
ASSOCIATION OF CHARITY SHOPS

Issue 1/March 2003

SAFETY MATTERS IN CHARITY RETAILING

This is the first of three Health & Safety newsletters to be produced in the next 12 months, bringing members up to date with recent developments regarding:

- H&S Law
- Members' experiences of managing H&S at work
- Our initiatives in this field

The Association is keen to continue making a contribution to the improvement of Health & Safety in the charity retail sector, following the success of the joint Association/Oxfam H&S Project last year.

Publications

As well as producing these newsletters, the Association will revise, as necessary, the H&S materials published in 2002. A small number of charities have nominated representatives to keep these publications under review.

Currently we are holding stocks of the shop posters and a limited supply of the Information Pack for Operations Managers. Please ring Thao Nguyen on 020 7422 8620 if you wish to order any posters or packs. All the materials are also freely available on the website www.charityshops.org.uk.

H&S Workshops 2003

We will also be repeating the successful Health & Safety workshops. Dates and venues are as follows:

3 June 2003	Edinburgh
1 October 2003	Nottingham
18 November 2003	London

Further information and a booking form are attached.

Recent Prosecutions

Reports of two recent court cases provide a useful insight into how and why local authorities decide to bring a prosecution against a retailer. The broad lessons to draw from these cases are applicable to all charity retailers.

The first case involves a carpet store in Hull that was fined £8000 and a further £2190 in costs because it failed to comply with the terms of a prohibition notice. Following an incident in April 2001, a council Environmental Health Officer (EHO) inspected the store and provided informal advice to the company on how to reduce the risk of injury to staff and customers.

However, later that year, a member of the public complained that carpets were still blocking the store aisles. In October 2001, a prohibition notice was served on the premises requiring the company to

maintain the aisles to an acceptable width. At a follow-up visit the EHO deemed the aisles to be restricted to such an extent that there was a risk of injury. The case came before the local magistrates in September 2002. This case illustrates:

- the absolute necessity to observe the terms of an EHO prohibition notice
- the importance that local authorities attach to retailers' obligations to minimise the risk of workers and customers tripping and injuring themselves

Government statistics show that slip and trip accidents account for over half of all reported injuries to members of the public.



The second prosecution involves a soft furnishings and fabric shop in Dunstable that was fined £8000 in January 2003 after an employee almost lost a finger in an accident. The shop assistant was reaching for a roll of fabric while serving a customer and caught her wedding ring on the sharp edge of the racking. Her finger was almost completely severed and she needed emergency surgery to save it. She told magistrates that she had never had any training in what she was doing.

The council decided to take this company to court after hearing of a similar incident at another of its branches in Rugby in November 2000. On that occasion the worker had to have her finger amputated.


This case shows:

- that local authorities have Internet access to records of incidents occurring nationwide
- the need to investigate accidents thoroughly and to apply the lessons learnt to all workplaces
- the importance of providing, and maintaining records of, H&S training
- the negative publicity arising from prosecutions - this case was reported on the front page of the local free newspaper.

Needle Stick Injuries

The contents of donated bags of stock often provide us with tales of the unexpected, the unusual and even the amusing, but recently staff in a Help The Aged shop discovered a syringe in a jacket pocket together with other equipment connected with drug use. This is what Help The Aged did to ensure effective policies and procedures were in place in all

shops, not just those in areas where drug culture is commonplace.

- **Advice on the immediate medical action** to take in the event of puncture wounds was issued. Encourage the injury to bleed, wash well under running water (without soap) and cover with a dry dressing. Seek medical help - this may involve a course of tetanus or hepatitis B injections and HIV testing. 
- **Advice and counselling** from specialist agencies and other appropriate support will be made available. Such an incident will cause trauma for the individual who will not only have concerns about her own health, but also the possible implications for her family.
- **Risk assessments** for the collection and sorting of donated bags were reviewed and also the COSHH assessment because of the risk of infection from needle stick injuries.
- **Sorting procedures** were reviewed to ensure there was a Safe System of Work in each shop. Heavy-duty gloves were provided for use during the initial sort. Although they do not fit neatly and feel awkward, the act of putting on these distinctive gloves raises awareness of the possible dangers associated with donated goods.
- **Instructions for the disposal** of needle stick implements were issued, such as using a pair of tweezers to remove them and store in a designated sharps box. This should be a plastic container sealed with hazard tape and ideally stored in a room/area not used by anyone. Local authorities should make a prompt collection free of charge to charitable organisations.
- **Training** for employees and volunteers was revised to ensure that all were aware of this hazard and of the control measures that had been put in place. The opportunity was taken to remind shops of the risks associated with price tagging guns and of how to use and store them safely. In the event of a puncture wound caused by a pricing gun, shops were advised to ensure that the needle be removed **by the injured person** and placed in the designated sharps box.
- **Accident Book records will be monitored** to see that appropriate action has been taken following injuries arising from needle sticks/tagging guns. These incidents are not reportable under RIDDOR, but any resulting infection might be.

Further information can be obtained from the HSE Information Sheet "Needle Stick Injuries" reference 9/93 NIS/18/01 or by consulting the Environmental Health Officer of your local authority.

Asbestos Regulations

The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations have now been approved. The implications for charity retailers, along with guidance notes on asbestos surveying, can be obtained by clicking on the "Property Group" button on the members' section of the ACS website.

H&S Committees

One way in which charity retailers can involve shop workers in the development of their H&S policies and procedures is to set up H&S Committees. Shaw Trust (with 28 shops) and PDSA (150 shops) have each taken a slightly different approach to this.

Shaw Trust's H&S Committee deals with all aspects of the charity's work. The two Regional (Retail) Managers are members of the committee that meets five times a year. The agenda and minutes are circulated to every shop. Shop Managers are encouraged to submit items for discussion via their Regional Manager or directly to one of the charity's H&S Managers.

PDSA set up a second H&S Committee to deal solely with their retail operation and this meets twice a year. One Area Manager and two Shop Managers sit on the committee along with one representative from each of Property Services, H.R., Training and Shop Operations. All shops receive a memo after each meeting and Shop Managers are encouraged to raise any issue directly with the chairperson.

It is interesting to note that recently the committees in both charities have developed policies, guidelines and training for shop staff in matters of personal safety. Both charities have found the advice provided by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust to be particularly valuable. Details of their leaflets can be obtained from their website www.suzylamplugh.co.uk.

Next Issue

This will include reports from some members on how they have:

- conducted and recorded risk assessments
- monitored the remedial action arising from these
- reduced risks from manual handling

Members are invited to use this newsletter to share their ideas and experiences in managing H&S in their shops. Contributions from charities of all sizes would be greatly appreciated.

Please contact Thao Nguyen on 020 7422 8620 if you wish to share something or to ask for advice from other members on a particular topic.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Linda Gowling (Help the Aged), Karen Knight (PDSA) and Valerie Witton (Shaw Trust) for their contributions to this issue.