

Commitment 3 – Health Surveillance and Fitness for Work

1. Introduction

Each year thousands of people become ill by the work they do. Health Surveillance is about putting in place systemic regular and appropriate procedures to detect early signs of work related ill health among employees exposed to certain health risks, and acting on the results whilst complying with legislation (Health & Safety Executive)

Health Surveillance is legally required in a number of areas. The Management of H&S at Work Regulations as well as specific regulations such as COSHH, Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005, Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, and safety critical activity such as Working at Height, Confined Space Entry and operating specialist plant or equipment, states that employers are required to assess any risks to the health of their employees. This should not be seen as a one off exercise; a constant focus is required to ensure that the organisation and the activities of the organisation adapt to change.

Fitness for work assessments are undertaken to ensure that potential and existing colleagues are physically and psychologically capable of carrying out the role for which they have been employed. This is a proactive approach to promote and maintain the physical, mental and social wellbeing of colleagues.

2. Compliance

An organisation is required to identify and manage the occupational risks arising from activities/tasks carried out by employees.

It achieves this by:

1. Appropriate Fit for Work and Health Surveillance criteria for all defined roles
2. Employees and new appointees assessed to confirm that they are fit for their role.

Health Surveillance

There has to be a risk management strategy in place and an ongoing programme of risk assessment carried out by the organisation. It is this process that directs where the health surveillance should be targeted.

Fitness for Work Assessments

The primary purpose of medical assessment of fitness to work is to make sure that an individual is fit to work and to ensure that an individual is fit to perform the task, is involved effectively and is without risk to his own or others' health and safety.

The assessments should be carried out on an ongoing basis where a task or job requires an employee to pass a certain level of fitness to ensure the job is undertaken safely e.g.: Working at Height, Confined Space Entry, Operating plant and equipment such as Fork Lift Trucks, Chainsaws etc

3. Employees

Fit for Work assessments benefit the employees by:

- Early detection and monitoring of health issues.
- It identifies adjustments to help employees perform the job/task more efficiently and protect health
- Working in the knowledge that their colleagues are fit for their roles
- Ensure that employees are fit when changing roles within a company.

4. Impact on Business

If these assessments are not completed competently and regularly it can lead to:

- Loss of productivity where health issues are not identified and managed at an early stage
- Increased sickness absence requiring the need for temporary staff
- Increased turnover of staff
- Investigations into work related accidents or disease which requires management time
- Increase in compensation payouts and related costs
- Increased level of legal and civil claims
- Damage to company reputation

5. Who should carry out the assessments?

Carrying out Health Surveillance and fitness for work assessments should only be carried out by individuals trained to do so. In terms of competence of staff, paragraph 49 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations provides the following guidance: 'Employers who appoint doctors, nurses or other health professionals to advise them of the effects of work on employee health, or to carry out certain procedures, for example health surveillance, should first check that providers can offer evidence of sufficient level of expertise or training in occupational health.'

6. Further Information

- Understanding health surveillance at work: An introduction for employers
 - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg304.pdf>
- TUC Hazards at Work Online
- IOSH Occupational Health Toolkit www.iosh.co.uk
- OHAG Guidance Note Series <http://2010.enegynetworks.org>
- In relation to competence of OH staff
- Faculty of Occupational Medicine www.facoccmed.ac.uk
- Nursing and Midwifery Council www.nmc.org
- Occupational Health Services Accreditation Standards www.seqohs.org
- Royal College of Nursing, Occupational Health Nursing Competencies Guidance www.rcn.org