



the Learning experience

Health and Safety at Work

Does your golf club employ five or more people? If the answer is yes, did you know that the law requires the club to have a written statement detailing the general policy, organisation and arrangements that have been put in place to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees.

This statement must be on display or be readily available for inspection at all times.

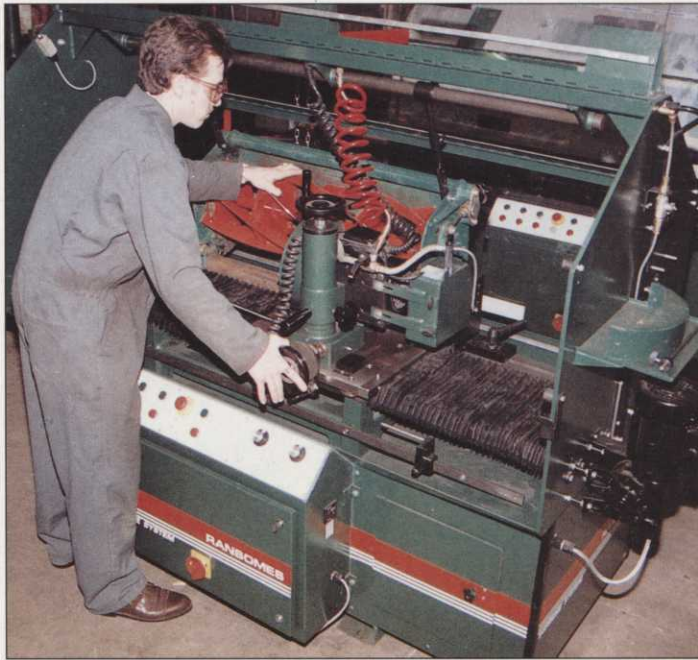
And that's not all. Under the same law – the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSW Act) – employees also have a legal duty to take reasonable care of themselves and others and to co-operate with their employers regarding their legal obligations. Contractors don't escape the net, either. They are legally bound to ensure that their activities are not a danger to themselves or to others.

The fact that this legislation has been on the statute books for more than 20 years makes it all the more disturbing that there are still many employers and employees who are unaware of its existence, let alone its implications.

Enforceable by the Health and Safety Executive on local authority courses and by the District or Metropolitan Council at privately-owned clubs, the penalty for non-compliance with the HSW Act can range from a fine of £5,000 for individuals and £20,000 for organisation up to an unlimited fine and even imprisonment in serious cases.

If that wasn't enough, six additional pieces of legislation were introduced in 1993 in response to European directives aiming to harmonise health and safety standards across Europe. The new regulations actually support rather than add anything to our existing HSW Act with the result, says Roger Bainbridge of leading safety consultancy firm, IRPC Group Ltd, that Britain leads Europe in health and safety matters.

"Having both the Health and Safety Commission and Executive means that we are probably the only country in Europe with a permanent and dedicated agency to report on and enforce the appropriate legislation," he commented.



Full safety measures must be followed when using workshop equipment. Never allow an untrained person to operate a machine without skilled supervision. Below: the 'CE' marking shows that a machine has passed rigorous safety tests and is certificated as safe for use as tested



"The problem is that virtually every work place in the country is bound by the regulations and the HSE has neither the time nor the resources to check on them all. The onus lies very much with individual companies and organisations to ensure that they are complying with the law.

"If they don't know or understand what they should be doing, then advice and guidance is available from the local authority environmental health department or the health and safety executive."

If both advice and practical

assistance are needed, specialist consultancies such as the IRPC Group are able to tailor individual programmes to answer, control and implement all health and safety matters required by law, taking the burden off the employer.

Ignorance of the existence of a piece of legislation is no excuse in the eyes of the law, stresses Roger Bainbridge. "The rules were made for good reason," he said. "Ignoring them, flouting them or delaying their implementation is storing up trouble. Meet all the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act and you'll not just improve the safety of everyone involved with the club's activities, but you'll also satisfy the latest European regulations."

Two principal areas of concern on golf courses relate to the safe use of machinery and pesticides. Both activities should be covered thoroughly by the club's health and safety policy with particular emphasis being placed on sound instruction and training of staff.

Under the HSW Act, it is unlawful to ask or allow someone to use a machine if they have not been instructed in its safe and proper use by a competent person. If, for example, the club's engineer is ill or on holiday and a cutting cylinder needs regrinding, it should be taken to the supplying dealer rather than ask an

untrained person to attempt the job.

The law demands that all operations be assessed to determine their potential risk. Having identified a hazard and its associated risks, it is the responsibility of managers to determine who is likely to be affected and to examine the existing safety measures and controls, ensuring that these are followed. They should then consider whether any additional measures can be taken to minimise the risk further.

Grass cutting and pesticide application are two jobs with clearly identified associated risks. If a task has to be carried out, it is essential that the most suitable equipment is used, that it is properly serviced and maintained, and that it is operated under the safest possible conditions.

Staff should be trained in a machine's correct use and should be supplied with appropriate safety protective clothing and safe and properly maintained equipment. If an employee chooses not to use the safety equipment supplied, he or she can face personal prosecution for contravening the HSW Act.

Similarly, manufacturers go to great lengths to design safety into their equipment, a fact certified by the 'CE' marking which should be found on all powered machines now sold within Europe. Altering the original specification of the machine in any way could affect its safe operation and invalidate the 'CE' marking, causing problems with insurance claims in the event of an accident.

Golf course staff with concerns or queries about any aspect of health or safety are advised to speak first with the club's management to ascertain what general or specific arrangements have been put in place.

The IRPC Group is able to provide club management, committees and directors with comprehensive advice and assistance with golf course health and safety issues. For further information, contact Roger Bainbridge on 01455 894222.

■ Next month: We take a closer look at those golf course operations demanding particular attention to health and safety.