WHAT LONG-TERM THREAT TO WORKER SAFETY IS BEING IGNORED?

INTRODUCTION

Occupational health and safety is crucial for any workplace but what long term threats are we potentially ignoring? From speaking to health and safety managers from across the country at SHW Live this report covers their core concerns.

The concerns have evolved from last year, where lone working, sick building syndrome and respiratory illness were the largest concerns.

This year the concerns are even more focused on the wider environment rather than specific threats and hazards which needs to be mitigated.

The themes are:

1. Considering the impact of the environment on health,

2. Impact of the way work is designed,

3. Ensuring policy supports practice,

4. Creating a culture of care,

5. Considering individual occupational safety and health needs.

We will discuss how each theme impacts the workplace, so that we can reduce the staggering figure of 1.8 million suffering from a work-related illness that HSE reports.

CONSIDER THE IMPACTS OF THE **ENVIRONMENT** ON HEALTH...

1 AIR QUALITY

2 BUILT ENVIRONMENT

3 GREEN SPACE

1. CONSIDERING THE IMPACT OF THE ENVIRONMENT ON HEALTH

Those we spoke to pointed to the significant impact that the environment can have on employees' health, both physically and mentally. Indeed the World Health Organization notes that environmental risk factors account for 12.6 million deaths worldwide annually. In the workplace, factors such as air quality, lighting, temperature, and noise levels can contribute to work-related illnesses and injuries. For example, prolonged exposure to high levels of noise can lead to hearing loss, and exposure to poor air quality can cause respiratory problems.

Equally the environment matters too. The World Green Building Council recorded an 11% increase to productivity when there was more fresh air by workstations. Health and safety managers talked about the need to identify potential environmental hazards and take steps to reduce risks to employees' health. This may involve implementing measures such as improving ventilation systems, providing personal protective equipment, or regulating the use of hazardous substances. According to the Health and Safety Executive, there were 61,713 injuries to employees in the UK due to workplace accidents and occupational diseases.

CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY…

…ON WORK LIFE BALANCE!

2 IMPACT OF THE WAY WORK IS DESIGNED

The design of work can have a significant impact on worker safety and well-being, including psychosocial risks. These factors can lead to burnout, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

Health and safety managers must take steps to ensure that work is designed in a way that minimizes the risk of psychosocial hazards such as stress. For example, high job demands, low job control, and poor social support are all factors that can contribute to psychosocial risks. To address this health and safety managers can assess the workplace for these hazards and take steps to address them.

Our conversations with industry showed that there has been an increased focus on psychosocial risks in the workplace, with many organisations investing in initiatives to promote mental health and well-being. Another responsibility for the department but one which allows more collaborative working with HR and other parts of the business. This provides an opportunity to deliver a more unified approach to worker wellbeing.

SAFER BY…

DESIGN

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3 ENSURING POLICY SUPPORTS PRACTICE

Ineffectiveness of policy was a consistent concern. Crafted with the best of intentions they are essential for ensuring a safe and healthy workplace. But only if they are heavily embedded into the way work is being done within the company. Making outdated policy and guidance as being a hidden threat. Risking the health of workers because of how fast work has changed in recent years.

Reviewing, improving and adapting policy was an action everyone acknowledged needed to be done but sat at the bottom of to-do lists. To protect workers this needs to change. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work supports this, showing that the most effective occupational safety and health policies are those that are integrated into the overall management of the organisation.

ENSURE **POLICY/PROCESS** SUPPORTS PRACTICE!

4. CREATING A CULTURE OF CARE

Creating a culture of care is essential for promoting a safe and healthy workplace. A culture of care means that employees feel valued and supported, and that their health and safety is a top priority. This involves fostering open communication, providing training and resources for employees to report safety concerns, and ensuring that employees feel empowered to take action to address potential risks.

The benefits of this are significant. According to HSE 77% of employees felt encouraged to raise concerns in a good health and safety climate compared to 20% who felt encouraged to

do so in a poor health and safety climate. This highlights the importance of creating a culture of care in the workplace.
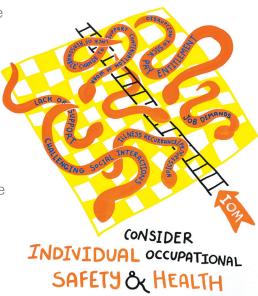
Health and safety managers can create a culture of care by fostering open communication, providing adequate training and resources, and promoting employee involvement in health and safety initiatives. This may involve conducting regular safety meetings, providing access to health and wellness programs, and encouraging employees to report safety concerns.

CREATE A CULTURE OF... **CARE** AMONGST YOUR TEAM FROM THE **GROUND** UP

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5 CONSIDERING INDIVIDUAL OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH NEEDS

Every employee is different and may have unique occupational safety and health needs. Health and safety managers must consider individual needs when designing policies and procedures and providing training and resources. This may involve accommodating employees with disabilities or health conditions, providing mental health resources, and ensuring that employees receive training in their native language.

According to OSHA there were 2.4million deaths worldwide from work-related diseases in 2019. Doing so doesn't need to be complicated, by taking an action as small as ensuring Respiratory Protection Equiptment fits properly we can start to tackle the the 75,000 preventable cases of exposure to respirable crystaline silica. Reducing the 4,000 deaths a year from COPD.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the long term threats that health and safety managers believe they are ignoring whether due to lack of confidence, lack of awareness or lack of resources. IOM is here, helping you to understand, share and solve these challenges and others. Supporting you with industry advancing research, consultancy services and laboratory we offer a trusted source of information and insight.

Allowing regulatory, strategic and tactical decisions to be made so that workplaces protect workers from hazardous materials, airborne threats and occupational risks. .

DATA

The data collected for this report summarises informal discussions with attendees, engagement in our talk as well as individual conversations with the live scribing at the event.

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Committed to making the world healthier and safer at work, IOM is a trusted advisor for organisations such as the NHS, HSE and AECOM. We investigate issues, offer independent guidance and provide informed solutions. Talk to IOM and find the solutions to your challenges today.

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