

YOUNG PEOPLE AND WORKPLACE ACCIDENTS

The Impact of Accidents

Workplace accidents impact on our lives in many ways. Obviously, there is the personal and family aspect. Serious accidents such as those resulting in death or disability have long term tragic effects on families and their relations. Less serious accidents can mean loss of work and, for younger people, a withdrawal from sporting activities or other pastimes. Then there is the effect on the broader economy. Accidents result in lost time at work, which can then result in lower national productivity. Additional demand is placed on national health services that are funded by the government; it can only do this by using money from the taxpayer. In this case study we look particularly at the non fatal accidents associated with young people at work.

Focus on Young People

For the purpose of statistics young workers are defined as those in the 15-19 age bracket. It is estimated that, although young people constitute only 4% of those in employment, injuries to young people represent around 10% of reported injuries. In fact, it is possible that the figure is worse than this since many accidents may not be reported. These figures are of great concern and it is essential that we all become aware of the need for improvement in this area.

What Kinds of Accidents Involve Young People?

Accidents are generally categorised in terms of the underlying cause. The latest available information indicates that the top three accident triggers of reported non-fatal accidents (2009) are:

- **Manual handling:** this category includes incidents caused by lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, twisting and turning.
- **Fall on same level:** this includes trips, slips or stumbles where the fall is not from a higher level to a lower one.
- **Body movement:** these accidents involve no specific work related activity but result simply from the movement of the body. In other words, the body has not been physically stressed by external actions.

More specifically, the top three accident triggers affecting young people are:

- Moving machinery
- Slips, trips or falls on the level
- Manual handling

Machinery That Moves is a Hazard

Vehicles that move around a workplace or its vicinity are a serious hazard. For example, on farms there are many accidents involving tractors. However, such accidents frequently occur in other work settings also. Mary was working in a large supermarket during her school holidays. One afternoon she was asked to go to the loading bay office to collect some documents. She waved to the driver of a lorry and then passed behind it, thinking that the driver had seen her. However, the vehicle started to reverse knocked her to the ground.

A Serious Fall

Some 18% (1,293) of all notified accidents (7,179) are categorised as 'falls at the same level'. It is estimated that 15 of these involved the 0-17 year old age group (2009 data). This is 21% of all accidents notified to the HSA relating to 0-17 year olds (71).

Gráinne was working in a restaurant during the summer break. In restaurant kitchens, where food is prepared, sharp implements, powered equipment and heat can present many *hazards*. Accordingly, the restaurant owner had produced a *safety statement* listing all these hazards, a related *risk assessment* and a list of the *controls* to minimise or eliminate each risk. Gráinne had been shown this safety statement and been asked to familiarise herself with it. One of the controls stated that a spill on the restaurant floor should be cleaned up immediately. However, one day a customer had accidentally spilled some tea on the floor. Grainne was passing by a few seconds later, slipped on the wet surface and hit her head on the table edge. In spite of the controls in place, such things can happen and this accident illustrates the need for constant vigilance and swift action. The controls already in place need to be reviewed and updated where necessary to prevent similar accidents occurring.

A Manual Handling Incident

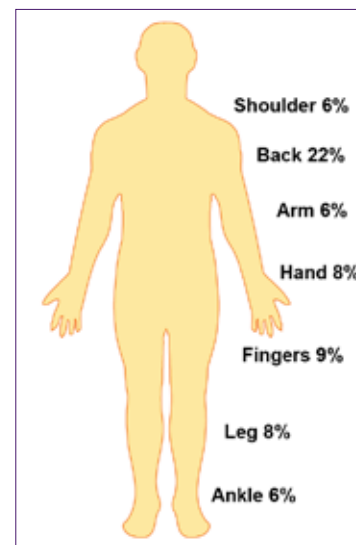
Alan works in a warehouse owned by a courier and freight delivery company. Fork lift trucks are used to load pallets of boxes on to and off delivery vans and lorries. Conveyor belts are also used to move boxes and parcels from the entrance to positions along the warehouse aisles. However, everything cannot be mechanised and it is frequently necessary to lift and



move a box by hand. Alan, like all the other employees has attended safety courses and is familiar with the correct way to lift objects. There are numerous posters on the warehouse walls and in the staff canteen drawing attention to the correct lifting procedure. However, it is very easy to forget the right procedures and to assume that nothing can go wrong while simply lifting something. This is exactly what happened to Alan. He was placing the box he had lifted on a higher shelf when he felt a wrench in his lower back. The next morning Alan could not even get out of bed. His local doctor diagnosed a slipped disc and muscle strain. It took a very unpleasant six weeks to get back to work.

