



SPIRIT OF ENTERPRISE

SAFETY AT WORK—AN ACCIDENT REPORT

Background to the case

There are thousands of work place accidents every year in Ireland. Some of these are fatal. For example, in 2006, fifty people were killed as a result of accidents at their places of work. Of course fatal accidents are tragic but non-fatal events can also be tragic, leading to serious injury or permanent disability. Over 8000 such accidents occurred in 2006. Also, if people are injured they may not be able to work at all and this will have obvious effects on their lives and on the economy.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA)

Clearly, there are good reasons to take safety in the workplace seriously and to do everything possible to protect people. The HSA is the government agency with responsibility for promoting standards of health and safety at work. In this case we will look at an accident involving a young student and consider what actions should be taken by the employer and others.

The story

John is a fifth year student who always works during the holidays. He likes to mix with other people and earn his own money. During the last two years he has worked in a local supermarket. They are always pleased to employ him because he gets on very well with the customers and is willing to do all kinds of jobs.

One afternoon, John and another employee Tony are asked to go into the storeroom to get a box of soft drinks, bring it out, and put the cans on the shelves in the shopping aisles. The policy of the shop is that two people must always be involved in this type of task because a ladder is required to get boxes down from shelves in the storeroom. Both John and Tony have done this many times before. The storeroom is located down a corridor and inside the door there are three steps down to the tiled floor. The light switch is just inside the door. The ladder is usually left near the steps so that anyone coming in can easily find it.

When John opened the door and tried the switch the light didn't come on, so Tony offered to go and get someone to bring a new bulb. Instead of waiting, John decided that there was enough light coming through the open doorway for him to continue. In his own words 'I was so familiar with the place that I thought I could easily get the box down and get the job done. I could definitely see what I was doing.'



Working from ladders requires great care

He took the ladder, extended it to its full length and placed it in position against the highest shelf which is about 3½ metres from the floor. As he described later, 'I checked it by moving it backwards and forwards a bit until it seemed to be in a good position.' He then climbed slowly up to the position from which he could reach the box he wanted. He took hold of the box with both hands and started to descend. 'Then I felt the ladder move a bit and I missed the next rung and tried to steady myself. The next thing I knew I woke up on the floor with Tony and Mary looking down at me. I had a sore head and a terrible pain in my ankle.'

Tony and Mary, the shop manager, heard the crash as they were coming through the door and saw John and the ladder lying on the floor surrounded by cans. John spent the next two days in hospital, four days out of work and six weeks with a crutch. Mary was legally obliged to report the accident to the HSA. The following day a HSA Inspector arrived on the scene. He questioned everyone involved, examined the premises and decided to request the company to produce a plan to prevent such an event from ever happening again. This is called an Improvement Plan and the Inspector has the legal right to demand it. Mary knows that you are familiar with safety regulations and asks you to amend the shop's Safety Statement as a first step in this process.

What you need to know

It is necessary to know that the law concerning these matters is the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005. The Act makes it clear that employees have responsibilities as well as employers. It also recommends 5 steps to a safer workplace. These steps are:

- Identify the hazards
- Assess the risks
- Select the control measures
- Write the Safety Statement
- Record and review

What is a Safety Statement?

A Safety Statement is a written document which describes how an employer safeguards the safety and health of employees and visitors to the workplace.

The Safety Statement should show that all workplace hazards have been identified and that risks have been assessed. It should demonstrate that these risks have been eliminated or controlled. Procedures for review should be set out and people responsible for particular tasks should be identified.

The Safety Statement is a crucial tool for preventing workplace accidents. A business is required by law to produce one (Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005) and employers can be prosecuted if they do not do so. Health, safety and good management go together.

In order to amend the Safety Statement you need to become familiar with the definitions of three terms, hazard, risk and control.

- A hazard is anything in the workplace that has the potential to cause harm. A slippery floor is a hazard.
- A risk is a combination of the likelihood of the harm occurring and the severity of the injury caused if it does occur. It is common to classify risks as high, medium and low. A slippery floor, used by many people, would produce a high likelihood of a fall. Injuries might be moderate but someone could be seriously injured. Therefore, the risk would normally be considered to be high.
- A control is anything that is done to eliminate or reduce the risk if the hazard cannot be eliminated. A low risk may not need any control. The risk on the slippery floor should be eliminated by cleaning, treating or re-covering the floor.

It is obvious that decisions about hazards and risks might involve different opinions and a lot of judgment. This is true but, nevertheless, it is important to make these judgments using the information you have and the opinions you form when reading the story. You can use the Spirit of Enterprise Safety Statement Template to do the exercise.

Hazard	Risk	H	M	L	Control

What controls will you recommend?

Remember that you must identify the hazards first. Then decide whether the risk is high (H), medium (M) or low (L). You may not need any controls when the risk is low. Bear in mind that it is preferable to eliminate the risk entirely. If this can't be done, it must be reduced to the lowest level possible. Also remember that the best way to eliminate a risk is to remove the hazard.

The Health and Safety Authority

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is a state-sponsored body, established under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 1989. It has responsibility for securing health and safety in the workplace and reports to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The HSA has overall responsibility for the administration and enforcement of health and safety at work in Ireland. The Authority monitors compliance with legislation at the workplace and can take enforcement action, including prosecutions.

It is the national centre for information and advice to employers, employees and the self-employed on all aspects of workplace health and safety. The Authority also promotes education, training and research in the field.

