



South Cumbria &
North Lancashire Branch

Joint Zoom meeting 15 July 2021



South Cumbria Occupational
Health & Safety Group

Topic: *Why all workplaces need a health risk management strategy. Illustrated by case studies*

Speakers: Amanda Dowson RGN RSCPHN(OH) BA(Hons) CMIOSH,
Director, *Peritus Health Management*,
Julian Dowson MA, B.Ed, Cert OH, LFOH, Director, *Peritus Health Management*

Attendees: 97

Elsa Mason, Vice Chair, *South Cumbria and North Lancashire IOSH Branch* welcomed members to the joint meeting with *South Cumbria Occupational Health & Safety Group*. She then welcomed and introduced our speakers, Amanda and Julian Dowson, Directors of *Peritus Health Management* a specialist consultancy that helps organisations to develop robust health risk management systems.

Amanda began the presentation by explaining that effective workplace health management systems could lead to an improvement in workplace culture, more efficient workers, and improved business management. It is a cost-effective investment when tailored to specific workplace needs.

She explained that workplace health risk assessments needed to follow basic risk assessment principles:

Identify the problem

Eliminate if practicable.

Control using control measures such as:

- An engineering solution to protect employees. For example, dust extraction systems.
- Management system: developing a safe system of work.
- Task specific employee training including explaining how to avoid health risks.
- Redeployment of employees with a known susceptibility to specific health risks.

Review annually or after an incident.

Amanda stressed that one of the most important things to consider when implementing workplace health management strategies is communication. Factors that are often overlooked include employees' potential hearing or sight impairments or limited fluency in English amongst migrant workers. These problems can affect employees' ability to undertake their workplace tasks, or to react in a timely manner if there is an emergency. They may be afraid to discuss these problems with their managers due to a perceived risk that they might lose their jobs, even though there may be relatively simple ways of dealing with the problem.

Amanda said that given the nature of potential work-related health problems it was important to ensure that there was a good working relationship between Human Resources staff and Health & Safety staff in large organisations. She recommended that organisations should have a Health & Wellbeing Policy including:

- Strategic aims.
- A system for assessing health risks including
 - A site-specific health risk matrix.
 - A site-specific, traceable monitoring programme. For example: air quality, noise etc... as necessary.

- A site-specific health training programme for all employees including managers and directors.
- A sickness absence management system that applies to all employees.
- A drugs and alcohol testing system that applies to all employees.
- A confidential support system available to all employees.

Amanda also explained that Health & Wellbeing management systems needed to address difficult problems such as how long confidential records should be kept, who should have access to them and how they should be stored.

She reminded members that it was important not to generate paperwork 'just for the sake of it' but relevant, user-friendly paperwork was necessary:

- To demonstrate compliance to enforcement authorities.
- To ensure that site specific workplace standards were documented accurately.
- To facilitate workplace audits.
- For accreditation purposes (if applicable).
- As a framework for tendering (if applicable).
- To support a claims defence in case of accident.

She emphasised that all such documents should be workplace specific, rather than 'cut and paste' from generic documents.

She illustrated this by explaining that if workplace health surveillance spirometry testing detects early employee respiratory problems, especially if they work in the same area, this should alert managers to investigate further. For instance, if these workers were using LEV systems their test results might be indicators of failing LEV systems and/or if they use respiratory PPE, managers should check that they have been face fit tested and that they were using their PPE correctly. All such checks and test results should be recorded for future reference.

She said that Good H & S + Good HR → Good company wellbeing + Good Business.

She then handed over to Julian who gave members a series of demonstrations showing practical ways of measuring workplace dust escape from LEV systems and chemical contamination on door handles and worktops. These tests can be viewed in a u-tube recording of this meeting at: [Why all workplaces need a health risk management strategy - YouTube](#)

Patrick McMurray then directed a question-and-answer session where Amanda and Julian fielded members' questions from the Zoom chat facility.

Elsa Mason thanked Amanda and Julian for their interesting and thought-provoking presentation and for offering to deal with any further queries on a one-to-one basis if members telephoned or e-mailed them.

Before closing the meeting Elsa reminded members that our Branch's next joint Zoom meeting with SCOHSG on 16 September 2021 will cover *PPE – CE Markings and Compliance*

Related HSE information:

Health risk management A practical guide for managers in small and medium-sized enterprises - a free booklet to download: [Health risk management \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH): [Control of Substances Hazardous to Health \(COSHH\) - COSHH \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)

Examples of skin irritants and sensitisers, together with occupations where they occur: [HSE - Skin at work: Dermatitis: Causative agents and occupations at risk](#)

Dust in the workplace General principles of protection: [Dust in the workplace: General principles of protection - EH44 \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)