Which Parts of the Body are Most Vulnerable to Injury?

Accident reports show that some 22% of workplace injuries affect the back with other body parts affected as shown in the graphic.



Your Task

The HSA has found that many employees think it is the duty of the employer to ensure that slips, trips and falls do not occur and that employees are not responsible. However, you are aware that employees also have a responsibility under the *The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005*. Among other things, employees have a duty to protect themselves and others, including visitors. Employees must also report anything that could increase the likelihood of an accident. You have also learned that it is estimated that, in 2009, there were 1,293 accidents notified to the Health and Safety Authority arising from falls on the same level, and that 15 of these related to the 0-17 age bracket.

You have been asked by the committee of a local youth centre to design a one page brochure to raise awareness among their employees about these risks. To carry out this task you should consult the document called *Get A Grip* which is available at www.hsa.ie.

The *Health and Safety Authority* is the national body in Ireland with responsibility for securing safety and health at work. It is an independent body operating under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 (SHWW Act) and has overall responsibility for the administration and enforcement of occupational safety and health and dangerous chemicals legislation in Irish workplaces. The Authority monitors compliance with the relevant legislation and can take enforcement action, including prosecutions, where appropriate. The key objective of the Authority is to make workplace safety, health and welfare an integral part of doing business in every workplace in Ireland.

The principal functions of the Authority are to promote workplace safety, health and welfare, to provide information and expert advice to employers, employees and the self-employed, to propose new regulations, guidelines and policies and to monitor and enforce compliance with occupational safety and health and chemical legislation. It employs over 200 people who work in eight locations throughout the country.

The latest information on workplace accidents is available in the *Summary of Workplace Injury, Illness and Fatality Statistics* at www.hsa.ie.

Health and Safety Authority
The Metropolitan Building
James Joyce Street
Dublin 1
Tel: 1890 289 389

This case and all teaching components can be printed from the CD or the *Spirit of Enterprise* website www.soe.ie.

You can find out more about the work of the Health and Safety Authority on www.hsa.ie.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND WORKPLACE ACCIDENTS

Case Summary

The case deals with the topic of workplace accidents involving young people (defined as 15-19 years). Proportionally, young people are involved in more accidents than other age groups.

The student is required to use the HSA *Get A Grip* material to produce an awareness brochure.

Syllabus Links

Leaving Certificate Business

Unit 4: Human Resource Management

Unit 6: Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Business – Safety and Health in the Workplace

LCVP

Preparation for the World of Work: Unit 1 – Introduction to Working Life; Unit 4 – Health and Safety in the Workplace

The case can also be used for related topics in *Junior Certificate Business Studies* and *Leaving Certificate Applied* and during relevant activities in *Transition Year*.

The HSA class work templates *Safety Statement* (Spirit of Enterprise, Edition 3) and *Spot the Hazard* (Spirit of Enterprise, Edition 4), can be downloaded from www.soe.ie.

Learning Outcomes

Having studied the lesson and carried out the related exercises, students should be able to:

- Outline some impacts that workplace injuries have on the economy.
- Describe the main workplace accident triggers.
- Relate the broad statistics re workplace accidents to young people.
- Discuss some responsibilities of the employer for safety and health in the workplace.
- Describe the role and mission of the HSA.

Building on the Case

The following points can be used to provide additional information and stimulate group discussion around the case.

Terminology Review

This case provides the opportunity to revise the essential terms associated with safety in the workplace. The HSA cases in previous editions of Spirit of Enterprise deal with the terminology in detail. The critical terms are repeated here for ease of access.

