

Spotlight

on Health & Safety

May 2019

Legionnaires' Disease

Risks in my Workplace

Workers Memorial Day

Remembering Those who Have Been Killed or Injured
at or Because of Work

Asbestos

Your Duty to Manage

An Ageing Workforce

Challenge or Opportunity?

Sound and Fury

Too Much Noise can Cause
Permanent Hearing Damage

Health and Safety Rep of the Year

Applications Now Open



Workers Memorial Day

Monday 29th April, Stormont Estate



Members of Northern Ireland Trades Unions gathered at Stormont today to lay a wreath in memory of all those workers who have lost their lives while at work. The ceremony was given added poignance this year with the recent murder of Journalist Lyra McKee. Pictured at centre with wreath are Gerry Carson National Union of Journalists, (centre) with Geraldine Alexander Chair of the ICTU Health and Safety Committee (left) and Alison Millar General Secretary of NIPSA and vice chair of ICTU.

On Monday 29th April 2019, trade unionists and workers came together at noon to mark Workers Memorial Day by laying a wreath in the grounds of Stormont estate.

Workers Memorial Day is marked internationally as a way of remembering those who have been killed or injured at or because of work or who have contracted a work related illness or disease.

Alison Millar, Vice-Chair of ICTU said: *“Workers Memorial Day is an opportunity for us to reflect on the people who have tragically lost their lives at or because of work. This year Workers Memorial Day is especially poignant as we remember journalist and NUJ member Lyra McKee, brutally murdered in the course of her work.*

As well as reflecting on this senseless loss, we remember the many families who have lost their loved ones in workplace accidents and the many more people whose lives have been cut short or blighted because of occupational diseases and illnesses.

Workers Memorial Day is also a day to be resolute in our commitment to ensure that all workers, regardless of their workplace, are able to carry out their work safely and free from intimidation and fear.”

Afterwards at an event in the Stormont Hotel, Belfast, Principal Inspector Kyle Carrick talked about the HSENI’s focus on the following occupational health priority areas:

- occupational lung diseases;
- occupational cancers;
- musculoskeletal disorders and work-related stress.

He referred to recent research which indicated that workplace ill health is estimated to be costing the Northern Ireland economy over £238 million per year. In Northern Ireland alone it is estimated that 395 people die each year due to work-

related disease. Many other occupational ill health conditions have a serious impact upon an individual’s quality of life and that of their family.

Kyle said: *“HSENI will continue to make workplace health an operational priority. As co-workers and safety representatives we all need to work together to raise awareness on occupational ill-health and ensure the risks are effectively managed in our respective places of work.”*

“
...we remember
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”

An Ageing Workforce in the 21st Century

Challenge or Opportunity?



Due to achievements in modern science and advancements in healthcare, people are living longer than before. In 2014 the average age of a UK citizen exceeded 40 for the first time ever and projections show that by 2040 almost 1 in 7 of the population will be over 75.

As the population ages so will the workforce as recent changes in the retirement age dictates. The equalisation of the retirement age for both men and women now means that employees cannot receive pension until the age of 66, 67 and 68 as these changes are phased in.

The Local Government and wider public sector has traditionally had a larger proportion of older workers ie: those aged 55 or over than in the private sector and conversely a lower proportion of younger employees – ie: those aged under 25. Subsequently the management of an older and ageing workforce raises a range of employment and health and safety challenges and opportunities particularly with regard to recruitment and retention and employee well-being.

This then raises the question – how well placed are employers to manage these issues and respond to the resulting implications both now and in the future?

Recruitment and Retention

Organisations need to take positive steps to demonstrate how highly they value their older employees. In order to take this forward employers need to take steps that ensure the health and safety of their older employees. Adequate and frequent risk assessments will identify potential risks at an early stage and enable employers to make adjustments to workplace activities or facilities as far as possible to meet the needs of employees. Employers need to ensure that they have staff trained in health and safety. This training should include how to evaluate a reasonable adjustment and why a reasonable adjustment can have a positive rather than a negative

impact on maintaining the business. Employers need to recognise the importance of retaining the skills and expertise of older staff. Staff wishing to reduce their hours, or who feel unable to continue in a physically or mentally demanding role can have a lot to offer to more junior and less experienced employees in different ways. It is important to maintain dialogue with older workers so they know they have ample opportunities to discuss how their changing needs can be accommodated and met with positive responses.

