

August 2024

Health & Safety Newsletter

What does the new government mean for health and safety law?

At the time of publishing this newsletter, there has been no suggestion of any immediate changes to Health and Safety Law by the Labour government.

However, Labour has stated in their **'Plan to Make Work Pay'** that they pledge to review and 'modernise' health and safety legislation to ensure it is fit for the modern workplace.

At present there is no indication of a complete overhaul of the current Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the only current indication of potential change is conducting a review into extreme temperatures and what is deemed acceptable for strenuous and sedentary tasks, currently there is no legally defined maximum temperature for any workplace.

The plan also outlined labours' goal to strengthen health and safety laws to better protect workers, this includes increased funding for the HSE and local councils to enable much more frequent workplace inspections.

Musculoskeletal disorders why do they matter?

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) affect the joints, bones and muscles. They can arise suddenly from traumatic injuries such as fractures, sprains and strains or can come from repeated stress and strain on certain muscles.

MSDs can affect the upper and lower back, neck, shoulders, arms, legs, feet and hands, the disorders can have a profound impact on the human body in various places.

MSDs can limit mobility which will not only affect a person's ability to work, it can also affect their social and personal lives which can then ultimately affect a person's mental wellbeing.

MSDs account for the most widely reported work-related health conditions among workers globally. In Great Britain, 470,000 people suffer from work-related MSDs and a total of 8.9 million working days were lost because of work-related MSDs in 2019-20.



What causes MSDs?

In the workplace, MSDs are often caused by occupational activities such as:

- Lifting heavy loads
- Working with high-force exertion
- Working in unfavourable body postures
- Monotonous repetitive tasks
- Application of vibration
- Physical environmental conditions
- Heavy work demands and pressures.

How to identify potential MSD hazards:

It can be difficult to identify specific hazards that can cause or aggravate conditions, however, there is a useful acronym that most people will be familiar with that is considered when assessing manual handling hazards (which are very closely connected to MSDs) this acronym is:

- **Task** – understanding manual handling tasks (for example, lifting) and ergonomics (for example, maintaining awkward positions)
- **Individual health** – is the individual in a fit state to undertake the task? Consider any pre-existing conditions, rest and recovery times and general good health.
- **Load** – if a load is too heavy for a worker to hold and is carried out repeatedly, it will eventually substantially affect the body. The nature of the load (liquid, solid) should also be considered, including how this may affect its centre of gravity which may make to task more awkward.
- **Environment** – this should be suitable for the worker to carry out their job without risk and should consider factors such as space constraints or variations in work surfaces or floors and environmental factors (such as excessive noise and temperature).

Training and competence also play a big factor in minimising the risk from MSDs, if you have not received the correct manual handling training required for your role this should be brought to the attention of your employer immediately.