

The Positive role of Health and Safety Reps in Risk Assessment

Mick Gledhill

Communication Workers

Bradford & District Branch

Sensible Risk Assessment

- Ensuring that workers and the public are properly protected
- Providing overall benefit to society by
- Balancing benefits and risks, with a focus on reducing real risks
- Both those which arise more often and those with serious consequences
- Enabling innovation and learning not stifling them
- Ensuring that those who create risks manage them responsibly and
- Understand that failure to manage real risks responsibly is likely to lead to robust action
- Enabling individuals to understand that as well as the right to protection, they also have to exercise responsibility

Sensible risk management IS NOT about:

- Creating a totally risk free society
- Generating useless paperwork mountains
- Scaring people by exaggerating or publicising trivial risks
- Stopping important recreational and learning activities for individuals where the risks are managed
- Reducing protection of people from risks that cause real harm and suffering
- Source: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/principlespoints.htm>

TU Safety Reps role

- Trade Unions – what do they offer?
- The Union Effect!

"Workplaces where workers are involved in taking decisions about health and safety are safer and healthier workplaces." *Source: HSE [worker involvement web pages](#)*

- Lower accident rates
- More positive health and safety climate
- Better control of workplace risks
- Greater awareness of workplace risks

Practical things to Consider

- Risk assessment is about identifying risks that need to be tackled in the workplace and prioritising them
- Decisions over whether to take action, and how quickly action should be taken is completely subjective, and often more down to cost than anything else
- Health and safety reps must be aware of the limitations of this process and use their rights to challenge any decisions they do not agree with.

'Reasonably Practicable'

- In evaluating risks and deciding whether to take action the employer is essentially putting a value on a person's health.
- Safety reps must therefore try to understand and question the assumptions that are being made over whether or not action should be taken
- Safety reps should also ensure that employers do not try to ignore some of the lower-level risks by concentrating on hazards that are likely to cause a fatality or serious injury

Don't overlook lower 'risk hazards'

- 75 per cent of all work-related sickness absence is caused by musculoskeletal disorders and stress-related illnesses
- Issues such as stress, dust, and repetitive injuries are often not prioritised, despite the fact that they are far more likely to occur and will affect more people
- As important as the 'high risk' hazards obviously are, good risk assessment requires a sense of balance

Union Involvement

- The legal responsibility to carry out a risk assessment lies with the employer
- Nevertheless, it is important that health and safety reps are involved in the process and play an important part in ensuring that they are done properly.
- This means safety reps should be given a copy of all draft risk assessments and asked to comment on them
- Safety reps should make sure that risk assessments have been done for all workplaces, that they cover all areas and activities, that they are up-to-date, and they are comprehensive.
- In high hazard areas with sophisticated RA processes – don't be put off – request training to enable you to understand the process and so be able to offer input

Employer's duties

- Employers have a duty to consult with safety reps on all health and safety issues, and to give safety reps information about health and safety matters relevant to their members.
- This includes information about risk assessments
- They must permit safety reps to take time off with pay during working hours to undertake their functions, and dealing with risk assessments is a valid safety rep function.
- Challenging their employer's risk assessments and ensuring appropriate control measures are in place and working is one of the TU safety rep's most crucial roles

Source: www.tuc.org.uk/extras/riskassessment.pdf.

Myths!



- You would be surprised how many Postal Delivery Staff have injured themselves on hanging baskets!
- A sensible approach would be to avoid the hazard or ask the customer to re-site in a safer place

• Source: HSE

Everything in Proportion

- As trade unionists we don't want to see employers swamped with unnecessary administrative tasks
- We just want safe jobs for our members

• Source: HSE



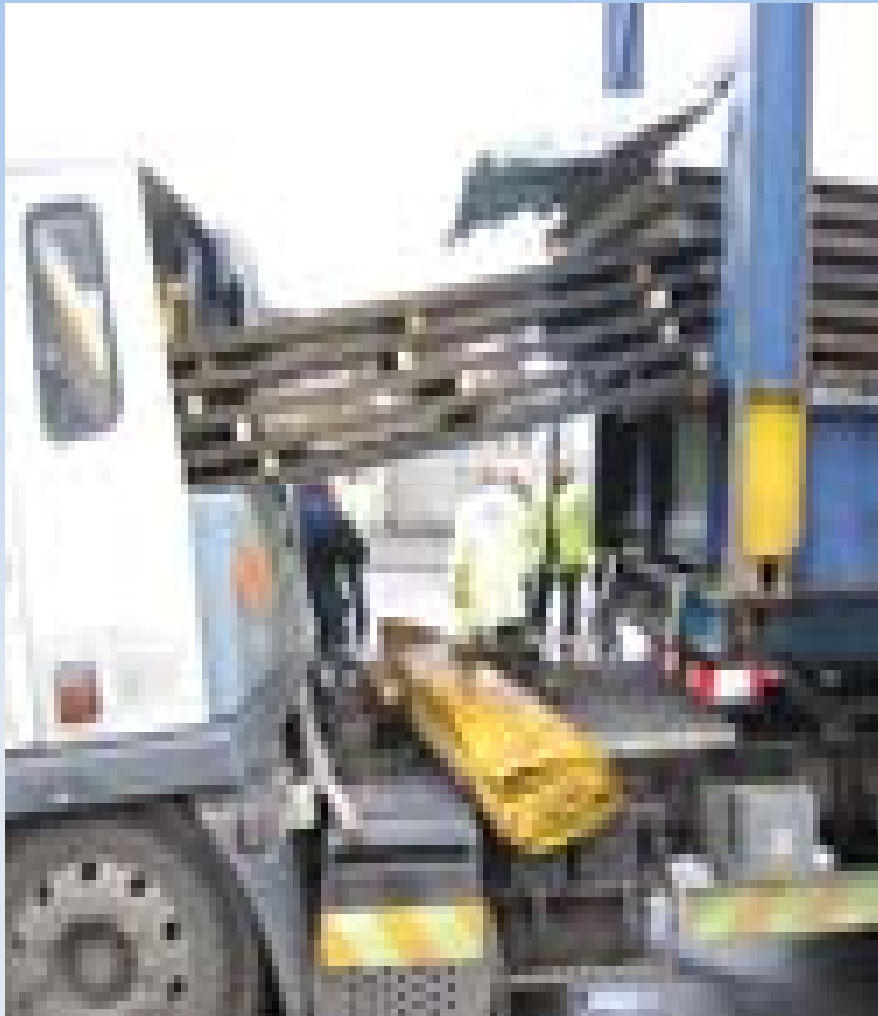
Things can go wrong!

- Emergency services are not exempt
- A fire fighter was seriously injured when he slipped into a portable grain dryer on a farm
- No risk assessment for this hazard – Fire fighter lost foot
- Factory fined after underage worker suffers crippling hand injury
- He was illegally employed and no assessment had been carried out

More examples

- Diner fell through hatch whilst entering restaurant
- Risk assessment had been carried out but staff 'ignored' it!!
- Workman whipped to death by industrial hose
- Had undertaken a risk assessment based on operating the pump during the first pour of the day but admitted it hadn't considered the dangers that might arise each time the machine was re-started

Risk assessments save lives



- £150,000 fine after driver crushed by steel cargo
- As a result of the accident the firm immediately stopped the operation and carried out a full risk assessment!!!!

Source: SHP Online

And Finally

- Remember to TU Effect
- Real tangible benefits come from TU involvement in H&S + RA
- Better risk assessments and TU involvement lead to lower accident rates, better control of and greater awareness of workplace risks
- TU safety reps are there to help
- They only hinder irresponsible and dangerous employers