

## ➤ Health and safety in the workplace

### **Introduction**

UNISON is the UK's largest trade union. Over two thirds of its members are women. The industries they work for include health, education and local government. A trade union is a body set up by workers. It defends worker's rights. It is also concerned with Health and Safety in the workplace. The success of a business depends on the workforce and employers working as partners. On Health and Safety issues, figures show that if unions are involved, accidents and deaths fall by over 50%.

### **The role of unions**

Trades unions look after their members. They improve pay and holidays. They work to make sure people are protected at work and compensated if they fall ill or are injured. They work to maintain Health and Safety. Two recent issues were:

\* Caring for cleaners. Accident rates amongst cleaning staff in the UK are high. In one case, UNISON found cleaners using liquids that were unsafe. UNISON and the employer agreed to limit the chemicals to three safe ones. Both then worked to ensure that cleaners were properly trained.

\* Catering with care. Accidents often happen in kitchens. In one case, UNISON gained compensation for a school catering assistant who was badly hurt in a fall. Both then worked on Health and Safety to prevent the accident happening again.

### *Health and Safety laws*

There are two main laws to cover Health and Safety. These are:

- \* Health and Safety at Work Act (HASAW);
- \* Management of Health and Safety Regulations.

Both groups have a role. Employers should make the workplace as safe as they can. To do this they look at the risks in a workplace. This is called risk assessment. Warnings about risks, or ways to avoid them, should then be made. This can involve equipment, information and training. Employees should act in a safe manner. Health & Safety at Work legislation covers standards of care in areas such as the upkeep of the workplace, equipment and systems.

### **UNISON and safety**

UNISON can help to reduce risks. It has people who are trained as workforce representatives. They are elected by members in the workplace. It aims to have one such person in every workplace with UNISON members. Employers tend to be concerned with stopping accidents. Representatives try to take a longer term view to improve Health and Safety. They inspect for hazards. They can look into accidents and complaints.

**UNISON and work issues**

UNISON campaigns on key issues. Three recent campaigns involved:

- \* Women's Health and Safety. Women suffer more from back pain and certain injuries. They are also more likely to be attacked.
- \* Violence. People who work with the public can be open to threats, verbal abuse and physical violence. For instance, drug addicts and mental patients can cause problems.
- \* Workplace bullying. Up to 25% of workers have been bullied. UNISON provides guidelines to deal with this, and to prevent it.

**Conclusion**

Health and Safety in the workplace is a major issue. Employers and employees both have a role. Employers should provide a clean and safe workplace. UNISON can help with this. It also works on improving long term health and well-being.