Managing Health and Safety in Building and Construction

by Tony Clarke

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Reviewed by L.H. Vassie

The volume takes the reader systematically from the basis and architecture of health and safety regulation in the UK, through the key principles of effective health and safety management to specific chapters on aspects of health and safety management in the building and construction industry. These address the current structure of the UK construction industry; risk assessment in the design and construction process; the key regulations—the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994 and the Construction (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1996; managing contractual arrangements and pricing construction contracts. Each chapter is concluded with a useful chapter summary, which captures the salient points within the chapter. Practical examples, drawn from the author's practical experience, are used to illustrate key principles in practice.

A dedicated chapter on risk assessment in construction provides a useful overview of this pivotal part of health and safety management in any industry. Whilst the approach outlined, the ranking of risks on a scale of high, medium and low, may be appropriate in small construction projects, the complexities of medium- and large-sized construction projects demand a more rigorous approach. Nevertheless, whichever approach is taken, it is important that standards for likelihood, severity and risk evaluation are defined.

The chapter on the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994—the largest in the book—provides invaluable information on the roles and function of the five duty holders, together with the key stages in the formulation of the statutory health and safety plan and the health and safety file. It highlights the importance of a co-operative relationship between the client and the other duty holders, which is often a challenge within the construction industry and an underlying factor in accident causation.

The high level of accidents and incidents in the construction industry demands a proactive approach to health and safety management, as the author points out. A key element here is regular performance monitoring of contractor and sub-contractor work activities, and emphasis on this aspect would be welcome. In the reviewer's experience, health and safety performance data supplied by contractors and sub-contractors should not be relied upon by clients and contractors respectively, as this is highly subjective and often (scaffolding) poles apart from reality on the construction site.

Overall, the book provides a well-structured package, highlighting relevant issues for consideration for effective health and safety management in building and construction projects. References to several Health and Safety Executive publications and other sources are included. This book would be a useful reference aid to managers in the construction industry and possibly to those studying construction management or health and safety management at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

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