

# Managing your people safely



Institution of Occupational  
Safety and Health

In partnership with

**YouGov**<sup>®</sup>

A report on the importance  
of health and safety training  
for managers



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## A report on the importance of health and safety training for managers

**There is growing evidence in business of the returns from investment in workplace safety and health. The International Social Security Association, for example, estimates a 120 per cent dividend, and the ratio is even higher for return-to-work programmes for people following injury or illness.**

Organisations that invest are seeing a positive impact on their workers' effectiveness and a range of business benefits, such as a positive, caring work culture, increased productivity and an enhanced reputation. These employers are also mitigating the risk of huge costs to their organisation and society as a whole of poor health and safety at work – a recent report estimated the total cost to society of a workplace fatality in Britain at nearly £1.7 million.

In this report, we examine the importance of one group of people in an organisation that is critical in creating safe and healthy places of work – line managers. These employees, who carry the burden of responsibility for ensuring their teams are tasked safely and act safely, are on the front line of workplace safety and health. How an employer makes sure they are equipped to play this role, a legal obligation in many countries, is one of the most important duties they hold.

### Our survey of businesses

In 2019–20, IOSH partnered with market research specialists YouGov to survey mainly small and medium-sized businesses, excluding any sole traders, on their approach to ensuring their managers have the knowledge, skills and understanding to manage their teams safely.

We interviewed nearly 700 people, all with decision-making responsibilities in health and safety. There was a spread across job role, industry sector and size of company.

Participants agreed (96 per cent) that: **Line managers are important in insuring the people they directly line manage are safe and healthy in the workplace.**

On whether respondents felt management failure was responsible for accidents, however, there was a mixed response, with a quarter (25 per cent) saying rarely, 15 per cent sometimes and only six per cent always or often. IOSH will address this finding later in its conclusions to this report.

IOSH and YouGov then asked participants who train their line managers in health and safety about how they ensure their managers have the right level of skills, knowledge and understanding to manage people safely, and in particular, about the access these employees have to health and safety training.

More than half of respondents (53 per cent) who train their line managers said they had invested in health and safety training for managers from an external provider, with IOSH's *Managing Safely* being the most popular course (46 per cent) amongst those who invested in external courses. But one in five participants (19 per cent), and predominantly SMEs (companies with up to 250 employees), said they had no form of health and safety training at all for their line managers.

These findings indicate widespread recognition in business of the importance of the line manager in safeguarding people at work – but differences in who's responsible for workplace accidents and in investment in management training to equip them for the job. Why are these findings important? Because health and safety training is considered by authorities in the field as integral to creating work cultures that protect people from harm. Later in this report, we'll find out how those companies that do invest in health and safety training for their managers are seeing the benefits.

But first, let's examine why the training of managers is central to the creation of safe and healthy organisations.

### Building a safe and healthy work culture: the requirements

There is a natural hierarchy in organisations that gets more defined the more employees an organisation it has. And co-workers at each tier of a business have an important role to play in creating work culture that protects its people.

So, what are these different levels of knowledge and actions required at each tier of the organisational structure? In brief:

- the Board needs to assure itself that the operation is performing in a way that leads to good safety and health outcomes. This is done by integrating safety and health into the organisation's existing governance framework, facilitating transformational leadership, creating the right culture and all operating within the best system.
- middle management need to ensure that action is taken to deliver the strategy and apply the resources needed to achieve it
- first line managers need to deliver the actions on the ground and ensure that all employees and contractors are fully implement the health and safety controls that deliver adherence to policy.

Of course, in any hierarchical structure, the information needs between the different levels, addressed in reports and data collection, are different. First line managers need to know that controls are being implemented. Middle managers need to know that resources are sufficient to implement risk control and that systems are operating smoothly and effectively. And those running the company need to have assurances that their policy is right, and the strategy is being delivered effectively. At each level of management, different performance indicators are required to check effective implementation.

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Put another way, responsibility for risk lies with the decision makers. Those that decide on workplace design, the equipment provided, how it is to be used (systems of work) and how well people are to be educated to do the tasks safely (safe people), are managers. It is fundamental: **the decisions of every manager influence the safety, health and welfare of all.** They must take ownership for this. And the final accountability lies with Directors, so organisational structure and delegated authorities are an important aspect of this picture.

This onus on managers and the various information needs between the different levels in an organisation are why leading designers of health and safety training, such as IOSH, create courses for people at those different levels.

This, above, is an outline of the requirements of an organisation in shaping a safe and healthy culture of work. We'll now explore those benefits identified by businesses interviewed in the IOSH-YouGov survey.