Employee Well-being and Engagement

Older staff generally tend to have less frequent periods of sickness absence but when they do get ill usually they tend to be off longer than average. Having a pro-active Occupational Health department running health promotion activities has a vital role to play in keeping employees of all ages fit and healthy for work. Reasonable adjustments for older staff – in the same way that adjustments are made for disabled staff – are quite often simple to implement and low in cost. Appropriate job re-design and work re-organisation can be important factors in ensuring the continued health and well-being of older workers. Organisations should be mindful of the cumulative impact of years of stress and heavy workloads and the particular effects this can have on older employees. It is also important to ensure the health and well-being of younger employees to ensure they have more fulfilling working lives as they will have to work longer. Helping staff to achieve their perfect work/life balance will have mutual benefits for employee and employer alike.

The Bottom Line

Traditional assumptions that learning ends in your 20's, career development ends in your 40's and work ends in your 60's are no longer accurate nor sustainable. Rethinking workforce strategies across multiple generations to account for longer lives will require open minds and fresh approaches.

Asbestos

and Your Duty to Manage

The management of asbestos is an important consideration for owners and others with responsibilities for buildings.

Asbestos related disease is caused by breathing in air containing asbestos fibres. In 2017 there were 77 asbestos related deaths in Northern Ireland with asbestosis or mesothelioma being the primary or secondary cause of death.



Although asbestos containing materials are no longer used in building manufacture, this hidden killer could be in any building built or refurbished before the year 2000. The duty to manage asbestos applies to all non-domestic premises which may contain asbestos, as well as common areas of domestic buildings including hallways, stairwells and lift shafts.

Trades people carrying out repairs and maintenance work are most at risk to asbestos exposure. They are more likely to disturb or damage asbestos containing materials and often might not realise they are working on asbestos. The effective management of asbestos will safeguard the health of trades people and others within your building.

Who is Responsible?

The legal duty to manage asbestos is contained within Regulation 4 of the Control of Asbestos Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 and applies to the 'dutyholder'. The dutyholder might be the owner of the building or the person with responsibility for maintaining or conducting repairs to the building.

For rented non-domestic premises, responsibility may be set out through a tenancy agreement or contract. Where responsibilities are not clearly defined, tenants should seek clarification with their landlord as soon as possible.

Identifying Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs)

A good starting point in identifying ACMs is to determine if there are any existing surveys, building or insurance reports that might contain useful information.

It's worth noting that asbestos was used in many parts of buildings and a detailed survey is required to identify all materials that may contain asbestos (e.g. insulation board, ceiling tiles and insulation on pipe work) including areas that may not be routinely accessed and can often be overlooked during a survey.

Dutyholders can either presume asbestos is present or confirm its presence / absence using a suitably trained person to conduct a survey which may include sampling. The person or organisation conducting any survey should be accredited or certificated for asbestos survey work.

Keep a written record or register

On completion of a survey a written record should be prepared that simply shows where asbestos is, the type if known, its form and what condition it is in.

The availability of this record is key when contractors or any other person needs to know where ACMs can be found.

A written record might be in the form of a plan or diagram, a written list or a computer based record which can be easily updated if necessary should there be any changes to the condition or presence of ACMs.

The asbestos management plan

Before arranging for any work to be done you should start by writing an 'asbestos management plan' which should include:

- who is responsible for managing asbestos;
- the asbestos register;
- a priority plan for action;
- the schedule for monitoring the materials' condition; and
- telling people about your decisions.

Priority action should be given to damaged materials likely to be disturbed. These will need to be repaired, enclosed or removed using trained personnel - a licensed contractor may be required. If materials are in good condition and not likely to be disturbed, it is usually safer to leave it in place and manage it appropriately as removal may be unnecessary and costly!

Remember, most work on asbestos insulation, asbestos insulation board and lagging, including sealing and removal, should normally be done by a contractor licensed by HSENI.

