



With new health and safety legislation, initiatives and alliances coinciding with the worst injury figures for a decade and the highest fines ever imposed for company violations, the issue has never been more prominent, writes Shane McGinley.

IN FEBRUARY the Health And Safety Authority launched a new strategy for safety in the workplace following the highest level of workplace fatalities in a decade for the month of January. On the same day the new strategy was announced two workers were hurt on a site in north Cork when a scaffold at a church near Dromtarriffe collapsed.

"The first thing with the Cork scenario," says Tom Beegan, chief executive of the Health and Safety Authority [HSA], "is it transcended a number of different sectors and it wasn't confined to any one particular sector and that was a worry. The second thing was that it was concentrated in Cork so we took the view that we should alert the workplaces to the fact that this has happened." As

a response to the worrying figures for the start of the year the HSA decided to "get tough" and according to Beegan the strategy was increased inspections and increased education.

The focus on the situation in Cork is part of an ongoing initiative to improve health and safety and

The main elements of the Bill will be on-the-spot fines for both employees and employers, which can range from €100 to €1,000.

reduce injuries in the construction industry. Minister for Labour Affairs Tony Killeen launched a new initiative of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), 'Safe System of Work Plan' (SSWP) aimed at construction sites across the country.

The new initiative relies heavily on pictograms to explain and clarify hazards and controls, thereby creating a wordless document where safety can be communicated to all workers regardless of literacy or language skills. The HSA highlights the fact that 225,000 people are now employed in the construction industry with increasing numbers being from non-English speaking countries. Over the last three years, 4,157 work permits have been issued to non-nationals to work in the construction sector. In 2004 alone, 1,213 permits were issued to nationals from 39 separate countries with over 60% were issued to the nationals from Turkey, Poland and Romania.

"We have worked hard to be innovative over the last couple of years to take into account the

• COMMERCIAL REPORT - HEALTH & SAFETY



Tom Beegan, chief executive of the Health and Safety Authority

changing nature of the construction workplace and tackle issues such as literacy and language which impact directly on communication of safety initiatives," said Beegan. "These new challenges have helped us to be more creative in finding solutions which we believe will help in saving lives and reducing injuries on site."

In terms of regulatory changes and the introduction of new initiatives, 2005 will see a lot of constructive developments in the area of health and safety. In Fermanagh a cross-border health and safety school, the first of its kind in Ireland, has been officially approved by government agencies in Northern Ireland and the Republic. The project, costing £1.5m stg will cater for up to 700 people annually.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Bill 2004 is expected to be enacted this summer 2005, giving the HSA increased powers and also changing the dynamic of health and safety. The Bill, published in June 2004, builds on the 1989 Act and incorporates the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Regulations 1993. The main elements of the Bill will be on-the-spot fines for both employees and employers, which can range from €100 to €1,000. For more serious cases and Bill increases the fines and penalties that can be imposed with the maximum fine imposable increasing to €3m and/or a possible two year prison sentence. Fines of such magnitude are an increasing reality, especially with the €1m fine imposed on Smurfit News Press Ltd., the largest ever fine imposed for safety violations.

The Bill contains positive and negative developments for the employee. Firstly it places more direct responsibility on the employee for their



Rody Ryan, managing director of Goldcert Management Systems Ltd.

own health and safety both in terms of promoting it and also in terms of responsibility if they are liable. "You hope that people will take on the initiative to get their staff trained, that the staff understand it's not just the company that is liable, people have a responsibility for their own health and safety. The company can do so much but at the end of the day



Goldcert

Partners for Business Systems Integration

Rody Ryan
Goldcert Director

"We are implementing OHSAS 18001 and ISO 14001 following the Goldcert approach to systematic continual improvement that brought us through a successful upgrade to ISO 9001:2000."
Steve Johnson, Business Systems Manager, ESB International

"Many thanks for helping us achieve ISO 14001 certification with no non-conformances. We are now considering the same Goldcert approach to help integrate our Health & Safety and other management systems as we go forward."
Joe Scally, Plant Manager, Dublin Bay Power Plant

"We are continuing to improve our QMS in the light of your insights and guidance that led to a fault-free outcome to our last external audit."
Nina Furlong, Quality Manager, Inisys Ltd

Now, what can we do for you?

Goldcert Management Systems Ltd,
57 Charleston Road,
Ranelagh,
Dublin 6.



