



LEIA Safety Information Sheet

Occupational Health and Wellbeing

Prepared by the LEIA Safety and Environment Committee

SAFETY INFORMATION SHEET

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Preamble

This information sheet is one of a series produced by the LEIA Safety and Environment Committee on topics relevant to the lift and escalator industry. Whilst every effort has been taken in the production of these sheets, it must be acknowledged that they should be read in conjunction with the relevant legislation, codes of practise etc. They should not be taken as an authoritative interpretation of the law but guidance to it.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Occupational health is concerned with the relationship between health and work

- a) The effect of your health on your work – does your health make it difficult to do your job or parts of your job
- b) The effect of your work on your health – are there things involved in your job which put your health at risk

Key areas

5 key risk areas for occupational health within site activity within the lift industry are most likely:

- Respiratory conditions
 - Exposure to dust particularly silica dust from drilling blockwork and asbestos causing asthma or asbestos related disease.
- Skin conditions
 - Exposure to oils, solvents, paints and other hazardous substances leading to skin irritation and potentially dermatitis
- Musculoskeletal conditions
 - Manual handling – lifting and manipulating heavy parts and equipment in restricted spaces leading to muscle strain, upper limb disorders and back pain
- Noise and vibration
 - Operating noisy equipment or working near noisy plant leading to noise induced hearing loss.
 - Use of hand held vibrating tools leading to adverse effects on blood vessels, nerves, joints and muscles (hand arm vibration syndrome)
- Well being
 - Promoting a healthy life style within the workforce

In common with most other industries the lift industry has previously concentrated on the safety part of health and safety but increasingly more focus is being placed on health being driven by client demands particularly, but not solely, within the construction industry.

Constructing Better Health

The Constructing Better Health initiative is focused on improving health in construction and within that initiative some workers are considered as Safety Critical. These are workers whose jobs can place other workers at risk unless the worker has full, unimpaired control of their physical and mental capabilities. Examples of safety critical jobs would be Plant operators, Scaffolders, Banksmen, Steeplejacks.

Although lift operatives are not mentioned, there is no definitive list, and to decide if a worker is safety critical or not the activity needs to be considered

- Is there a safety critical element?
- Could an incapacitated worker expose themselves or others to a significant risk of harm?

In particular, the health conditions of most concern would be those involving

- Sudden loss of consciousness (e.g. epilepsy, some heart conditions)
- Impaired awareness or concentration
- Sudden incapacity
- Impaired balance or coordination
- Restricted mobility
- Impaired vision or hearing

Risk assessment and task analysis can be used to decide which workers are safety critical.

Irrespective of this classification and although there may be no specific legal requirement some employers do prefer to have the assurance that their employees are unimpaired and not likely to put themselves or others at risk due to health issues. One option would be a Medical Assessment

Medical Assessment

The HSE recommend that workers who carry out safety critical tasks require a medical assessment. Decisions on an individual's fitness to perform a particular job can only be taken by a competent Occupational Health Doctor who will need details of the job the individual will be expected to perform. Whilst the clinical details will remain confidential between the OH practitioner and the individual the employer can expect the OH practitioner to provide a general report about individual fitness in terms of the individual being:

- Fit for work
- Fit for work with restrictions
- Temporarily does not meet the fitness standards
- Unable to meet the fitness standards

Ongoing checks

Fitness for work will in all likelihood change over time and an assessment needs to be made as how often individuals need to be recalled to ensure they are still fit enough to continue their work.

Workers can be asked to inform their employers of any health changes which may affect their ability to do their job safely.

Sickness absence and observations by managers and supervisors may also indicate deteriorations in health and this might trigger a further medical assessment.

Health Surveillance

According to the HSE 'Health surveillance is about putting in place systematic, regular and appropriate procedures to detect early signs of work-related ill health, among employees exposed to certain health risks; and acting on the results.'

Health surveillance is a system of ongoing health checks. These health checks may be required by law for employees who are exposed to noise or vibration, ionising radiation, solvents, fumes, dusts, biological agents and other substances hazardous to health, or work in compressed air.

Health surveillance is important for:

- detecting ill-health effects at an early stage, so employers can introduce better controls to prevent them getting worse
- providing data to help employers evaluate health risks
- enabling employees to raise concerns about how work affects their health
- highlighting lapses in workplace control measures, therefore providing invaluable feedback to the risk assessment
- providing an opportunity to reinforce training and education of employees (eg on the impact of health effects and the use of protective equipment)

A risk assessment should be used to identify any need for health surveillance. If identified by a risk assessment it should be put in place

Health surveillance is a particular legal requirement and should not be confused with:

- Workplace wellbeing checks, such as promoting healthy living
- Medical assessments (fitness to work examinations) and health assessments requested by night employees

However health surveillance programmes can be designed to include a medical assessment to determine if an individual is indeed fit for work.

WELLBEING

Some employers may wish to promote physical wellbeing amongst their employees through campaigns which focus on matters like:

- Healthy eating
- Keeping fit
- Alcohol consumption
- Encouraging employees not to smoke

Mental and emotional wellbeing can also be promoted where appropriate.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS: EMPLOYERS

It is an employer's duty to protect the health as well as the safety and welfare of their employees and of other people who might be affected by their business. Employers must do whatever is reasonably practicable to achieve this.

This means making sure that workers and others are protected from anything that may cause harm to health and effectively controlling any risks to health that could arise at work.

Employers have duties under health and safety law to assess risks in the workplace. Risk assessments should be carried out that address all risks that might cause harm, including risks to health

Employers must provide information about the health risks at work and how employees are protected, and also instruct and train employees on how to deal with health risks.

