

It's for your own safety, honest!

Pick up a paper on any given day and it seems the health and safety police are taking over: primary schools going bonkers over conkers and banning daisy chains because of potential germs. We even have bags of nuts with warnings that it 'may contain traces of nuts'.

And if you have exhibited at a show recently, you will know that the lists of questions and regulations are as long as your arm. But why?

With the South West Model Engineering, Model Making and Hobbies Exhibition just around the corner, we spoke with the event's operations director, Chris Smith, to explain.

"If you think exhibitors have it tough, you should see the mountain of rules, regulations, HSE statutes, and local authority dictates that I have on my desk," he laughs.

"Believe me, the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 or the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 do not make for the greatest bedtime read!

"Seriously though, the UK events industry are leaders the world in safety. The paperwork can be a bit confusing for exhibitors, but it has only one aim: to ensure everyone - from the moment they arrive to the moment they leave - has a great, and safe, day out.

"Every event brings with it many thousands of accidents that could potentially happen. Both organiser and exhibitors have a moral and legal duty to recognise each one, and minimise as much as possible the risk of it happening.

"This may sound daunting, but the majority of the responsibility lies with us, the organiser. In essence, we provide a safe place of work and environment for all staff, contractors, exhibitors and visitors to the venue, and ensure that the basic shell of the venue - indoors, outdoors and all the facilities - is as safe as it can be.

"Exhibitors have a sole responsibility: a duty of care to ensure that their stand or demonstration is safe for anyone who is working at, visiting, or merely walking past it.

“We will work with them to ensure that anything they bring on site is as safe as possible, and that club members, staff, or contractors, all know what is expected from them; that we are all singing from the same safety hymn sheet, if you like.

“Of course, exhibitors may shudder when they see this dreaded Risk Assessment form in the exhibitor manual. It may seem a little confusing, but it is a simple means to assess, record and devise control measures against all the significant risks associated with your exhibit.

And should an accident happen? Chris explains that exhibitors cannot solely rely on the safety net of insurance.

“In the industry we have something called the ‘Accident Iceberg’; a frightening representation of the true cost of an accident. In essence, it shows that for every £1 covered by insurance – such as injury, ill-health and damage – it could cost you a further £36 in such things as investigation time and lost wages.

“That says nothing of damage that any negative media coverage will have on your reputation.

“However, we are here to ensure that you never have to endure this. We enjoy an enviable industry reputation for health and safety, and this is largely due to the work that goes in long before the event or exhibition opens.

“Safety is no accident and that is why we are here to help you. If we all work together, we can ensure that your exhibit is both safe and enjoyable for you, your staff and every visitor.”

Risk Assessment: your 5 simple steps

Step 1: Consider the hazards:

Very few exhibits are hazard-free. What material are you using? Will there be noise? Could something fall and break if a visitor bumped into something at your exhibit?

Step 2: Decide who could be harmed and how:

This not only includes staff, contractors and visitors during the show, but at other times too. Could a small child get harmed if they gained access after hours, for example?

Step 3: Evaluate the risks:

Can you eliminate any hazard completely? If not, can it be reduced by doing something in a different way? Maybe your team needs extra training, hard hats, or life jackets?

Step 4: Record the findings:

Write any risks down on the risk assessment form and let the organisers know. Include the measures you will take to control those risks.

Step 5: Work with the organisers own health and safety team

Appoint one person to be in charge of your exhibit, and ensure that he/she uses the knowledge and experience of the experts!

Chris Smith is the operations director for Nationwide Media Group, organisers of the South West Model Engineering, Model Making and Hobbies Exhibition. The UK's most interactive hobbies show takes place at the Royal Bath and West Showground on 18th and 19th April 2009. For further details on exhibiting or visiting, please visit www.swmee.co.uk or call 0117 907 1000.

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For further information on this article, please contact: Gareth Dupre: gareth@magicbeanspr.com or 07833 364291