

EUROPEAN HEALTH AND SAFETY WEEK – MONDAY 23RD – SUNDAY 29TH OCTOBER

Introduction

The annual European Health and Safety Week takes place in a few weeks' time at the end of this month and is designed to raise awareness of health and safety. This year it is planned for the week between Monday 23rd and Sunday 29th October.

Emphasis on fire safety arrangements

TSSA wants to publicise this week of activity but with the appalling Grenfell Tower fire tragedy still fresh in all of our minds, there is an opportunity for reps to put a particular emphasis on fire safety in the workplace.

National Inspection Day

National Inspection Day is on Wednesday 25th October. TSSA is asking reps to carry out an inspection in the workplaces where the members they represent work and as part of that inspection, to put a particular focus on fire safety, reviewing the arrangements that should be in place.

Where can I get more information about fire safety arrangements?

In August, TSSA published a Reps Bulletin under the title of "Reviewing

Fire Safety Arrangements at Work" which was sent to all reps.

If you haven't got access to a copy, please email Rob Jenks at: jenksr@tssa.org.uk or call 07876 590551.

The TUC has also published an excellent introductory guide that includes an inspection checklist at Section Seven. The guide is available to download from:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/fire%20safety%202017%20.pdf>

Do I have legal rights to carry out an inspection?

Yes, health and safety reps have legal rights in this area.

Regulation 5 of the Safety Reps and Safety Committee Regulations 1977ⁱ gives safety reps the right to be able to inspect their workplace every three months, as a minimum. In some high risk settings, those inspections should be more frequent.

To carry out such an inspection means that you should give your employer reasonable notice of what you want to

do. The HSE recommends that those inspections are carried out with an appropriate employer representative but according to the Code of Practice, this does not prevent safety reps carrying out independent investigations or having private discussions with employees.ⁱⁱ

What resources are available?

The Brown Book contains appropriate forms for an inspection (see pages 20 and 21) but you may wish to simply use a notepad and complete the forms afterwards. Your employer may also have appropriate documents to hand.

TUC has also produced an excellent guide to help health and safety reps carry out inspections and which can be downloaded from:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/insbooklet30auglowres.pdf>

What shall I do if I can't make arrangements for Wednesday 25th?

If you are not available on National Inspection Day or haven't had enough notice to make arrangements, please choose another day in the following few weeks/months to make sure that TSSA members are properly covered.

What else can you tell me about European Health and Safety Week?

Publicised by the TUC and HSE in Britain and organised by the EU-OSHA (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work), the Health and Safety Week is "aimed at people in organisations, companies and workplaces of all sizes and sectors. Everybody involved in occupational safety and health matters is invited to take part, especially safety and health

institutions and occupational insurance organisations, trade unions and employers' organisations, companies, managers, employees and safety representatives."

What is the theme of the week?

EU-OSHA are promoting a theme of "Healthy workplaces for all ages" because of the recognition that:

- by 2030, workers aged 55–64 are expected to make up 30% or more of the workforce in many European countries. In the total population in Britain, 1 in 4 people are currently aged over 65 but by 2033 this is expected to rise to nearly 1 in 4;
- The retirement age is increasing in many Member States and, as a consequence, many workers are likely to face longer working lives – or to die before being able to claim their pension;ⁱⁱⁱ
- Longer working lives may result in longer exposure to risks;
- There will be more workers with chronic health problems and specific needs;
- Older workers might be more vulnerable to certain health and safety hazards;
- The high rate of work-related health problems in certain sectors and jobs that involve a heavy physical and/or mental workload, manual work or atypical working hours must be taken into account;

- Disability prevention, rehabilitation and return to work are of increased importance;
- At the society level, age discrimination needs to be dealt with.

The TUC, HSE and the EU-OSHA are, therefore, calling for the Health and Safety Week to highlight the need to ensure safe and healthy conditions throughout each person's working life which will enable everyone to go on and enjoy their retirement.

What resources are available?

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has produced a variety of information, presentations, posters, leaflets and flyers that can be found online at:

<https://www.healthy-workplaces.eu/en/campaign-materials>

The TUC has also published its "Health and Safety for older workers: a guide for workplace representatives" which can be downloaded from: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Older%20workers%20april%202014%20pdf.pdf>

Can we use another theme?

There is nothing stopping safety and staff reps using another theme during the week, especially one that fits the issues in their company or workplace. For instance, you could choose to focus on fatigue, especially if you have people who work shifts or are on call.

