

Safety Corner

Safety consideration related to ageing workforce

People aged 50 or above represent about 20% of the workforce in cosmopolitan cities. This percentage will soon rise to a quarter of the workforce, for we continue to live and work longer. Research shows that older workers tend to experience fewer workplace injuries than their younger colleagues. It is perhaps as a result of more experience or increased caution. However, the injuries they experience tend to require a longer time to heal; incidents affecting older workers are more likely to be fatal, with a dramatic jump in fatalities at the age of around 60. For instance, it is suggested that nearly 40% of fatal injuries in the UK in the year 2017/2018 involved workers aged 60 or above, despite them making up just 10% of the national workforce. This highlights the importance of accident prevention, more so for the ageing workforce.

With more people working beyond the typical retirement age of 60, there is an urgent need for greater preventative measures to be in place to promote sustainable work and healthy ageing throughout people's working lives. Here are issues employers need to know about an ageing workforce:

1. Muscle strengths and sensory abilities, for example, balance, vision and hearing, deteriorate with age. Employers need to match tasks to workers' limitations and assign tasks suiting ageing colleagues' conditions. Proper training and safe use of appropriate personal aids, supported with risk assessment of the work environment, help enhance workplace safety for ageing workforce and, as a result, improve productivity.
2. Although not restricted to ageing workforce, unhealthy lifestyle, such as smoking and lack of exercise, can negatively affect the worker's ability to meet the physical and mental demand from the job. Employers can put in place care and wellbeing programmes leading to a more productive and healthy workforce. Investments in these areas positively influence these employees' performances.
3. Workers over the age of 50 often have domestic care responsibilities for their spouses and/or parents. Therefore, flexible working hours are essential for these workers juggling their job duties and personal responsibilities. Employers may encourage a part-time working mode, which is suitable for employee's later career stages till their full retirements. The flexible working mode enables them to focus on their jobs and hence not distracted by their family obligations.
4. Employers are obliged to ensure a safe working environment. Workplace should be regularly inspected and audited. Hazardous conditions should be reported and removed promptly, and risk assessed and controlled. Equipment should be properly designed and regularly maintained in a bid to prevent failure and accidents. Safety policies and procedures should be reviewed and enhanced to take into consideration the ageing workforce. Last but not least, supervisors should be trained to proactively manage issues relating to an ageing workforce

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