**Tel/Fax: 01 496 9188 Website: www.goldcert.com
e-mail: mail@goldcert.com**

SGS


SGS Ireland Ltd

The SGS Group of companies is the world's largest organisation in the field of inspection, verification, testing and certification.

Since it was established, the SGS Group has remained dedicated to its independence as a guarantee of its total impartiality. SGS does not engage in any manufacturing, trading or financial activities which might compromise its independence and neutrality. The SGS Group has built its international reputation on a commitment to quality, based on the individual and collective responsibility of all employees at the service of customers worldwide.

SGS Ireland Ltd started operations in August 1993 and employs 450 staff across a network of business sectors including:

- **Systems & Services Certification** – Health & Safety Management Systems: OHSAS 18001, Quality Management Systems: ISO 9001, Environmental Management Systems: ISO 14001, EMAS, Emissions Verification, Food Safety Management: I.S. 343 incorporating HACCP, Global Food Standard BRC, BRC IOP, Automotive QS 9000/TS 16949, Product Certification and Service Certification Qualicert.
- **Oil, Gas & Chemicals Services** – Laboratory testing, fuel testing, chemical analysis, gas-free testing etc.
- **Consumer Products Services** – Import management, retail & supply support, Performance & Statutory testing of textiles, testing of toys, household goods etc.
- **Training Services** – Technical Management Training including Quality, Environment, Safety & Risk Management.
- **Agricultural Services** – Comprehensive Cover, Marine Insurance, Quality inspections and analysis, Sampling, Warehousing etc.
- **Industrial Services** – Pre-shipment and Vendor Inspection, Type Approvals, Vehicle Inspection etc. In December 1998 the SGS Group were awarded the 10-year contract to set up and manage the National Car Testing Service (NCTS) in Ireland.



• COMMERCIAL REPORT - HEALTH & SAFETY

you are responsible for your own health and safety and the health and safety of the people around you," says Mark Hyland of Firetec Fire Safety Consultants.

"The fine that is imposed on people is nearly as big as what's imposed on companies. It's going to be a lot more focused on the likes of supervisors and line managers and they will be a lot more responsible for those in their area of work, which will be a new thing," adds Hyland. This is evident in a recent case in Coleraine where a building firm was fined £25,000 for failing to prevent the death of an employee when a sheet of metal mesh fell from a crane. The crane driver was also fined £10,000. Under the new Bill such a scenario would become more common in the Republic.

Under the new Bill employees will also be protected from penalisation for exercising their rights under the legislation and making a complaint to the HSA regarding health and safety standards in their company. Any employee dismissed for making a complaint about health and safety standards will be eligible to appeal the decision under the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1997-2001. The Bill also provides provision whereby employees can be tested for intoxicants if it is suspected they are under the influence of drink or drugs. This includes regular medical testing for those who work directly in a safety critical position.

From an employers point of view, there is some relief for smaller companies with less than three employees, who will now meet the safety standard requirement by adhering to the code relevant to their industry. The Bill also provides, for the first time, the HSA the power to name and shame companies who are found guilty of health and safety offences.

"When we talk about health and safety management you can simplify that back down to good management practice," said Beegan. "Therefore in order to build the foundations of a good health and safety policy and safety statement a company must firstly have a good risk management strategy in place."

"More and more organisations are increasingly concerned about achieving and demonstrating sound occupational health and safety performance to their customers, employees and shareholders, by managing the risks and improving the beneficial effects of their activities products and services," says Karen O'Hanlon, business manager at SGS Ireland Ltd.

At the same time more stringent legislation is increasingly pointing to stronger occupational health and safety expectations and management systems, believes O'Hanlon. "A clear commitment and a direct proactive stance on occupational health and safety is required, to demonstrate their

commitment and their ability to achieve sustainable development," adds O'Hanlon.

Building business management systems and eradicating the distinction between quality and business is the best way to develop a risk management strategy, believes Rody Ryan, managing director of Goldcert Management Systems Ltd. "The key thing is continual improvement, building systems that will drive continual improvement systematically in any part of the business that you choose to focus on."

The Chambers of Commerce of Ireland (CCI) observes that accident and work related illnesses caused by poor health and safety is costing Irish businesses a minimum of €300m annually.

Ryan previously worked for the NSAI and travelled the world evaluating safety and quality standards. In his experience he has found that there are not many cultural differences in the current approach to health and safety. "I found that a very large number of the companies I dealt with at every level seemed to me to be stuck in a compliance mode, observes Ryan. "It's like having a car in the garage but all the wheels are on the wall."

