What is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974?

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, often referred to as the HASAWA, or HSW is the main piece of UK legislation detailing the duties of employers regarding health and safety in the workplace. Its general principle is that employers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees. It also covers other people visiting the workplace premises such as temporary workers, casual workers, self-employed workers, clients, visitors and the general public.

The primary context of each of the provisions within the HSW is that each duty is qualified by the text “so far as is reasonably practicable”. In addition, the Act provides the framework for the government to issue health and safety related regulations, guidance to employers, and Approved Codes of Practice. These all set out in more detail the specific responsibilities pertaining to employers in different areas concerning health and safety, for example, working with hazardous chemicals, or working with display screens.

The Act also established the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). It goes on to provide powers for the HSE enabling them to enforce the terms of the Act, and penalties which can be given should employers not meet their responsibilities.

**The Primary Points of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974**

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 is long and detailed. The primary provisions of the HSW include:

* The requirement for safe operation, including maintenance, of the workplace environment including plant, equipment, and systems.
* Maintenance of safe access, and exits, at the workplace.
* Safe usage of, including handling and storage, of dangerous and hazardous chemicals and substances.
* Adequate and appropriate health and safety training for staff.
* Adequate and appropriate welfare provisions for staff in the workplace.
* The requirement that employers must keep and update a written Health and Safety Policy, which is formulated in conjunction with the Act, and in consultation with the employees or their representatives.