

Health and Safety Bulletin

Method statements

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Many organisations demand method statements from contractors before they are allowed to work on site. Contractors often develop method statements under pressure, so that they can get on with the work. This article reviews what a good method statement looks like and why we need them.

What is a method statement?

A method statement is a “safe system of work” – the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act requires employers to have safe systems of work (e.g. a description of how the work is going to be done) where the activity involves significant risk.

Other safe systems of work include work instructions (or standard operating procedures (SOPs)) – these tend to be used for tasks that are repeated regularly by a number of people (for example manufacturing activities) or permits-to-work, which tend to be used to authorise high risk activities, where the significant risks are associated with the conditions on the day, for example roof work which can be affected by weather conditions.

Method statements are used where the work is unusual and often where it is going to be carried out by specialists not directly employed by those in control of the site. It provides everyone involved with an overview of what risks are involved and how these risks will be managed.

How should method statements be developed?

Effective method statements can only be developed once a comprehensive risk assessment is available. The risk assessment will have identified the significant hazards associated with the task and the controls required to minimise the risk.

The method statement uses this information to produce a step by step outline of how the work will be done so that both the site controllers and those doing the work are clear about their expectations – this may be in terms of the type or standard of equipment that can be used, when the work can take place, how the work area should be isolated (e.g. barriers), standards of housekeeping and what personal protective equipment should be used.

Does the site controller have a responsibility for the quality of the method statement?

The quick answer is “yes”!

Only the person in control of the site can assess whether the method statement is suitable and sufficient – it’s unlikely that a contractor will fully understand how they might put the site employees at risk or vice versa. This doesn’t mean the site controller has to become a specialist in roof work or servicing a machine, but they do have to read the method statement and use their competence to evaluate it. By the way, denying you ever saw the paperwork or that you have the competence to assess it will not be a defence if something goes wrong. If you allow contractors to work on your site, you are *demonstrating* that you have selected them as the best people to do the job, and that you have checked they are going to meet the safety standards – otherwise you wouldn’t have let them start work, would you?

The work is about to start, does the method statement matter now?

One of the most common problems with method statements is that the people who actually come to do the work have never seen them!

If the method statement is going to be followed, then the people doing the work must understand what is expected of them and the consequences of failing to meet those standards. An easy way of accomplishing this is to have a simple method statement signature sheet and to ensure everyone who turns up to carry out work covered by the method statement signs to say they have read and understood it, and that they are aware if they fail to follow the contents they will no longer be allowed to work on site. Of course, both the contractor workers and the site controller have a responsibility to ensure the method statement is followed, so the work must be supervised – not constantly but with scheduled inspections.

Conclusion

Often method statements are used to document the procedures for work of higher risk, but, when it involves contractors and site controllers, both parties are unsure where their responsibilities lie. There are simple practical tools that can reduce the risk of work controlled by method statements going wrong.

For more help with contractor control and the use of method statements
– contact Grainne Kelly at gkelly@clwydassociates.co.uk

Recently issued health and safety information:

- Starter for 10 on PPE
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/pe.htm?ebul=hsege n&cr=3/25-feb-13>
- INDG460 – dust mask card
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg460.pdf>
- INDG463 protection against silica dust
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg463.pdf>
- INDG461 Using cut off saws
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg461.pdf>
- Webpage on health surveillance replaces HSG61
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/health-surveillance/requirement/index.htm>
- Guidance to sharps regulations
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/hsis7.pdf>
- Fitnote guidance
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/series/fit-note>

FFI – the story so far....

Information is starting to filter through on how the implementation of the Fees For Intervention (FFI) scheme, introduced in October 2012, is progressing.

In a recent presentation, the HSE's head of field operations announced that

- 25-33% inspections by the HSE have resulted in FFI
- 1400 invoices were sent out in January 2013
- Less than ten invoices have resulted in appeals against FFI
- The HSE are planning to

start recruiting new inspectors as a result of the income

A Freedom of Information Act request also identified that in the first two months of the scheme more than 40% of the premises to which FFI was applied were in the construction sector.

FFI applies where the HSE identify a material breach of health and safety legislation. Duty holders are charged £124 per hour for any work the HSE does with them to achieve legal compliance.

About Clwyd Associates...

We are a management consultancy, focusing on health and safety, and SAP based in the Midlands.

We employ consultants with at least 15 years practical experience backed up by recognised professional and academic qualifications - ensuring our clients receive first class service.

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Case Law update

This issue focuses on cases involving method statements

A teenage worker escaped with only minor injuries when he dropped through a fragile roof at a children's activity centre, despite striking a metal railing during the fall. He was working on a fragile cement roof, without any crawling boards or fall-prevention equipment, when it gave way and he fell. The investigation identified a lack of adequate planning, inadequate risk assessment/method statements, lack of control measures, supervision and competence contributed to the accident. The teenager's employer was fined **£12,000** plus over **£4,000** costs

A demolition contractor was fined

£100,000 plus **£25,000** costs following an accident which happened whilst work was taking place to decommission one of the pile chimneys on the Sellafield site. The employee involved in the accident was removing steelwork inside the chimney when he fell approximately 95 metres and suffered fatal injuries. The proposed method of removing the steelwork changed as the job progressed, but the changes were not assessed and the method statement was not updated. Sellafield Ltd was fined **£150,000** and were also ordered to pay **£50,500** costs

A roof work supervisor was fined **£480** plus **£650** costs after he failed to follow the method

statement agreed by his employer and the controller of the warehouse he was working on. His employer was also fined **£14,000** for allowing roof work near fragile roof lights with no precautions

The Managing Director at a company where asbestos stripping took place was fined **£6,666** with **£11,039** costs after he allowed two company employees to carry out the AIB removal. Although two asbestos surveys had been produced, the MD acted contrary to the information contained within them and allowed the stripping to take place with few precautions other than RPE and PPE. There was no risk assessment or method statement

HSE under review

The Department of Work and Pensions has recently announced that the HSE will be undergoing a routine review.

The purpose of the review is to assess whether there is a

continuing need for HSE's activities, as well as whether it is complying with the principles of good governance.

The HSE is a non-departmental public body (NDPB). For it to remain an NDPB it must prove

it

- performs a technical function which needs external expertise, or
- carries out activities that require political impartiality, or
- needs to act independently to establish facts

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