In NSAI Ryan spearheaded a range of programs to shift their focus from compliance to effectiveness so that the process was more proactive rather than reactionary. "Having a sense of purpose behind the

system beyond just getting a cert on the wall," adds Ryan.

Occupational Health & Safety Assessment Series (OHSAS 18001) is an international standard defining requirements related to health and safety management systems. "It is the first cousin of ISO9001," says Ryan. ISO9001 was designed specifically for quality management and according to Ryan it is now used by over half a million companies in the world and is the most successful standard of any kind ever developed on the planet,

it is used all over the world in every country and in every type of background and culture.

OHSAS 18001 certification demonstrates an organisation's commitment to provide a safe working environment and protect their employees. It aims, says O'Hanlon, at reducing and preventing accidents and accident related loss of life, equipment, time and damage to the environment.

Certification against OHSAS 18001 is aimed at the way a company has control over, and knowledge of all relevant risks resulting from normal and abnormal situations. It focuses on the management of Occupational Health & Safety and the continual improvements that the organisation develops to provide stakeholders and others with assurance of conformance with its stated Occupational Health & Safety policy.

The first step in developing a health and safety risk management strategy is to divide the company up into its components, look at the organisational chart and follow the process map to look at the intricate workings and possible threats in the company's organisation. "Brainstorm what are the hazards and the risks associated with those hazards. On that basis you can prioritise areas that are acceptable and those that are not," says Ryan. "There are then three fundamental questions that need to be addressed. What is the company's procedure to control that risk? What procedures does the company have in place when an accident occurs? And does the company have a registry of incidents and the frequency and severity of near misses?"

"The accidents that happen are ordinary, 20% of the serious accidents arose from people slipping or falling, not from a height but on the same level or tripping over something," says Ryan, emphasising that brainstorming risk analysis in the health and safety sector must cover everything from the mundane to the potentially fatal.

As part of the service, offered by companies such as Goldcert Management Systems Ltd, a gap analysis is carried out on the company's present situation and their current level of regulatory compliance. A company safety statement is then drawn up and a framework is put in place in the event of an accident occurring.



Regulations dictate that fire extinguishers, like all health and safety equipment, must be serviced annually.

• COMMERCIAL REPORT - HEALTH & SAFETY



Builders protesting at the Dail in 2001 over the decline of safety standards on building sites in Dublin.

"It is continual improvement. You start off with a snap shot of your system with a description of your procedures of what you think is going to protect you from problems down stream and if they are good they never change. Then you keep an eye and proactively record near misses because for every accident there is maybe 20 near misses," says Ryan.

Part of the ongoing continual improvement is staff training and maintenance of equipment. Mark Hyland, as well as working with Firetec Fire Safety Consultants has also been a fire fighter with Dublin Fire Brigade for the past 12 years. "I do a lot of safety training for other companies, fire risk assessment, service equipment in premises and health and safety equipment," says Hyland. Regulations dictate that fire equipment is serviced once a year and fire alarms must be serviced four times a year. With constant staff rotation now a matter of fact in most manufacturing and commercial organisations regular staff training sessions are the norm. According to Hyland, the most common office related fire hazards that he has observed are electrical overload, breaking compartmentation of the building by leaving doors open at night, using fire extinguishers to hold doors open, hydraulic shutters taken off doors and emergency exits left blocked.

"If a fire alarm goes off there is a very slow reaction time that can cost people," says Hyland observing that there is a general ambivalence to the importance of fire drills. Education is the best weapon to combating fire safety ignorance. In many cases companies have the correct equipment in place but the staff have not been adequately trained or staff feel that they are only attending safety lectures so the company can meet regulatory requirements. According to Hyland the best method



Some of the most commonly observed causes of fires in offices is electrical overload and the breaking of compartmentation by leaving doors open at night



In 2004 the construction industry accounted for 15 fatalities, according to Health and Safety Authority figures.

of combating this training deficit is to adapt training sessions to the specific needs of the organisation in question. "Once you inform people on the fire and safety end of things it opens their eyes to the stuff people do at home," observes Hyland, showing that a good health and safety policy also has broader reaching social benefits.