Even after your action plan is completed, it's important to continue to manage the risk from asbestos left in place. Persons with responsibility should take time to walk round the building at least once a year, or more frequently if necessary, to check the plan is up to date. Materials should be checked regularly to see they haven't deteriorated, been damaged or disturbed in any way.

Your duty to manage is all about protecting yourself and others from exposure to asbestos fibres.



NIPSA have produced a leaflet highlighting **Asbestos in Schools** available at nipsa.org.uk/publications/Ref-A5_0132-2.pdf and further information from the HSE publication; **Managing asbestos in buildings: A brief guide**, is available at hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg223.pdf

Legionnaires' Disease

Legionnaires' Disease is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia caused by legionella bacteria and is contracted by breathing in tiny droplets of contaminated water

Legionella bacteria is a common naturally occurring bacteria found in most fresh water sources such as streams, rivers and lakes. Legionella pneumophila was first recognised after an outbreak of Pneumonia during an American Legion convention in Philadelphia in 1976. There were 221 cases and 33 deaths associated with this outbreak, a fatality rate of 15%. Legionella bacteria also cause a range of similar but less serious conditions such as Pontiac fever and Lochgoilhead fever.



Cooling towers in large complex buildings like hospitals can be the site of outbreaks.

Are there legionella risks in my workplace?

Legionnaires' disease is preventable, however given the correct environmental conditions, any man-made water system may allow Legionella bacteria to grow and proliferate. Legionella risks are increased if your water system:

- has a water temperature between 20°C and 45°C;
- creates or spreads breathable droplets of water, e.g. aerosol created by a cooling tower or shower, it's the size of the droplets not the size of the organism which is important;
- stores or re-circulates water; and

- contains nutrients for the bacteria to grow – this can include rust, scale, organic matter and biofilm.

The most common sources of legionella in man-made water systems include cooling towers, evaporative condensers, spa pools and hot and cold water systems.

Who is at risk from Legionella?

Everyone is susceptible to infection. The risk increases with age but some people are at higher risk than others including:

- people over 45 years of age;
- smokers and heavy drinkers;
- people suffering from chronic respiratory or kidney disease;
- people with diabetes, lung and heart disease; and
- anyone with an impaired immune system.

Your employer, or the person in control of premises (e.g. landlord), has a duty to understand and manage legionella risks. Although all systems require a risk assessment, not all systems will require elaborate control measures. A simple risk assessment may show that the risks are low and being properly managed, meaning no further action may be required. It is important to review your risk assessment regularly in case anything changes in your system.

What is the law covering the control of legionella?

In Northern Ireland the legal requirement to conduct a risk assessment, in the context of work, is underpinned by primary health and safety legislation including the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000; and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health

... Am I at risk?

Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003. The control and management of legionella is dealt with more specifically in Approved Code of Practice & Guidance *Legionnaires' disease, The control of legionella bacteria in water systems, L8*

The ACOP states "A suitable and sufficient assessment must be carried out to identify and assess the risk of exposure to legionella bacteria from work activities and water systems on the premises and any precautionary measures needed."

Further guidance for dutyholders, which includes employers and those in control of premises is contained within *Legionnaires' disease: Technical Guidance*. The technical guidance, also referred to as HSG274, is in three parts, detailing control measures in various types of water system including hot and cold water systems.

Managing the risk in hot and cold water systems

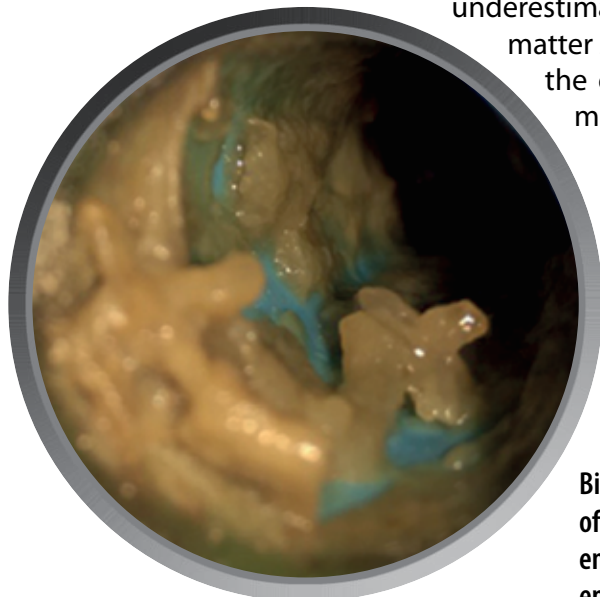
Hot and cold water systems supply water for domestic purposes and are common to most workplaces.

