

The Importance of Maintaining Training Through the Credit Crunch

The current financial climate is causing headaches for many UK and global organisations, and it looks as though the UK economy could be in for a rough ride for the foreseeable future. The credit crunch appears to be tightening its grip, inflation is rising sharply, fuel and other costs are spiralling, and business confidence faltering.

In order to tackle this uncertain situation, budgets are likely to be squeezed, and it is tempting to see training as an easy target for cutbacks, not least the health and safety training budget. However, this is a false economy. If an employee were injured or even killed through lack of training, this could result in prosecution, a large fine or even imprisonment under the recent Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007.

According to HSE statistics, 228 people were killed at work in 2007/08, 34 of them in manufacturing, and nearly half a million people were injured while at work. Thirty-six million working days were lost, 30 million due to work-related ill health and 6 million due to workplace injury.

Legislation

The HSE states that employers have a duty to provide information, instruction, training and supervision and make sure all their workers can understand it. This, coupled with the ever-increasing burden of UK and EU health and safety legislation, means there is an escalating need for training rather than the reverse, to ensure compliance and avoid penalty.

The implications of the Corporate Manslaughter Act, under which organisations can be found guilty of corporate manslaughter as a result of serious management failures resulting in a gross breach of a duty of care, are not yet always well understood by employers, making health and safety awareness training even more vital for business.

Providing health and safety information is essential to maintain a good safety culture within an organisation, so that safety is upmost in the minds of workers, and they feel well cared for by their employer. And ultimately, giving successful training can save the employer money.

Delivery

When weighing up the training needs of the organisation, factors such as the expected outcome from the training, the people who need to be trained, the effectiveness of the training currently provided, the available training budget and the types of training needed, all need to be examined.

Employers should consider the most appropriate method of training delivery. Should you opt for traditional, or more cutting-edge, training?

How does it fit with the organisation and how are you going to get the message across in the timeline you want? Traditional health and safety training delivery may encompass in-house or off-site training, on a one-to-one basis or in groups or seminars. This type of training can be very expensive, but things have moved on, and newer methods offer an attractive alternative.

According to Safety Media, traditional training in each health and safety subject costs the employer at least £50 per person, but it can cost as little as 50 pence per person if e-learning, or online training, is used. However, even though it costs less, the quality of the training is not compromised.

E-learning has developed enormously in recent years after a relatively slow start ten years ago, and is an increasingly important method of training, owing to almost universal access to the internet. Incorporating many interactive features and deliverable in any number of different languages, e-learning is now widely regarded as a mainstream training method, integrated into the training strategy of an increasing number of organisations.

E-learning is becoming more and more necessary because of the growing mobility of busy workers and geographic diversity of organisations' sites. The benefits of online training include speed, efficiency, cost, convenience and interactivity. Employees find it flexible and engaging, and enjoy the control it gives them over their own learning programmes.

Employers, for their part, discover e-learning delivers sizeable cost and time savings, as well as effective staff training. The software can be installed on the organisation's intranet, or it can be hosted by the supplier on its own web portal. This means training can be provided not only to end users who have direct access to a PC, but also those who do not have use of a PC at work, such as warehouse, factory, and sales staff. Group training sessions can be organised for these users, using handsets that interact with the trainer. Because modules can be accessed when travelling or at home, as well as at work, e-learning therefore reduces employee down-time.

Conclusion

Health and safety training should never be overlooked during financial downturns, as doing this could have disastrous consequences and make matters worse. Health and safety training by e-learning can not only save money compared with traditional training, but it can provide high-quality and effective instruction to ensure that all employees are fully up to speed with this vital issue.

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