Health and Safety for Schools

by Oksana Higglesden

The first Health and Safety Manual for English language schools in Britain has been recently launched by ARELS to raise awareness of their legal obligations in this area. Produced by Helen Mattacott, ARELS' Education Officer and committee member of the IATEFL ELT Management SIG, the Manual covers all aspects of the working environment. Practical advice is given on good health and safety management; legal obligations on schools; hygiene; electricity and gas; how to produce a health and safety policy; how to carry out a risk assessment; handling, reporting, recording and investigating accidents on and away from school premises; staff training; as well as details of organisations involved in health and safety.

English language schools cannot afford to ignore health and safety

Schools may argue that health and safety regulations are more pertinent to organisations involved with hazardous chemicals and materials. On the contrary, all organisations which employ more than five members of staff are legally and morally responsible for the health and safety of their employees who may be affected by their activities. How many schools are confident at all times that their staff and students are not at risk within their premises?

Injuries and fatalities at work are on the increase. In Britain, two people are killed and over 6000 injured at work each working day. Consequently, 31 million work days are lost. Small firms, in particular, have a higher rate of fatal and major injuries and are more vulnerable to larger losses, even collapse.

Many accidents can be attributed to negligence on behalf of the employer such as a frayed carpet or a guillotine without a guard. Fire too is a potential killer; so is electricity. Many schools have a broad range of electrical equipment which is often in constant use such as tape recorders, video recorders, televisions, overhead projectors as well as electrical equipment in the office and in language laboratories. The repercussions of an accident caused by negligence can be catastrophic for a school. In many cases, the costs of an accident can greatly exceed the costs for which a school is insured. Equally important is the damaging effect that can arise from negative media coverage.

Failure to adhere to health and safety laws can lead to prosecution. These laws are enforced by an inspector either from the Health and Safety Executive or from your local council. They have wide ranging powers which include the right of entry to your premises without any notice, the right to talk to employees and safety representatives and to take photographs and samples. They also have the right to issue a notice requiring improvements to be made or where a risk of serious personal injury exists to stop a process or the use of dangerous equipment.

The responsibility of an accident does not stop with the company. Directors and managers too can be held personally accountable for failures to control risks to health and safety.

What are schools legally obliged to do

All organisations with more than five employees must comply with six regulations which came into force at the end of 1992 to bring UK health and safety legislation in line with EC directives. These are:-

- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992
- Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992
- Health & Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992
- The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992
- The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992
- The Provision & Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1992

Of major importance are the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 which require employers to:-

- assess the risks to the health and safety of their employees and others who may be affected in order to identify the measures needed to comply with relevant health and safety law. Significant findings of the risk assessment need to be recorded.
- make arrangements for implementing the health and safety measures identified as being required by the risk assessment. Arrangements for planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review will need to be covered and recorded;
- appoint competent people either from inside the organisation or from outside to help with the implementation of the health and safety arrangements;
- · set up emergency procedures;
- provide information to employees which can be understood, as well as adequate training and instruction;
- work together with other employers sharing the same workplace.

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The Law - What UK Schools Must do

- 1. Set up and implement policies and a structure for the Management of Health and Safety at the school.
- 2. Display the Health and Safety Law Poster.
- 3. Register with the Health and Safety Executive on Form OSR 1.
- 4. Ensure VDU workstations comply to Regulations and if requested provide for eye tests for designated VDU
- 5. Comply with the Fire Safety Regulations.
- 6. Maintain all portable electrical equipment as safe and without risk.
- 7. Arrange for a competent person to regularly check all portable electrical equipment for faults.
- 8. Arrange for a member of CORGI (Confederation of Registered Gas Installers) to maintain all gas appliances.
- 9. Register school canteens/food preparation areas with the Local Environmental Health Officer.
- 10. Display a copy of the Employer's Liability, Public Liability and Product Liability Insurance (if food is prepared on the premises) in the office area.
- 11. Arrange for Health and Safety training for all staff.
- 12. Provide a workplace and facilities which conform to the Workplace Regulations 1992.
- 13. Set up an accident/First Aid logbook.
- 14. Keep a fully stocked First Aid Box, conforming to regulations, on each site.
- 15. Have an 'Appointed Person' in charge of First Aid and the First Aid box. This person should follow at least a one day training course.
- 16. Produce a written Health and Safety Policy if five or more employees are employed.
- 17. Draw up a Risk Assessment for all aspects of the school.
- 18. Make arrangements for waste transfer of sanitary dressings.
- 19. Comply with The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.