Temperature control is the traditional control method for reducing the risk of legionella in water systems. Cold water systems should be maintained, where possible, at a temperature below 20°C. Hot water should be stored at least at 60°C and distributed so that it reaches a temperature of 50°C within one minute at the outlets. The principle of keeping hot water hot and cold water cold is a simple but effective strategy.

Other precautions include the regular movement of hot and cold water in distribution pipework including regular flushing of outlets to ensure water cannot stagnate. The importance of keeping the system clean cannot be underestimated as biofilms or inorganic matter such as scale can significantly reduce the effectiveness of any type of control measure.

In many cases the effective management of legionella in hot and cold water systems may require assistance from a competent person. Such persons or water treatment companies are normally accredited by the Legionella Control Association.

Biofilm forming inside a pipe. A community of bacteria and other microorganisms embedded in a protective layer with entrained debris, attached to a surface



Sound and



No ear protection on a daily basis
will lead to long term damage



**Noise is part of everyday life,
but too much noise can cause
permanent and disabling
hearing damage.
This can be hearing loss that
gets worse over time.**

Noise is frequently described as **‘unwanted sound’**

Noise at low levels is not necessarily harmful; environmental noise can convey a sense of liveliness in an area. However, the adverse effects of noise exposure could: interfere with speech, cause sleep disturbance, anxiety, hearing damage and stress-related cardiovascular health problems.

There are various noise sources:

Industrial noise includes agriculture, manufacturing businesses and workshops

Commercial and Leisure noise includes entertainment, sports and leisure, petrol stations, car washes, fast food outlets, bars, restaurants, offices, security alarms

Domestic noise includes home entertainment such as loud music and television, parties, animal noise, shouting, home security alarms

Construction noise includes building, demolition and road works

Transport noise includes road traffic, railways, domestic air traffic, military aircraft, delivery vehicles, vehicle alarms

Street noise includes loudspeakers, ice cream van chimes, street traders, performers and public addresses

With hearing damage, conversation may become difficult or impossible, your family may complain about the television being too loud, or you have trouble using the telephone, and you may be unable to sleep. By the time you notice, it is probably too late.

However, there is no need for your hearing to be damaged by your work – your employer has a duty to protect you

How Can I Tell If Sounds Are Too Loud?

Noise levels are usually measured in dB(A), a decibel scale that reflects the sensitivity of human ears to

different levels and pitches of sound. Long exposure to sounds over 80dB(A) can damage your ears.

In practical terms, this means that if you can't talk to people about two metres away without shouting because of background noise, the noise levels could be hazardous. If you go somewhere where the level of sound hurts your ears, you should leave.

How does noise exposure affect your hearing?

If your hearing loss is caused by exposure to noise, you will experience a dip in your hearing in the high frequencies, which means that you can't hear these pitches as well as others. If the noise exposure continues, this dip will spread and affect lower and higher frequencies too. As it gets worse and affects a wider frequency range, you will find it difficult to follow conversations if there is background noise. Later you may find it difficult to follow what someone is saying, even in a quiet room.

Action Level

An action level is basically a noise exposure level at which employers are required to take certain steps to reduce the harmful effects of noise on hearing. There are two main action levels for continuous Noise:

The lower exposure action value is a daily or weekly average noise exposure level of 80 dB, at which the employer has to provide information and training and make hearing protection available.

The upper exposure action value is set at a daily or weekly average noise exposure of 85 dB, above which the employer is required to take reasonably practicable measures to reduce noise exposure, such as engineering controls or other technical measures. The use of hearing protection is also mandatory if the noise cannot be controlled by these measures, or while these measures are being planned or carried out.

Finally there is an exposure limit value of 87 dB, above which no worker can be exposed (taking hearing protection into account).

The Problem

Throughout all industry, industrial hearing loss remains the occupational disease with the highest number of civil claims accounting for about 75% of all occupational disease claims.