You may also wish to review certain policies and how they are implemented, including around the

way safety reps are involved (or not) in risk assessment processes.

Reps may also wish to think about how the health and wellbeing strategies that the ORR and RSSB launched back in 2014 are being implemented in their particular companies.

What resources are available?

Reps should have a look at TSSA's Reps Bulletins that contain introductions to many of these subjects and point to additional reading, such as:

- Fatigue: see Reps' Bulletin H&S116 from July 2016;
- Risk Assessments: Reps Bulletin H&S113 from October 2015
- Health and Wellbeing: Reps Bulletins H&S104 and 105 from July 2014

All are available to download from the TSSA Website at:

<https://www.tssa.org.uk/en/rep-area/rep-bulletins/health-safety/index.cfm>

Are there other things I could be doing?

In addition to promoting a theme with your employer and colleagues as well as carrying out at least one inspection, you could also:

- Plan a meeting with your manager to discuss health and safety issues that have been raised with you;
- In advance of the meeting, if you are aware of an issue that is beginning to raise its head, conduct a survey of your

members to get their perspectives, including the extent of the problem, how it affects them and what can be done to resolve it;

- If you are part of a Safety Committee meeting, ask for the agenda to include the Health and Safety Week so that you can discuss how joint initiatives (involving reps and managers) could be used to promote the health and safety culture and build relationships. If you don't have a meeting scheduled, you could also ask for the employer to agree to another week when there is more time to prepare;
- If you are not part of a Safety Committee, working with at least one other safety rep, ask your employer, in writing, to form one^{iv} to meet on a regular basis;

Building the union in the workplace: TSSA's Time to Grow Strategy

TSSA's Time to Grow Strategy is about growing the union through recruitment, and winning in the workplace. TSSA reps have a vital part to play in delivering this. One of the key functions of any rep including a health and safety rep is to maximise the TSSA membership in their constituency - more members means more influence with the employer.

An important element of any health and safety inspection should always be discussions with staff about the issues that they are concerned about. These discussions present an opportunity to identify individuals that are not members of TSSA, talk to them

about what TSSA is doing for the staff, and ask them to join the union. Always carry membership application forms on health and safety inspections!

Details of the Time to Grow Strategy can be found at:

<http://www.tssa.org.uk/download.cfm?docid=64396CB2-A961-4057-91BE75C83ED5E8AE>

Guidance on recruiting can be found at: <https://www.tssa.org.uk/en/Your-union/ reps-area/recruiting.cfm>

Non TSSA members can join online at: <https://www.tssa.org.uk/en/join-us/join-intro.cfm>

Planning your activities

The key to having a successful health and safety week is planning and organising what you can realistically carry out. Circumstances may mean that you have to arrange activities in the period after the end of October but do not allow this to put you off taking action – after all, something you do now may save the life of a member (and yes, it can be that important).

Part of the activities you plan could be to:

- Arrange times to meet members – perhaps away from the workplace to maintain confidentiality – or during lunch breaks/shift change over times;
- Coordinate themes and activities with other TSSA reps, including industrial (staff) reps, equality or learning reps;
- Contact your manager about time off to carry out an inspection (and even to ask him

to accompany you on a mutually agreed date) and/or to meet to discuss issues;

- Research the themes and prepare for any meetings;
- Report back to your members and fellow reps – as well as your TSSA organiser!

A call to action

And finally, whatever you do, please make a point of doing something, either during the health and safety week – or in the weeks after it. TUC research has long established the existence of the “union effect”,^v meaning that trade unions have a significant impact on health and safety, making workplaces safer places when

unions are organised and active: the European Health and Safety Week gives us all an opportunity to prove this in the interests of our members.

Acknowledgments

This Bulletin has been prepared using the material listed at various points in the text and the notes (below). In addition, the HSE’s Website was consulted at:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/campaigns/european-2016/index.htm>

ⁱ See March 2015 edition of the official Safety Reps Brown Book available at:

<https://www.tssa.org.uk/en/Your-union/health-and-safety/index.cfm>

ⁱⁱ See page 22 of the Brown Book

ⁱⁱⁱ Nearly 20% of male manual workers die before reaching State Pension Age according to research by the TUC, published under the title of “The health and safety of older workers” and available

at:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Older%20workers%20april%202014%20pdf.pdf>

^{iv} Regulation 9, page 28, Brown Book available at:

<https://www.tssa.org.uk/en/Your-union/health-and-safety/index.cfm>

^v <https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues/health-and-safety/organisation/worker-involvement/union-effect>