

Mind yer language

You are either fluent in Finnish, very curious, bored or maybe even a little crazy? Or are you so grateful to have your job that you would be willing to sign anything that was put in-front of you just to keep that job? For some of us the answer is the latter. Can you imagine sitting through a training session, having no idea what is being said and then being asked to sign something at the end, so that you can begin work and get a paycheck. Would you do it? Would you ask someone to do it? Did you know that non-national workers accounted for 15% of workplace deaths in 2005 and that language barriers often mean that safety messages are going over workers' heads?



There has been much public concern about the increasing number of people been killed or injured in our workplaces. Last year 71 people were killed at work in Ireland. 9 of these people were non-national workers. Construction is the sector with one of the highest number of migrant workers. Recent figures from the Central Statistics Office show that about a quarter of the 40,000 new migrants who took up jobs in the last quarter of 2005 did so in the construction sector. This sector is a

cause of great concern as it also has the greatest number of fatalities (5 non-nationals were killed in the construction sector, 2 worked in manufacturing, 1 in agriculture and 1 in transport).

If you are an employer you must take account of your workers for whom English is not a first language. Provisions relating to non-national workers have been included in our new statutory Safety Legislation, the Safety, Health and Welfare at work Act 2005. The Act states that an employer has a duty to provide information, training, instruction and supervision in a form, manner and language which employees are reasonably likely to understand. It is no longer acceptable to bring a group of people into a room, run through a training class, ask them to sign off a training record and expect this to be deemed sufficient in the eyes if the law. Employers must now ensure that their non English speaking employees understand clearly their rights and responsibilities as well as specific safety information relevant to their jobs.



What can I do to ensure I am meeting my legal requirements?

Employers' must ensure that they are adequately communicating the risks and providing appropriate safety training for all employees, including those who are non-English speaking. Easy-to-understand training is vital if workers are to stay healthy and safe at work. One of the options that a lot of companies now use is to have the entire training course translated into the native language of the trainees, to provide a translator during the class and to develop posters or training materials using pictures to highlight hazards.

As you may have heard on the radio recently, The Health and Safety Authority have launched a nationwide safety campaign focusing on Polish and Turkish. With regard to improving safety awareness in the construction sector, the HSA have also have developed a Safe System of Work plan for construction sites which uses pictures and diagrams to convey potential hazards and control measures. As well as this the Authority have published a new multi-lingual Health and Safety Guide for Horticultural Industry and will soon launch a seven language training DVD. Further information is available on their website www.hsa.ie. Phoenix Safety is also now offering a translation service for training courses and safety documentation. For further details please see www.phoenixsafety.ie

