Christmas ‘Elf and Safety’ Myths

Christmas is a special time of year. Even so, it doesn't stop health and safety being - wrongly - cited as a reason for preventing pretty harmless activities from going ahead.

Not only does this needlessly ruin the festive spirit but it also trivialises the true purpose of health and safety: Protecting people from real risks at, or connected with, work. In the run up to Christmas I have re-published some of the workplace festive myths, gifted to HSE from media reports and correspondence received.

Myth: Workers are banned from putting up Christmas decorations in the office.

The reality - Bah Humbug! Each year we hear of companies banning their workers from putting up Christmas decorations in their offices for 'health and safety' reasons, or requiring the work to be done by a 'qualified' person. Most organisations including HSE and local councils manage to put up their decorations, celebrating the spirit of Christmas without a fuss. They just sensibly provide their staff with suitable step ladders to put up decorations rather than expecting staff to balance on wheelie chairs.

Myth: Indoor Christmas lights need a portable appliance test (PAT) every year.

The reality - Lots of companies waste money in the false belief they need to test their Christmas lights annually, or even don't put them up at all! By following a few sensible precautions, such as checks by the user for obvious signs of damage, every workplace can switch on safely and sparkle! Important: Remember though to switch them off and unplug at the end of the day and during office closure periods.
Myth: If you clear snow from outside your business or home you are likely to get sued.

The Reality - HSE responds to Bristol Evening Post - ‘A laughing stock - snow health and safety’

Dear Editor, - I would like to make it clear that under health and safety legislation nobody who volunteers to support their community by clearing pavements during icy conditions should feel they are in danger of being sued. The Health and Safety Executive encourages a common sense approach to health and safety, and agrees with your reader that "clearing the snow and ice...makes it easier for people to get about." HSE is focused on the real safety risks at work, and we think it is ridiculous that people should feel prevented from helping others, through a fear of being held responsible for an accident.

Yours sincerely, Terry Rose, Regional Director, South West - Health and Safety Executive

Myth: 'Elf and Safety' Ruins Christmas!

The reality - Don't believe everything you read!

HSE's mission has been to 'sleigh' the most commonly encountered festive health and safety myths. Yet, the myth they hear most often of all is that 'elf n safety' has ruined Christmas.

HSE hear of events being cancelled, Santa stopped from parading in his sleigh, and festive displays being banned, all blamed on 'Health and Safety' reasons.

Health and safety laws exist to provide safeguards against people being seriously injured or made unwell at work, not to hamper fun activities. So on that note, Wight Safety Consultancy would like to join HSE and say "Bah Humbug" to all the festive killjoys out there and a very happy Christmas to everyone else!

Be safe this Christmas.

Mark
Mark Elliott CMIOSH