### Why businesses are investing in health and safety training for managers

IOSH and YouGov asked those companies investing in health and safety training for managers about the benefits. These are the findings and IOSH's responses

## **82% Investing in external health and safety training courses for line managers say they drive benefits for the business**

Competency isn't just about legal compliance – it's about doing what is right to grow your business. It's about being open to opportunity and thereby developing and realising business potential. Occupational safety and health is part of the fabric of modern business. It is demanded by governments, society, employees and even investors. Customers may well deselect your bid if they are unconvinced by your ethics, your safety performance and past record. Or in a close race, they may give preference to contractors who can persuade them of their outstanding performance in many areas including workplace safety and health.

Customers may favour buying from suppliers who can demonstrate a positive safety and health culture. This provides confidence that an attention to how you do business would reflect in the care and quality you have in the product.

Respondents who think health and safety courses for line managers drive benefits for their business then identified the following specific business benefits

## **83%\* Active staff involvement to improve workplace safety is a benefit of external courses**

The training of managers can support a key requirement for shaping a safe and healthy culture of work – a 'bottom-up, top-down' model of operation. If employees are to be truly engaged in safety and health performance and improvement thereof, they must believe that their views are listened to – that they can report risk and be assured that their management team will act. They need assurance that they can challenge anyone about poor safety and health performance and expect rectification. That builds a positive health and safety culture.

## **79%\* Improved organisation-wide safety awareness culture is a benefit of external courses**

The new international standard for occupational safety and health, ISO 45001, includes this statement about occupational safety and health: "The success of the occupational safety and health management system depends on leadership, commitment and participation from all levels and functions of the organization."

A strong OSH management system underpins a safe and healthy work culture and health and safety management training is an excellent mechanism for achieving this. Training courses equip managers with the skills, knowledge and understanding required to assess risk, demonstrate the organisation's commitment to good health and safety and can involve participation at all levels of an organisation.

## **39%\* A reduction in lost time due to accidents is a benefit of external courses**

Insurance can be costly and legal enforcement of health and safety breaches can bring unexpected blows to cash flow and reserves in the form of heavy fines.

Predicting risk, putting preventative measures in place and having robust investigation systems in place is a much cheaper way of minimising these potential business costs.

Avoiding lost-time incidents and production disruption is an obvious benefit from good risk management. It's customer friendly! Health and safety management training can be a powerful tool for shaping this 'prevention first' culture.

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### **36%\*** Enhanced reputation within supply chain (e.g. are known to have high health and safety standards) is a benefit of external courses

All organisations will be scrutinised by stakeholders: investors, employees, customers and contractors. Their brand and reputation is also judged by wider society. What is being demanded of business in terms of ethical practice is changing.

Far more emphasis is now being placed on sustainable business models. This includes recognising human capital as a value and not just a cost. Demonstrating care for employees and development of their skill base is a means of attracting and keeping talent in an increasingly difficult employment market. The culture of an organisation is growing in importance.

### **30%\*** Increased productivity due to fewer accidents is a benefit of external courses

Numerous studies have produced findings that point to the link between mental and physical wellbeing and productivity. One recent study, for example, by the Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre (AWRC), found an average productivity boost of 20 minutes per day per employee who took part in a programme focused on improving energy levels.

And a report published in 2017 by the Centre of Economic and Business Research showed that workplace absence is costing the UK economy £18 billion a year in lost productivity.

Studies such as these support the case that good health and safety reduces absenteeism and presenteeism and boosts productivity. The best health and safety awareness courses equip managers to deliver a 'prevention first' culture and to identify when issues such as mental illness are arising, says IOSH.

## Conclusions

The IOSH-YouGov survey was a snapshot of attitudes in business to the role of line managers in shaping safe and healthy work cultures, and the steps required to equip them in this role. And the poll was conducted before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

These were the key findings.

- Consensus (96 per cent) on the importance of line managers in insuring the people they directly manage are safe and healthy in the workplace.
- A quarter of respondents (25 per cent) felt management failure was rarely responsible for accidents.
- More than half of respondents (53 per cent) who train their line managers said they invested in health and safety training for managers with an external provider – IOSH's Managing Safely was the most popular course (46 per cent) amongst this group.

- One in five (19 per cent) said they had no form of health and safety training at all for their line managers – this group was predominantly SMEs, with up to 250 employees.
- More than four in five businesses investing in health and safety training for their managers (82 per cent) said the courses were driving business benefits.
- Active involvement of staff in health and safety, an improved organisation-wide safety culture, reduced costs and improved productivity were among those benefits.

In this report, we have identified the requirements of businesses for building a safe and healthy work culture and the role safety and health training for line managers play in meeting these requirements.

It is clear that businesses of all sizes agree on the essential role of line managers in protecting people at work. And those organisations investing in management training are reaping a range of business benefits.

However, there are differences of opinion in the survey on the responsibility and accountability of managers for work-related accidents. And smaller companies surveyed were also more unlikely than larger companies (250+ employees) to invest in health and safety and training for managers. This may well degrade their potential.

