

➤ Health and safety in the workplace

Introduction

Everyone has the right to be in a safe and healthy workplace. This is a basic human right as most people spend a large part of their life at work. Employees in the UK mainly enjoy safe and healthy work conditions - pressure from trade unions over the years has made this possible - but this isn't always the case.

Formed in 1993 from the merger of three public sector unions, UNISON is the UK's largest trade union and has defended workers' rights and Health and Safety issues. Today, over two thirds of its members are women. Members work in different industries, including healthcare, education, transport, local government, the voluntary sector and call centres. It is crucial for a business' success that employees and employers act fairly towards each other - if they don't, this can cause difficulties.

UNISON believes most workplace problems can be sorted out with negotiation and agreement. Partnership in the workplace is about employers and employees working together to create a good long-term relationship. Health and Safety partnerships are part of this process. Working with management, many branches of UNISON change people's working lives for the better. By doing this, they are putting Health and Safety at the centre of the culture of the organisation.

The Health and Safety at Work Act (the law governing this area) is based on the idea of forming partnerships. This principle is supported by government. It has been shown that involving trade union safety representatives in the workforce reduces accidents and deaths by over 50%. Partnership focuses on working towards common interests and shared goals.