Employers are also required to consult with employees and this includes health issues which may arise.

Examples of ways in which the employer can meet their duties for health:

- Carrying out and recording risk assessments which cover risks to health including:
 - COSHH assessments for Hazardous substances
 - Manual Handling assessments for Manual handling operations
 - Assessments covering Hand arm vibration and Noise
 - DSE assessments for IT equipment users
- Implementing risk controls required by risk assessments
- Where appropriate arranging health surveillance
- Fitness checks on employee health – particularly where individuals working alone or in a high risk environment
- Pre-employment medicals and routine medical checks
- Encouraging well being
 - Discouraging smoking
 - Discouraging excessive alcohol consumption
 - Encouraging Healthy eating
 - Encouraging healthy lifestyle
- Drug and Alcohol testing
- Eyesight tests for drivers

LEGAL DUTIES: EMPLOYEES

Employees have a duty to take care of their own health and that of others who may be affected by their actions at work. Employees must co-operate with employers and their fellow employees to help everyone meet the legal requirements.

As an employee, if you have specific queries or concerns relating to health in your workplace, talk to your employer, manager/ supervisor or a health and safety representative.

Examples of ways in which the employee can meet their duties for health:

Using correctly all risk controls provided by the employer for example – manual handling aids and PPE

Notifying your employer in the event you suffer any health issue which could impact on your work or the safety of others.

Reporting to your employer if you feel anything at work is affecting your health

Co-operating in any Fitness or medical checks

Co-operating in any Health Surveillance programmes

SO WHAT SHOULD AN EMPLOYER DO?

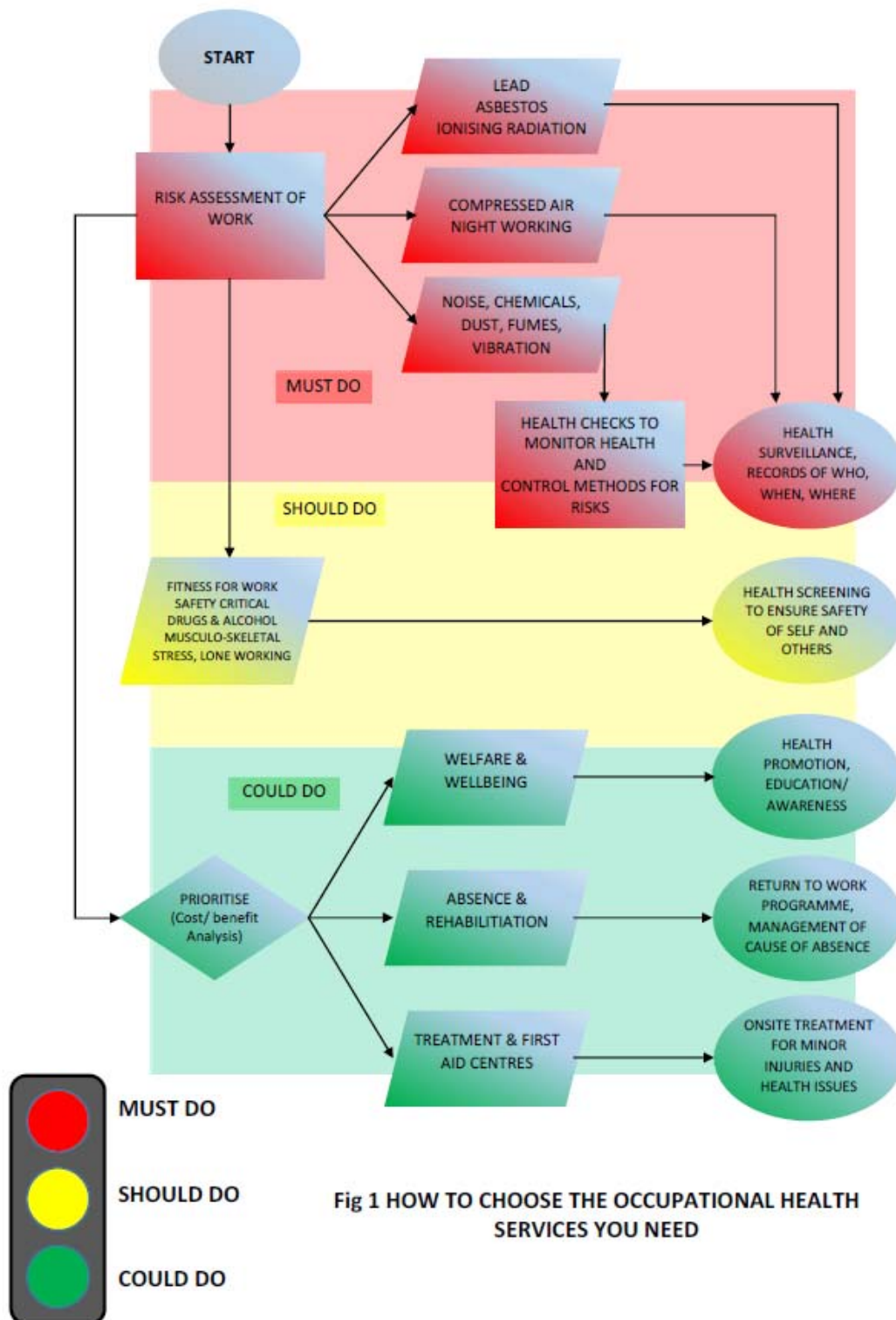


Fig 1 HOW TO CHOOSE THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES YOU NEED

References

HSG137 Health risk management - A practical guide for managers in small and medium-sized enterprises 1995 HSE

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg137.pdf>

HSE Health Surveillance website:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/health-surveillance/index.htm>