Whether a director, middle manager or first line supervisor, all are taking daily decisions that affect the health, safety and welfare of employees, contractors, suppliers, customers and even the public. These are not the same responsibilities but related to the responsibility of role and hierarchical position. The nature of their responsibility is different for each. To be efficient and effective needs a knowledge about health and safety risk, and its control. Get it wrong and it's costly. Get it right and it can bring brand, reputation, productivity and even investment benefits.

Competence is the key to running any business well or delivering any role with confidence and skill. Knowledge results from experience, but too often it's the school of hard knocks that delivers this learning. In health and safety that usually means someone has been harmed, which is morally unforgivable.

Good health and safety training can boost knowledge to a level that not only facilitates prevention of accidents but drives business benefits. The problem is that a lack of health and safety knowledge reduces confidence and often results in needlessly stringent controls being implemented that can introduce unhelpful bureaucracy and diminish business performance. The right training can help find the happy balance. Delivering a safe operation with healthy employees is simple when you know how...

\* Of respondents who think health and safety courses for line managers drive benefits for their business.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 698 health and safety decision makers. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th December 2019–6th January 2020. The survey was carried out online.

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### Health and safety management training scores top grade: A case study

With universities becoming increasingly commercial and innovative institutions, occupational health and safety is now firmly on the Higher Education syllabus. That's certainly been the case at the University of Huddersfield, renowned for its research in subjects including biomedical sciences, engineering and physical sciences.

"Unlike many other universities, specific professional health and safety advisers within our academic schools and support services is minimal," explains Gary Wood, Health and Safety Adviser at University of Huddersfield. "IOSH's *Managing Safely* training was therefore viewed as ideal to assist those with local health and safety coordination roles and management responsibilities. We wanted a flexible accredited resource that was of international renown and could be adapted to best suit our needs, especially in terms of scheduling."

Since it began delivering *Managing Safely* nearly a decade ago, the university has received a lot of positive feedback from delegates, including areas around assessing and controlling risks, understanding responsibilities and hazards, investigating incidents, and measuring performance.

Dr Simon Barrans, a Reader in Turbocharger Engineering, said: "Not only did it clarify what the processes needed to be (and how simple they actually were), it also dispelled some of the more ridiculous notions about health and safety."

Gary believes that *Managing Safely* has really challenged people's perceptions of health and safety. "The IOSH training actually makes their working lives easier and they experience that themselves and then spread the word – the big difference now is that individuals proactively want to undertake the training."

Overall, the university's commitment to *Managing Safely* delivers three vital aims: enhancing the university's health and safety reputation; widening stakeholder engagement with health and safety; and ensuring efficient and effective risk management processes.

It has also been seeking to bring IOSH courses into its educational programmes, including as an elective option on the final year of its Events Management degree.



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### *Managing Safely* a recipe for success: A case study

Operating amidst the Covid-19 pandemic has brought countless challenges for organisations, with many businesses working tirelessly to maintain supply chains. As a result, mitigating risk in the workplace has never been more vital in the manufacturing sector, especially for food groups like Samworth Brothers.

That is where *Managing Safely* has come in.

"It is such a valuable course as it covers everything from risk assessments, hazard spotting, accident investigation, and gives in great detail, information that managers and supervisors need to know to apply their knowledge to their particular roles," said Alison Wright, Head of Health, Safety and Environment.

"From an engagement perspective, we have seen a definite proactive trend, with managers becoming really involved in inspections on the back of the training that they have received."

Since Samworth Brothers began delivering *Managing Safely* several years ago, the family business has seen a clear impact on the wider organisation and colleagues. The training has created a wider conversation about safety and health, ranging from regular conversations and communications with employees to create real visibility for safety and health across the workforce.

The food manufacturing group is a prime example of how having the correct processes in place for a workforce ensures people understand their responsibilities, which can then be applied to managing a hazard in the workplace, an investigation, or a global pandemic.

Alison added: "*Managing Safely* works as a great engagement piece for businesses and at Samworth Brothers we've seen it raise the profile of safety and health within the organisation with the day-to-day involvement and inclusion being much higher. We are beginning to notice a reduction in accidents.

"No day is the same, but the skill set is. Once an individual's skills are developed, they can be applied to any situation." Samworth Brothers is in the process of introducing *Managing Safely* across its outlets to ensure its workers remain at the heart of their company.

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IOSH is the Chartered body for health and safety professionals. With over 48,000 members in more than 135 countries, we're the world's largest professional health and safety organisation.

We set standards and support, develop and connect our members with resources, guidance, events and training. We're the voice of the profession and campaign on issues that affect millions of working people.

IOSH was founded in 1945 and is a registered charity with international NGO status.

**Institution of Occupational Safety and Health**

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