Good health and safety management policy

Most accidents are preventable or their effects can be minimised by implementing an effective and workable health and safety management policy. The Health and Safety Executive has identified five stages which contribute towards successful health and safety management.

- set your policy;
- organise your staff;
- plan and set standards:
- measure your performance;
- learn from experience, audit and review.

Set your policy

Setting a policy is the first step towards controlling all accidental loss. It entails identifying hazards, assessing risks, deciding what precautions are needed, putting them in place, deciding who is responsible for implementation, and checking that they are used to protect people and improve quality. Hazards and risks can be identified by considering the causes and effects of previous accidents which have caused injuries, ill health or other damage. Your health and safety policy should influence all your activities, including the selection of people, equipment and materials, the way in which work is done and the design and provision of services. Once you have drawn up a written statement of your policy and arrangements for implement-

ing and monitoring it, reconsider whether it will prevent injuries, reduce losses and really affect the way you work.

Organise your staff

To make your health and safety policy effective you need to consult your staff and involve them in planning and reviewing performance, writing procedures and solving problems. Health and safety should be discussed regularly and staff must be provided with information about hazards and risks and preventative measures. Assess the skills needed to carry out specific tasks safely and allocate responsibility to individual staff. Ensure that they are adequately instructed and trained. Make certain that all employees know what they must do and how they will be supervised and held accountable.

Plan and set standards

Planning is the key to ensuring that your health and safety efforts really work. Your planning should provide for:-

- · identifying hazards and assessing risks, and deciding how they can be eliminated or controlled;
- · complying with the health and safety laws that apply to your business;
- agreeing health and safety targets with managers and supervisors:

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- design of tasks, processes, equipment, products, services;
- · safe systems of work;
- procedures to deal with serious and imminent danger;
- setting standards against which performance can be measured.

Standards should identify who does what, when and with what result. Don't forget that your standards must be measurable, achievable and realistic.

Measure your performance

You need to measure your health and safety performance to find out if you're being successful. To do this you need to know where you are, where you want to be and evaluate the difference between the two.

Measuring your performance requires a combination of active and reactive monitoring. Active monitoring involves regular inspection and checking to ensure that your standards are being implemented and that management controls are working before things go wrong. Reactive monitoring entails investigating injuries, cases of illness, property damage and identifying in each case why performance was sub-standard, finding out and recording what happened and why. Accurate records will enable you to refer this information to the people with authority to take remedial action including organisational and policy changes.

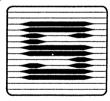
Learn from experience; audit and review

Monitoring provides the information to enable you to review activities, that is whether your policy, organisation and systems are achieving the right results. They tell you about the reliability and effectiveness of your systems and allow you to learn from your experiences. Combine the results from measuring performance with information from audits to improve your approach to health and safety management. Review the effectiveness of your health and safety policy paying particular attention to the degree of compliance with health and safety performance standards and legislation; areas where standards are absent or inadequate; achievement of stated objectives within given timescales; and injury, illness and incident date which involves analyses of immediate and underlying causes, trends and common features.

By following these five steps you will be well on your way towards good health and safety management within your organisation and can help you to protect people and control loss. After all, prevention is far better than cure.

For further details on the ARELS Health and Safety Manual contact the association on +44 171 242 3136 or write to the address below. The Manual retails at £30 for members and £50 for non-members plus postage and packing.

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ELT Management SIG changes

Joint Co-ordinator Following her appointment as Principal of Newnham Language Centre in Cambridge, Marie-Louise Banning is regretfully having to give up her role as Joint Co-ordinator of the ELT Management SIG. We trust that she will remain an active and highly valued contributor to the Group's activities, at conferences, seminars and through this Newsletter.

Her place as Joint Co-ordinator, with Allan Kelsall, will be taken by George Pickering, who has recently joined Churchill House School of English as Assistant Director (Marketing and Sales). Welcome, George!

Newsletter Editor As mentioned on the front page, the SIG Committee is looking for an Editor to take over the production of this Newsletter, three times a year. Interested parties should contact the Joint Co-ordinators at the address on the back page. There will be opportunities to discuss this informally at the York Conference.