

Local Authority Enforcement of the Health and Safety at Work Act

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has issued a warning that there will be a 'breakdown' in some local authorities' ability to enforce the Health and Safety at Work Act, due to the significant drop in the number of local authority inspectors.

The HSE has warned that this could lead to a loss of confidence in the health and safety system and an escalation of a general lack of compliance, resulting in increases in harm and incidents.

In response, the HSE is asking local authorities to sign a 'Statement of Commitment' which it hopes will focus the attention of senior council officials on the issues. More details can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/lau/statement.htm>. Local secretaries and/or Health and Safety Co-ordinators should raise this with their local authority to ensure it is aware of, and signs up to, the Statement.

Minibus Guidance

The NASUWT has always strongly advised members not to volunteer to drive school/college minibuses and that such an activity should not be part of a teacher's contractual duty. This advice remains unaltered.

However, despite this strong advice, the NASUWT does recognise that some members do undertake this activity. The latest guidance for members can be found at <https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/advice/health-safety/minibus-guidance.html>.

Heavy Stone/Concrete Outdoor Furniture

The HSE has identified concerns associated with the stability of some outdoor furniture sets which are marketed for use in school grounds.

The concerns relate to table-and-bench sets in which a solid timber table top is supported by a stone or concrete plinth at each end. The table top connection is concealed and secured with an adhesive resin-based fixative. The plinths may or may not be partially secured to the ground using a similar adhesive. The stability of the table is dependent upon the integrity and strength of the connection between the plinths and the table top and therefore needs to be installed correctly.

Schools are receiving instructions to assess any tables to ensure that they remain safe for use. The table should be solid and rigid. It should be on level ground and should not deflect or wobble if pushed firmly from one end by an adult. If the table wobbles, this may mean that the connection is absent or has failed, and the table is unsafe. If it is possible for an adult to lift the table top off the plinths, then this may also mean that the table is unsafe.

Health and Safety Representatives should draw this to the attention of school managements, and include any such tables in health and safety inspections.

Local secretaries and/or health and safety coordinators should ensure that employers, including local authorities, are aware of the guidance and request that this is disseminated to schools.

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Bouncy Castles

The HSE has updated its website guidance for those buying or hiring inflatable play equipment such as bouncy castles, following two fatalities of children involving inflatables.

The new guidance emphasises how users should monitor wind speed, and that all play equipment must have a current inspection tag from either the Amusement Device Inspection Procedures Scheme (ADIPS) or the Pertexa Inflatable Play Accreditation (PIPA).

The guidance states that no inflatables should be used outside in winds above 24mph, and wind speed should be monitored at regular intervals using an anemometer. If no anemometer is available, the inflatable should not be operated outdoors. Smartphone weather apps should not be used as they do not take localised wind conditions into account.

Air Pollution

The quality of air in the environment is increasingly a cause for concern, particularly in built-up areas and near major roads, with warnings being issued that poor air quality could be responsible for over 30,000 deaths per year.

Although there are many known air pollutants, the most concerning are the very small particulates, primarily ejected via diesel-engine exhausts, known as PM10 and PM2.5 particles.

The UK Government has created a Daily Air Quality Index which provides information on air pollution levels. It can be found at <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/air-pollution/daq?view=more-info>.

Members who teach outside, such as PE teachers, will be particularly susceptible to the effects of air pollution, but this will affect all members when going outside, for example, on break duty. Members undertaking bus duties may also come into contact with high levels of pollution. (Please note that the NASUWT advice to members generally is not to undertake bus duties.)

As air pollution monitors have become increasingly inexpensive, the NASUWT recommends that schools consider purchasing a monitor. When high levels of pollution are detected, schools should consider changing activities or providing personal protective equipment, such as face masks, which are also inexpensive.

This is not just a problem in urban schools. Rural schools, particularly those near major routes or which have traffic issues at drop-off/pick up times, could also be suffering with air quality issues.

School Site Traffic Issues

The HSE has announced that it will be undertaking targeted inspections of schools to examine arrangements for managing pedestrians and vehicle movements on school property.

This follows a case in South Wales where a pupil was killed after being hit by a school minibus. As well as the trauma caused by this tragedy to the pupil's family and the whole school community, the local authority was fined £300,000. The HSE has stated that it has identified cases where similar incidents could occur.

Health and Safety Representatives should bring this to the attention of school managements, and should ask to see the risk assessment regarding vehicle movements on-site and, if necessary, request that this is reviewed.

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Local secretaries and/or health and safety co-ordinators should ensure that employers, including local authorities, are aware of the HSE statements and request that this is disseminated to schools, with a recommendation that all schools review their arrangements without delay.

Further HSE guidance is available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/workplacetransport/>.

New Resources

The NASUWT has published a number of new Health and Safety Resources:

- Revised 'Excessive Working Temperatures' guidance (available at: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/health-safety/excessive-working-temperatures.html>);
- 'Causes and Signs of Stress at Work' (available at: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/health-safety/causes-and-signs-of-stress-at-work.html>);
- 'Laser Cutters and 3D Printers' (available at: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/health-safety/laser-cutters-and-3d-printers.html>);
- A new 'Reporting Accidents' checklist (available at: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/health-safety/health-and-safety-leaflets/h-n-s-reporting-accidents.html>).

The NASUWT Health and Safety Facebook Groups

The NASUWT has created a Health and Safety Group on Facebook, which can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/196369153718482/>.

There is also a Scotland Health and Safety Facebook Group, which can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/248107999199089/>.

Both groups will be used to keep members updated on the latest developments in Health and Safety.



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