Detailed statistics on workplace incidents leading to fatal and non-fatal accidents are publicly available on www.hsa.ie, together with a range of the Authority's publications and annual reports.

Health and Safety Authority
The Metropolitan Building
James Joyce Street
Dublin 1
Tel: 1890 289 389
Email: wou@hsa.ie

You can find out more about the HSA at www.hsa.ie and www.soe.ie.

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Syllabus Links

This case and the associated *Student Exercises* are designed to enhance the appreciation of the importance of *work place safety* in business enterprises and to develop student skills of *critical analysis, discernment, communication, debate, research* and *report writing*.

The materials can be used effectively on the *LCVP, LCA, Leaving Certificate Business* and *Transition Year* programmes.

Learning Outcomes

This case requires the production of a partial Safety Statement and calls for the identification of hazards, a risk assessment and recommended control measures, following an accident involving a fall from a ladder. Having completed the exercise, students should be able to:

- Define the terms *hazard, risk assessment* and *control measure*.
- Form opinions and make decisions regarding these, based on the accident data provided.
- Construct the relevant parts of a Safety Statement.
- Describe the function of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005.
- Appreciate and describe the role of the Health and Safety Authority.



Ladder work is a cause of many serious accidents

Building on the Case

The case alludes to several issues of safety in the workplace and implies many others. The following topics can be used to provide additional information and stimulate group discussion.

Falls from height are a serious accident trigger

The HSA uses the term *accident trigger* to describe the fundamental cause of an accident. Falling from a height is the primary cause of fatal and serious injury in the *construction industry*. The top two triggers for non-fatal injuries across all sectors are *manual handling* and *slips, trips and falls on a level*.

Familiarity can make us careless

There are many different types of workplace but all of them contain hazards and present risks. Machinery is an example of a common workplace hazard, but well planned controls can eliminate the associated risk. Certain activities also present risk. For example, a very large proportion of injuries happen to people attempting to lift heavy objects. Many injuries are also caused by people slipping or falling.

Employees have responsibilities

The Act makes it clear that employers are primarily responsible for creating and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace. For example the employer must provide *safe systems of work*. However, employees also have serious responsibilities to *'take reasonable care to protect his or her safety, health and welfare and the safety, health and welfare of any other person who may be affected by the employee's acts or omissions at work.'*

Training is a requirement

The Act requires employers to provide *'information, instruction, training and supervision.'*

Employees are obliged to attend any training programmes provided.

The employee Safety Representative

Employees are entitled to appoint a colleague to act as their *Safety Representative* who will liaise with management on matters of health and safety. This person is entitled to inspect places of work and investigate accidents.

How to find out more

Statistics regarding fatal and non-fatal *incidents* can be found on the HSA website www.hsa.ie (Statistics and Research).

Glossary of Terms

Hazard: Anything that has the *potential* to cause harm to people or to property.

Risk: A risk is the *likelihood* or *probability* that harm will be caused, together with the *severity* of the harm.

Risk assessment: The process of deciding on the above factors. Risks are often assessed as high, medium or low.

Control measures: The precautions taken to minimise or eliminate risks as a result of the previous assessment.

Improvement Plan: A HSA Inspector is authorised by the Act to require that a business produce this plan which sets out the actions planned to prevent dangerous workplace incidents from recurring.

Safety Statement: A statement, required under the Act, which identifies hazards, risks, controls and safety procedures.

Student Activities

The following can be undertaken by *individuals, pairs* or *group assignments*. They can be posed as discussion topics or be assigned requiring written reports or presentations.

Most can be assigned as a *jigsaw class* with teams dealing with each report separately and then working in *cooperative learning mode*. Mutual learning should be assessed following any of the group exercises.

Case Study (LCVP)

Applied Business Question (LC Business)

Having read the McDonald's case, discuss the following:

- Should John have attempted to get the box by himself?
- How could the fall have been prevented?
- Is a ladder the best way of retrieving boxes from high shelves?
- Is the light switch in a good position?
- Do you know of any safety signs that might have been displayed? See *Research On-line* below.
- What procedure would you recommend for getting boxes from the storeroom in future?

Presentation Skills

Following completion of the exercise, a student or group can be asked to mount a presentation outlining their findings and recommendations.

Idea Generation

Separate groups of students are asked to brainstorm and produce ideas on the following topics. The ideas can then be discussed and evaluated in the larger group.

- Safe methods for taking stock from high shelves.
- Procedures for deciding on the high, medium or low status of a risk. The two factors involved i.e. the *likelihood* of an event and the *severity* of a possible injury add complexity to this topic.
- Suitable warning signs. Also see *Research On-line* below.

Safety Terms

Reviewing terminology is an effective method for building knowledge and vocabulary.

A student (or team) chooses a term from the list of *Keywords*. The other students suggest definitions for that term.

School Visit

You would like a HSA Inspector to visit the school and give a presentation on workplace safety.

- Write the letter making this request, giving your reasons for it and stating the objectives you would like to achieve from the visit.

Research On-line

- Go to www.hsa.ie. Click *Publications & Forms*, then *Get Publications Here* and then *Work Safety*. Print out the booklet called *Obligatory Safety Signs*. Check the meaning of the different geometric shapes.

Business Terms

Reviewing terminology is an effective method for building an *enterprise general business vocabulary*.

- A term is chosen from the *Glossary*. The other students suggest definitions for that term which are then discussed and analysed.
- Terms and definitions are cut from a copy of the *Glossary* and distributed separately to members of the class. Matching terms and descriptions must then be located.