

Meridian Insite

Conkers bonkers - Give us a break!

- *Is the H&S industry to blame for conkers bonkers culture*
- *New occupational health standards for construction*
- *Have you assessed risks from vibration?*
- *Would you dare blow the whistle on your employer?*
- *Legal changes that may soon affect your organisation*
- *Keyboards can breed more bacteria than a*

A health and safety body is again sponsoring the World Conker Championships in a bid to set the record straight.

The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) is sponsoring the World Conker Championships, which take place at Ashton in Northamptonshire on 12 October, to again dispel the myth that health and safety stops people doing things.

"Recently, health and safety has been blamed for the cancellation of an annual tulip parade and dog obedience classes, for banning old folks from playing whist, and banning a toy monkey from the

street," explained Ray Hurst, the president of IOSH. "These decisions are completely 'nutty' and it's a gross abuse of the term to say health and safety has anything to do with these bans. These are in the same league of stupidity as forcing children to wear goggles to play conkers and that's why we're sponsoring the World Conker Championships again – to show that health and safety isn't behind these ridiculous decisions.

"We want to show that health and safety professionals are not here to stop people doing things and that health and safety guidance, when applied sensibly by competent people, is integral to running a successful event or business.



**Conkers are great fun.
But are they too risky?**

They help you get the job done, and help you do so safely." Let's hope they have a 'smashing' time, without any injuries!

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Launch of occupational health standards

The first set of standards for the industry published by Constructing Better Health (CBH)

The first set of standards for occupational health for workers in the construction industry have been published this week.

Constructing Better Health (CBH) says the standards provide a benchmark to sup-

port the management of occupational health in the industry.

The Standards cover a wide range of topics including fitness for task health assessments for safety critical workers, health surveillance/monitoring and general health checks and competencies for occupational health providers.

Michelle Aldous, CBH chief

executive, says: "The CBH Standards are core to the national scheme and address the need for baselines against which the industry can check, monitor and improve the health of the construction workforce.

"The CBH Standards are intended to empower employers with the knowledge to meet legislative and non-legislative requirements."



Legal changes that may affect your organisation

Employer failed to provide adequate supervision, training, PPE and a young person risk assessment



Have you assessed the risks from vibration?

Health, safety & environmental legal changes

Legal changes soon to affect many UK organisations include:

Batteries Directive: This directive will affect manufacturers, importers, distributors, users and recyclers of batteries and accumulators.

The objectives are to reduce the use of harmful elements (e.g. cadmium) in manufacture and make it easier to recycle batteries instead of disposing in landfill.

Expected to come into force by Sept 2008

Carbon Reduction Commitment: This affects heavy users of energy. Whilst introduction is not scheduled to start until 2010, the year that will be used to benchmark future energy usage is 2008.

Controls on the Handling, Transfer and Transport of Waste: The Duty of Care regulations, which are scheduled to come into force in 2009 will simplify existing regulations and make them more effective. The aim is to improve the management of waste, help protect the environment and crack down on illegal practices.

Groundwater Regulations: Existing regulations to be enhanced to increase protection of groundwater from pollution originating with contaminated land.

These regulations, scheduled to come into force Nov 2008, could affect anyone whose activities might result in contamination passing from land to groundwater (e.g. remediation works prior to construction).

Man denies manslaughter of boy

A 15-year-old boy was crushed to death when he was allegedly left to work unsupervised at a building site in North London.

His site boss, Colin Holtom, 63, denied a charge of manslaughter when he appeared at the Old Bailey. It was alleged he had failed to provide the boy with adequate supervision, training, protective clothing, and risk assessment or warning.

Adam Gosling, a GCSE student from Latchingdon in Essex, was killed during the demolition of a brick wall while working at the site in Enfield, north London, April 2007.

Mr Holtom, of Latchingdon, was charged with manslaughter by gross negligence. He also pleaded not guilty to a charge under health and safety law. The trial is due to take place 15 April 2009.

This case emphasises the importance of providing adequate training and supervision, especially for young persons. (Section 2c - The Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974)

Additionally, employers are required to carry out individual risk assessments for young (under 18) employees. (Section 19 - The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999)

Fined for not assessing vibration risk

Engineering firm fined £10,500 for failing to protect a worker from the risks of vibration in the workplace.

Once again, this highlights the importance of assessing the risks of vibration to your workforce. Further to carrying out such an assessment, it is also necessary to monitor exposure levels to ensure employees are not at risk of developing hand, arm vibration syndrome (HAV).