"All health and safety comes down to responsibility and responsibility for something going wrong. An accident is not just an accident," says Jim Lennon, managing director of Anderco Lifting Ltd. Lennon works in the area of testing lifting equipment, which like the area of fire equipment is a highly regulated sector, as all lifting equipment must be inspected and checked every six months. A machine may be deemed operable but may have some minor defects that would increase the possibility of an accident occurring. Regular inspections record any of these defects and the responsibility is then on the company to fix these or take responsibility for an accident in the event one occurs.

The increase in legislation and recent large fines imposed are good for the industry as a whole believes Lennon. "As legislation increases and things become more controlled the drive for decreasing fatalities it is only good for the health and safety business."

Lennon has found that the size of companies does have a bearing on their record. "You find with the likes of the pharmaceuticals most of the bigger companies such as multinational companies would be very good in terms of conformance because they provide a large budget for it, provide training for all levels of operators and are prepared to spend money on machinery. What you will find is that it is at the smaller end of the businesses where there is the greatest potential for things to go wrong."

The areas of health and safety are not one and the same. While the area of safety is highly regulated the health end of the scale has not attracted as much direct focus. "I think companies have a bigger challenge to cover health than they have to cover safety. Safety is very visible usually and is very immediate and short-term. It's associated with accidents, which you can prevent. Health is more associated with a process such as burnout or stress. It doesn't have the same trigger mechanism that accidents or a safety issue would have," says Ryan.

Many researchers in the area of health and safety believe the psychosocial aspects of will be developed further in the coming years and the line between HR and health and safety is beginning to merge.

The Irish Bank Officials Association launched a policy document warning that the culture of relentlessly pursuing excessive profits by financial institutions is at the expense of workers' health. Bullying has recently become an important occupational issue and there are now codes of

• COMMERCIAL REPORT - HEALTH & SAFETY

practice put in place by the HSA, the Labour Relations Commission and the Equality Authority. According to Beegan the HSA also has plans to start drafting a national occupational health strategy this year, especially in the area of muscular problems. Like the area of safety, small changes can often lead to great rewards.

One company, which Ryan was involved with, was experiencing a high level of absenteeism due to repetitive strain syndrome. The company decided to implement a practice where each hour for five minutes all employees did wrist and all over body exercises. As a result absenteeism dropped and productivity increased. This echoes long held theories that already exist in Japan. "They brought the whole concept of a holistic approach to the work life balance and we are only starting in the Western world to start talking about this but we have a long way to go," adds Beegan.

Alliances and institutional harmony have become commonplace in the increasing the awareness of health and safety issues. The Chambers of Commerce of Ireland (CCI) observes that accident and work related illnesses caused by poor health and safety is costing Irish businesses a minimum of €300m annually. Using a new initiative called Chambersafe the CCI aims to reduce costs by at least 20% a year.



Accident scene in Dublin where three workmen were injured when scaffolding collapsed.

This will be achieved by offered companies a reduction in their insurance costs if they can prove they have implemented a comprehensive health and safety strategy. The ESB and the HSA have also established a strategic alliance to promote health and safety practice and reduce fatalities in the construction and agricultural sectors when working in proximity to ESB Networks electricity infrastructure.

In light of the soldiers' deafness claims health and safety risk management has become a political

topic for the government. With the emergence of claims by primary teachers in relation to voice problems Beegan believes that all businesses and organisations must look at their health and safety situations, both for their employees, their reputations, industry at large and their future success. "Make some time available at the most senior level of an organisation and reassess is there anything we haven't thought of that might come from left field that could be a major difficulty," advises Beegan. ■

ANDERCO SAFE HEIGHT LTD



• Sayflida Applications •
 Fall Arrest & Rescue Systems, Horizontal & Vertical Life Lines, Fall & Load Arrestors, Supply, Installation & Certification Nationwide

Glanmire hse Cork (021) 455 9250
 Fax (021) 450 0140
 Email:sales@safeheight.com
 Website:www.safeheight.com



<p>Training Fire Safety Occupational first aid First responder AED Emergency Aid Manual handling Health and Safety</p>	<p>Fire extinguisher and equipment sales and service First aid supplies First aid kits • Eye wash • Burnfree gels • Medical room supplies • Emergency care equipment Defibrillators</p>
<p>Fire and Safety Risk assessments- Safety Audits Safety Statements</p>	<p>Safety Signage Firetec can supply all you safety training and supply needs.</p>

FIRETEC COMPLETE PROTECTION FOR YOUR STAFF AND YOUR COMPANY

Firetec
 Fire & Safety Consultants
 Naas, Co Kildare
M 0872291357 PH 045 894846
E firetec@eircom.net