- **Hazard:** anything that has the potential to cause harm.
- **Risk:** the likelihood that harm could occur from a particular hazard and its consequences.
- **Control:** anything done to eliminate or reduce the risk.
- **Risk Assessment:** the process of evaluating risks in the workplace and putting in place the most appropriate controls and precautions
- **Safety Statement:** a written programme which describes how the employer ensures the safety, health and welfare of employees, visitors to the workplace and those who may be affected by the work activities.

Health and Safety in the Curriculum

The HSA online course *Get Safe – Work Safe. Workplace Safety and Health for Senior Cycle Students* introduces students to the principles of safety and health. It is useful for senior cycle students whose programme of learning includes some form of work experience and those who are actively engaged in part-time or holiday work. The unit is relevant to all students as future members of the workforce. This course is available at www.hsa.ie/education or www.alison.com/hsa

The HSA guide *Health and safety matters for students embarking on work experience* is designed to assist teachers when preparing students for participation in a work experience programme. It can be downloaded at www.hsa.ie.

Young Persons

The Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act protects the health of young workers. It is designed to ensure that work done during school years does not put education at risk. Information on the Act is available at www.employmentrights.ie, which is the website of the *National Employment Rights Authority (NERA)*.

Student Exercises

The following student activities can be undertaken by *individuals*, *pairs* or *group* assignments requiring written reports, discussion or presentations. Most of the exercises can also be used to assess learning following a class session.

The Case Analysis

The task posed at the end of the case should be used to stimulate analysis of the case material. This will exercise the ability to use judgment and make rational decisions. It can also be used in group mode as a shared learning exercise.

Student Reflection

What have we learned from the case?

This exercise is particularly effective when done individually, followed by group discussion. It aids *understanding*, *retention* and *recall*. Possible reflection questions include:

- Can I suggest the impact that workplace accidents have on individuals, families and the economy?
- Can I identify the top three accident triggers?
- Can I describe some of the steps employees can take to avoid workplace accidents?
- Do I understand what the terms hazard, risk assessment and controls mean?
- Can I relate the information in this case to what I already know about safety, health and welfare at work?
- Do I know what the HSA does and why?

Applied Business Question (LC Business)

- Identify the main workplace accident triggers.
- Describe some hazards that are likely to lead to slips, trips and falls in a commercial office.
- Outline the controls you would suggest to reduce the risk involved.
- Suggest some reasons why young people appear to be more prone to workplace accidents than other age groups.

Case Study (LCVP)

- Describe three types of workplace accident trigger.
- Identify three hazards that might lead to slips, trips or falls in a shopping centre and suggest what could be done to eliminate them.
- List some actions that could be taken to raise the awareness of restaurant employees about slips, trips and falls.
- Draw a pie chart showing the most injured parts of the body resulting from workplace accidents.

Question Time

The following True/False and Multiple Choice questions can be used as quizzes to engage in a review of case terminology. They can be printed out from the CD or website (www.soe.ie) for handout purposes.

True or False?

- Young people are less prone to accidents at work than older people.
- In general, the back is the most vulnerable part of the body.
- A Safety Statement guarantees that there will be no accidents.
- Accidents have a negligible impact on the economy.
- Employers are not legally bound to produce a Safety Statement.
- Falls at the same level is the leading accident trigger.
- Manual handling is the third leading accident trigger.
- Employees have a responsibility to avoid slips, trips and falls in the workplace.
- The proportion of young people in the workforce is estimated to be around 4%.
- The proportion of workplace accidents to young people is about the same.

Multiple Choice

Accident prevention is the responsibility of:

- The HSA
- The employer
- The employees
- Employer and employees.

The proportion of workplace injuries affecting the back is estimated to be:

- 17%
- 45%
- 22%
- 6%.

Writing Skills

Students can be asked to read the case and then prepare a short synopsis. This is an exercise in the isolation of key ideas, requiring judgment and composition skills. It is also a valuable revision tool.