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HELLO & WELCOME...

Prepare for Inspectors' Visits by knowing their Priorities for 2017 and Beyond

As the Health and Safety Executive launches its work strategy for 2017 and beyond, what does it see as the three most important areas? And what are inspectors' specific plans for the two of our most important sectors: manufacturing and construction? Read on to discover the answers: it will help you understand what inspectors are most likely to ask for – and allow you to avoid being caught out when an inspector calls.

The HSE plans to focus strongly on health, based on statistics that show work-related ill health leads to both more premature deaths and greater losses to the economy than do work-related accidents. Within this, past workplace conditions are a major driver of ill health such as cancer, but current conditions are not blameless either: the HSE estimates that in 2015/2016, 1.3 million people were suffering from an illness they thought was caused, or made worse, by their work.

Understandably, inspectors plan to target their efforts where they will have more effect: the HSE will therefore focus on preventing conditions with the widest prevalence, the highest economic losses and the most significant impacts in terms of length and quality of life. In practice this means: (1) Occupational stress and related mental ill health, (2) Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and (3) Occupational lung disease.

For stress, their action will include issuing new guidance to build on the existing management standards and targeting sectors (E.g. education and healthcare) with the highest reported stress levels. For MSD's, inspectors propose a similar approach; here though the target sectors will be food manufacturing and construction. For occupational lung disease, they will prioritise the four greatest concerns: asbestos, silica, asthma and legionella.

Contact Us

Trinity Safety Limited

+7771531454

01392 439615

info@trinitysafety.co.uk

www.trinitysafety.co.uk

[@trinitysafetyco](https://www.trinitysafety.co.uk)

The planning also includes a sector by sector approach, drawn up in consultation with industry stakeholders. Looking at what are, for our readers, two of the most important sectors, manufacturing and construction, there are three priorities in each case. These are set out in the panel below:

HSE Priorities by Sector
Manufacturing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Controlling exposure to substances that cause occupational lung disease. ➤ Reducing the incidence of common work-related ill-health conditions, e.g. MSDs and work-related stress. ➤ Preventing serious incidents involving heavy loads, during maintenance activities and catastrophic events.
Construction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reducing incidents of ill health, with a particular focus on occupational lung disease and musculoskeletal disorders. ➤ Supporting small businesses to achieve improved risk management and control. ➤ Embedding the principles of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 (CDM).

It's given that individual inspectors will be influenced by the strategy- both as they decide what to visit and in the questions, they ask at any given site. Use our draft plan below to ensure you're not wrong-footed should an inspector call to check what's being done in your organisation:

7-Point Action Checklist
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The HSE is very orientated: so, in your policies and procedures, check you give health hazards as much priority as you give to safety issues such as accidental injury. 2) Pay special attention to the specific health risk the HSE is targeting: stress, MSDs and lung disease, especially if you are in a target sector (e.g. stressing healthcare ad preventable lung disease in construction). 3) Make sure your substances hazardous to health assessments are up to date, and managers are applying control measures in line with your assessment findings. 4) If you have asbestos anywhere on your premises, check you have an up-to-date management plan under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 (CAR). 5) Stress and back injury are health hazards that affect almost every sector and are often reported as the leading causes of costly sickness absence. For stress, benchmark your policies/procedures against the HSE's stress management standards (www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards). And turn to our key topic piece on page 4 to ensure your manual handling assessments are comprehensive. 6) Stay abreast of what others in your industry or sector are doing on the priority items: intelligence from local health and safety groups, the trade press and your network contacts can really pay off here. 7) Be ready to present to inspectors how you are addressing the priority items as they relate to your own activities and sector.

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