The types of work equipment likely to cause HAV range from heavy duty pneumatic breakers to small electrical hand drills. Use of all vibrating tools and equipment must be assessed.

The HSE have provided an 'exposure points system and ready-reckoner' on their website, which is a very useful tool for assessing vibration exposure: www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/hav/readyreckoner

Blow the whistle – two-thirds wouldn't

Less than a third of people would blow the whistle on their employer if they broke health and safety laws.

A YouGov poll commissioned by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) found that only 28 per cent of people would report their company or organisation to the Health and Safety Executive if it was in breach of health and safety legislation.

The survey, of 1,332 employed people from across Britain, found that:

- 35 per cent would report their line manager or supervisor to their boss if they felt there was a risk they or a colleague could get hurt at work
- 74 per cent would tell their line manager or supervisor if they felt there was a risk they or a colleague could get hurt at work
- 50 per cent would tell their colleagues if they felt there was a risk they or a colleague could get hurt at work.

Worryingly, five per cent said they wouldn't do any one of these.

The poll revealed that few people know the true picture of workplace accidents in the UK. In 2006 – 07, 247 people were killed and 274,000 were injured. However, two-thirds of a parallel survey of 1,291 people significantly underestimated the number injured at work in a single year. The majority believed the figure was below 100,000, with the largest group opting for between 1,000 and 50,000 injuries.

Ray Hurst, the president of IOSH, commented:

"The fact that more than two-thirds of people said they wouldn't blow the whistle on their employer for doing something illegal suggests a few things. It could be that people are very loyal to their employers or, more likely, that they're scared of the consequences if they get found out having told. It's also quite possible that people don't know how to report to the HSE.

"But it does seem fairly clear that most people trust their line manager or supervisor to sort out health and safety problems for them. That's why it's imperative managers understand health and safety and have the authority to deal with potential hazards. We must also do more to educate young workers, as the poll showed that almost a third of 18 - 24 year olds didn't know who to go to for health and safety advice at work.

"Blowing the whistle on employers obviously isn't something you do lightly. But if your employer won't act and you're genuinely concerned for your own or others' safety, it's certainly not something you should be afraid of doing."



Would you dare blow the whistle on your employer?????

35% would report their manager or supervisor

74% would tell their manager or supervisor

50% would tell their colleagues

Scaffold collapse seriously injured three workers

Untrained, unsupervised scaffolder's seriously injured.

The Health and Safety Executive has fined West Midlands company over £8,000 after three men were seriously injured when the scaffolding they were erecting collapsed onto a busy road in Staffordshire.

Three workers, who were not properly trained or supervised, suffered serious injuries when the scaffolding they were erecting collapsed.

Dozens of building workers were said to be walking around in a daze after the accident. One worker, who did not want to be named, said: "It could have been worse as a few people were in the canteen at the time. It's a bit like a disaster movie."

Once again, this emphasises the importance of training and supervision (Section 2c — Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974). Scaffolders in particular should at least have CISRS certification.



Witnesses say "it fell like a pack of cards"



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Health & safety under TV spotlight

Television film crews may soon be coming to your site

H&S is under the media spotlight from documentary makers right now with TV programme people apparently looking at ways they can reflect both enforcement and safety advice.

Who knows, they could be filming us, or they might be filming you!



Filming me, filming you!

Desktop lunchers beware!

Keyboards can apparently breed more bacteria than a toilet seat!

Computer users who eat lunch at their desks are being warned that keyboards could harbour more bacteria than a toilet seat. Workplace health organisation Health@Work says the average keyboard can host a range of illness-inducing bacteria, such as *E. Coli* and *Staphylococcus Aureus*. Both of which can cause a number of health problems, including nausea and vomiting, impetigo, and even kidney failure.

Keyboards can be a major health risk. In fact, it is such an issue now that companies are developing dishwasher-safe, antibacterial keyboards to combat the prob-

lem. These are a great idea, but are primarily used in the health sector, so may not be available to all employees, which is why care should be taken to ensure desktops are clean.

One way to avoid the problem is to encourage users to give their keyboards a spring clean: "Firstly, shake out dust and crumbs, then wipe down with a soft, lightly dampened, lint-free cloth. Follow this with an antibacterial wipe-down. Staff should also be encouraged not to eat at their desks and to use the canteen instead, or eat out. The problem is compounded by poor hygiene, so reminders in office bathrooms about the importance of washing your hands after a visit to the loo are also advisable.



Do you eat lunch at your work desk?

Rogues gallery:

Send us your good or bad practice pictures. Either post them or email them to admin@meridiansafety.co.uk