Noise Levels

Work and work processes where noise levels exceed the 80dB and 85dB levels employers are required to take action under the *The Control of Noise at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006*

For example, noise levels of 85-95dB occur in bakery, dairy and confectionery industries but can rise to 100dB in milling, drink production and the meat industry.

The nine processes listed below are particularly associated with high noise levels. The inclusion of these processes is supported by hearing loss civil claim data from one of the main trade unions representing workers in the food and drink industries.

Glass bottling lines: 85-100dB

Wrapping, cutting wrap, bagging etc: 85-95dB

Bowl choppers: > 90dB

Pneumatic noise and compressed air: 85-95dB

Milling operations: 85-100dB

Saws/cutting machinery: 85-107dB

Blast chillers/freezers: 85-107dB

Packaging machinery: 85-95dB

Wheeled trolleys/racks: up to 107dB (from wheel bearings)

Managing the Risk

Protection is best achieved by controlling noise at source.

What Does My Employer Have To Do?

Your employer should be looking at:

- using quieter equipment or a different, quieter process.
- engineering/technical changes to reduce the noise at source.
- using screens, barriers, enclosures or absorbent materials.
- laying out of the workplace to create quiet workstations.
- improved ways of working to reduce noise levels.
- limiting the time you spend in noisy areas.

And the use of Personal Protective should be the last line of defence

What Do I Have To Do?

- Help your employer to do what is needed to protect your hearing.
- Make sure you use any noise-control devices and follow any safe working methods that are put in place.
- Wear any hearing protection you are given and wear it properly (you should be trained how to do this) making sure you wear it all the times Taking it off even for a short while reduces the overall protection you get, meaning your hearing could still be damaged
- Attend your hearing checks. It is in your interest that any signs of damage to your hearing is detected as soon as possible, and certainly before any damage
- Report any problems with noise-control devices or your hearing protection straight away

Note: all of the above are legal duties on you.

