

Control of Contractors

Understanding the Risk

The inadequate control or supervision of contractors working at your premises can have serious consequences, resulting in:-

- Injuries to either your employees or contractors, visitors
- Loss of/or damage to your property e.g. as a result of a fire.
- Loss of containment (pollution issue)
- Interruptions to your business as a result of injury, loss, damage or delays in completing the work.

In this context contractors include not only those involved in building construction or alteration, but any company contracted to undertake work, at your premises e.g. electrical contractors, service and maintenance engineers, caterers, cleaners etc.

In any client/contractor relationship both parties have a duty of care to the other under health and safety law e.g. the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 etc.

Controlling the Hazard

The adequate control of contractors requires the establishment of clear procedures and guidelines, to be followed in connection with:-

- Planning the work
- Selecting the contractor
- Reviewing the contractor's method statement and health and safety arrangements
- Ensuring that the contractor understands what is required - not only in terms of the work to be undertaken, but also in meeting your health and safety etc requirements
- Supervising the contractor
- Reviewing the contractor's performance

Planning the Work

Many accidents and incidents can be avoided by careful planning, which should include:-

- Clearly defining the scope and extent of the work to be done



- Undertaking a detailed risk assessment to identify potential risks associated with the work and the possible need for special precautions or instructions including the use of permit to work systems in particular a hot work permit
- Hot work permits are required (your insurance policy may stipulate this) in connection with any operation that results in the emission of concentrated sources of heat such as sparks or molten metal e.g. welding, brazing, cutting, grinding, paint stripping and torch applied roofing
- Other permit controlled processes e.g. isolation of energy sources/ detection equipment, work at height, work in confined spaces, line breaking etc
- Establishing the level and extent of management and supervision required during the work

Selecting the Contractor

In selecting a suitable contractor you should ensure that the contractor is competent to do the work required i.e. they have the necessary knowledge and skills – the degree of competence required will depend on the nature of the work to be done.

In ensuring that the contractor is competent the following should be established:-

- What qualifications and skills the contractor has.
- What experience the contractor has in the type of work to be done.
- Details of references or independent assessments of their work.
- Membership of any trade organisation or professional body.
- If the contractor is to employ a subcontractor(s) this information should be established for each subcontractor.
- Many companies only use contractors from their own list of approved contractors comprising companies, who it is known meet their competency requirements and there are clearly advantages in doing this.

Reviewing the Contractor's Method Statement and Health & Safety Arrangements

Before being appointed the contractor's method statement should be reviewed so that any issues arising from this can be resolved, in advance of the work commencing.

The method statement should detail how each aspect of the required work will be completed and should highlight both the risks involved and the measures proposed to control them.

In addition to reviewing their method statement the adequacy of the contractor's health and safety arrangements should also be reviewed, to include:-

- A copy of their health and safety policy and procedures.
- Details of their health and safety record.
- Details of the experience of the employees to be involved in undertaking the work including where appropriate, training and qualifications.

It should also be ensured that the contractor has adequate insurance cover in place, including public liability insurance and employer's liability insurance etc.

Ensuring the Contractor Understands what is required

In addition to understanding what is required in terms of the work to be undertaken it is essential that the contractor also understands any other requirements applicable, including health and safety issues, welfare arrangements etc.

These requirements should be discussed and agreed at a preliminary meeting with the contractor before the work is allowed to start.

Issues that should be discussed include:-

- Site access and parking arrangements
- Access to the work area and other areas where access is allowed e.g. welfare. Areas where access is not allowed should also be made clear
- Safety induction arrangements, including requirements for personal protective equipment, fire precautions and emergency procedures
- Details of permit to work systems operated
- The presence and condition of any asbestos containing materials in or adjacent to the area of work
- Arrangements for contractor supervision
- Welfare arrangements
- Accident reporting arrangements and first aid facilities
- Housekeeping arrangements and standards

These items are best documented in a set of Rules for Contractors, which the contractor can be asked to sign for, to confirm that they have been received and understood.

Before they are allowed to start work it should be ensured that the contractor's employees have also been made aware of these issues and that they undergo a full site induction.

A record should be kept of the preliminary meeting and the employee site induction, including the details of all the attendees.

Supervising the Contractor

The level of supervision required in respect of a contractor will depend on the nature and extent of the work being undertaken, but should include:-

- Ongoing vigilance by both management and staff
- Periodic inspections of the work area and operations, by a competent person with the authority to stop the work if necessary e.g. a serious breach of health and safety rules
- Regular review meetings with the contractors to monitor progress and discuss any issues arising

Reviewing the Contractor's Performance

On completion of the work a review of the contractor's performance should be undertaken, to include:-

- An assessment of the work undertaken
- The identification of any breaches of the Company's rules, in particular health and safety violations
- Level of communication and co-operation with the contractor and its employees
- Based on the outcome of the review the decision can be made whether the contractor will be used again and if appropriate, their name added to the Company's list of approved contractors.

References

Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974

HSE publication L21: Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 - Approved Code of Practice and guidance.

HSE publication INDG368: Use of Contractors (free leaflet)

HSE publication HSG 159: Managing Contractors

HSE publication L144: The Approved Code of Practice - Construction (Design and Management)

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