

As a freethinking adult the concept of a “Nanny State” is contrary to my simple maxim that with a few exceptions we are masters of our own destiny. This is never truer than in the matter of our own health. Forty cigarettes, four pints, four hours watching the box and your life could be foreshortened by at least fourteen years. Increased regulation greater control more bureaucracy. We all complain about it and generally think that it is unnecessary and stifles enterprise. But then you wonder why? Our leaders can’t be that stupid? No they aren’t always that stupid, many times we bring it on ourselves. This is demonstrated so clearly in the matter of Health and Safety in the workplace. Statistics gathered by the health and Safety Executive indicates that the three most common causes of accidents in our industry are: Manual Handling, Slips and Trips and Contact with Machinery.

It also states that:

“Print workers are exposed to a range of hazardous chemicals, including solvents, during the course of their work. In a recent study, 10% of print workers reported that they had a current skin problem caused by their work. Further information on how to reduce exposure to chemicals is contained in COSHH Essentials.”

COSHH Essentials is a booklet provided by the Health and Safety Executive free of charge on their web site www.hse.gov.uk

It is my experience that the issue of skin problems is much greater than stated. It is very rare that I come across a long serving individual who has not suffered from a work related skin condition. The figure for skin problems in those handling inks, solvents and chemicals in the screen printing industry for several years is nearer 90% than 10%. It is almost a right of passage. “You are not a printer unless you have had dermatitis.” We are all to blame. Health and Safety is everyone’s responsibility, but the greatest responsibility is with the individual.

Almost without exception the required Personal Protective Equipment is available to the individual.

Do they wear it? Gloves, goggles, respirators, overalls. Do they heck! “It takes to much time.” “I can’t find them.” “They are uncomfortable to wear.” “I didn’t think they were necessary.

More truthfully, “I can’t be bothered.” The industrial language has been filtered out of the text but you get the message.

This is not a matter of choice. It is the law. There are two excellent pieces of legislation (did I really say that) that cover this area of health and safety, these are:

Chemical (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 2002 (CHIP)

Ensures people are supplied with the information they need to protect themselves from chemicals. CHIP obliges suppliers of chemicals to identify hazards and provide appropriate packaging labels and safety data sheets.

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH)

Requires employers to control exposures to hazardous substances to protect both employees and others who may be exposed from work activities.

The combination of CHIP and COSHH provide the information to enable the industry to avoid the problems. Unfortunately the people on the shop floor often never read the core of the advice that is contained on the Material Safety Data Sheets. Admittedly they can be pretty daunting documents at first viewing with chemical specifications that will scare many people off but contained within them is crucial information.

The type of gloves that should be worn, whether you need to wear goggles, if air extraction should be used. What should be done in the event of the material coming into contact with the skin. What to do if it is swallowed. How to store it and much else. The common factor in all these Material Safety data Sheets is the need for good housekeeping and reducing the likelihood of the material either as a solid liquid or a vapour to come into contact with the individual. You do not need to be a chemist to understand these documents all you have to be able to do is read.

Almost without exception industrial dermatitis is brought about by either not using gloves or using the wrong gloves. The use of barrier creams on the hands when wearing gloves can help. If skin does become dried out by contact with solvents a suitable moisturiser can help reduce the potential damage. With Ultra Violet Curing systems regular skin contact with the material can cause sensitisation that means the sufferer can no longer work with the materials as they can have an allergic reaction to them even from a distance several feet let alone actual contact.

Then there are the annual Risk Assessments that are the responsibility of the employer to have carried out by a suitably qualified person. Once completed the recommendations must be actioned. How many companies have Annual Risk Assessments and out of those how many act on the recommendations. Nobody knows for certain. It is not a matter of taking a gamble because gambling infers you are hoping to win something here the gamble is how long will it be before you have a serious loss. That loss being an injury to the individual and financial loss in the courts. It could even be a matter of someone going to jail!

Good practice in Health and Safety is not an imposition it is part of the structure of best practice that makes your company prosper. I have never known a company with an enlightened view on Health and Safety fail, however those who choose to ignore this aspect of their business often become casualties themselves.

Every company has to have a Health and Safety Policy that is incorporated into the Employee Manual provided when the individual joins the company. If someone has been

with the company for several years, in the screen printing industry it can be forty years, it may be the case that Employee Manual has not been kept up to date. Many employees have no idea where it is let alone what is in it. It is vital that the employer ensures all employees have copies of and understand changes in legislation that affect them. It is well worth asking employees to bring their manuals for updating. This is best done in training sessions that cover Health and Safety where the changes can be explained and the responsibility of the individual reinforced. In broad terms these responsibilities are as shown in an extract from the SPA Members Health and Safety Scheme:

Managing Director or Chief Executive Officer

- Has overall health and safety responsibility for the company
- Issues the company's health and safety policy

Managers

- Specify the company health and safety rules on the use PPE, first aid, fire etc.
- Conduct risk assessments to determine whether there are procedures in place to ensure the rules are capable of being followed

Supervisors

- Ensure that employees are trained and follow the health and safety rules such as wearing PPE, using equipment properly
- Conduct health and safety audits to ascertain whether the employees are following the company rules

Employees

- Follow the company health and safety rules and report any failures in procedures or equipment that could affect the health and safety of the employees
- Any failure by one member of the link will automatically lead to the total failure of the whole.

Safety Advisor

Advises on:

- Day to day implementation of the health and safety policy including accident reporting and analysis
- Organisation and promoting positive health and safety culture
- Audits and assessments of health and safety performance
- Best health and safety practices where necessary seeking external assistance
- Is the contact point for the Health and Safety Executive or Local Authority Inspectors.

Not responsible for ensuring that the company health and safety rules are followed. Can be full-time or part-time and seek external advice.



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HEALTH AND SAFETY

Each member of the team has a responsibility to uphold the Company Health and Safety Regulations. Failure to do so can result in disciplinary action that could in turn lead to dismissal or even legal action.

There is no excuse the information and guidance is out there. If you find trawling through the Health and Safety Executive daunting buy the CD produced by the SPA it is available by ringing 01737 240792. All the necessary documentation is contained on this CD and its use is explained in terms that even I can understand.

Health and Safety should not be a matter of threat or sanction it is about good business practice. A safe company is a profitable company it shows everyone you care. Business is stressful enough without the risk of being injured at work.