Classroom Based Staff have to ask themselves the question

**WILL I BE
ATTACKED
AT WORK
TODAY?**

Survey of Education Workers Reveals Scale of Violence Inside Schools

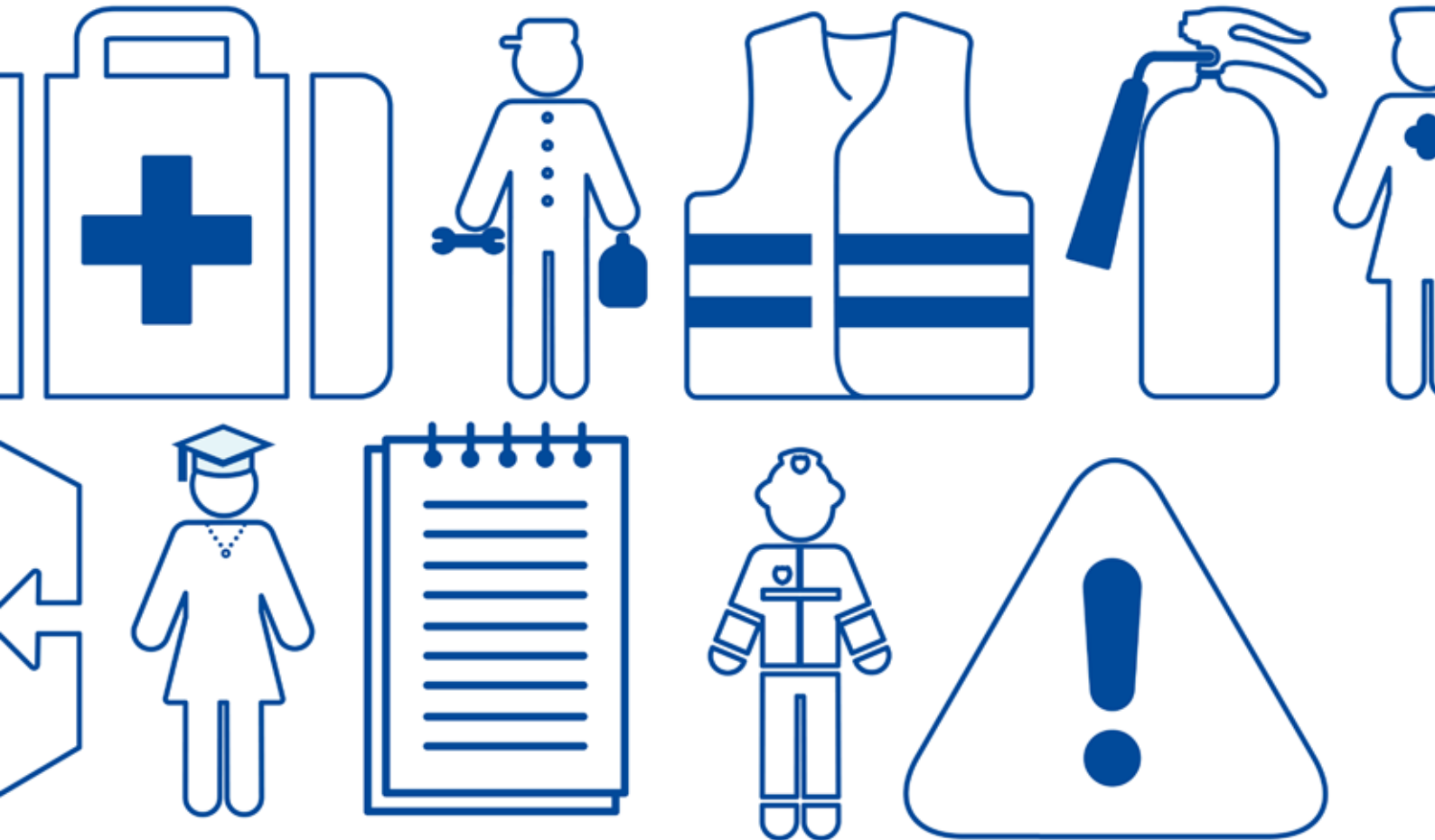
In October 2018 a survey was carried out by 10 trade unions on the Education trade union group of the Irish congress of trade unions amid substantial concerns raised by members in relation to the level of violence in schools. The concerns were raised not only by teaching staff but by support staff and classroom assistants. The survey covered nursery, primary, secondary and special educational needs facilities.

Initially they looked at the scale of the problem and it was found that 1 in 3 education workers suffer physical abuse annually and 1 in 5 suffer physical abuse once a week. 83% have been verbally abused in the classroom and 48% of this abuse comes from parents. In the special needs sector these figures are higher. It should be noted that these are reported incidents and may not be a true reflection of the scale of the problem. When asked if staff were supported by their line management in the workplace 50% said no. Also more than 50% stated that no further action was taken in regard to the abuse either physical or verbal and even in the event of an injury which resulted in an absence by the member of staff the incident was not reported to the employer or HSENI under RIDDOR.

The scale of violence is concerning but the lack of understanding by the line management structure on the adverse impact of such behaviours is more concerning. A workplace should be a safe place and every reasonable step should be taken to ensure this. Of all the staff surveyed less than a quarter were aware of the risk assessment process. This process is mandatory under Health and Safety legislation, to identify potential risks in the workplace.

The trade unions identified the need of the employer to recognise that the school setting was a workplace and measures needed to be sought to address these issues and ensure the safety of staff. The survey highlighted that the current mechanisms were not robust enough to deal with the problem. More than 80% of educational staff felt that violence in their workplace has had a negative impact on them. Hopefully the results of this survey will ensure that the employer carries out not only its statutory obligations but takes every reasonable measure to ensure that zero tolerance is the norm rather than the exceptional from now on.

Health and Safety 2019 Representative of the Year



The 2019 Annual Health and Safety Representative's Award is run by the Health and Safety Executive NI and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

The aim of the award is to recognise the achievement and contribution Health and Safety Representatives make in protecting and promoting workplace health and safety. The award is open to all trade union appointed health and safety representatives.

The award winner will receive a crystal plaque engraved with their name which will be presented at a special event, to be confirmed.

Details are available from the HSENI website: hse.gov.uk/news/ni-health-and-safety-representative-year-award-2019 and the closing date for receipt of applications is **Friday 28 June 2019**.