

The Importance of Good Health and Safety Policy

I have been in the Window Cleaning business for 24 years, a Federation member for around 20 with no serious accidents, a record I am quite proud of.

However, in 2017 one of my employees Andrew, who is also my son, had an accident at work when he accidentally put his hand through a pane of glass resulting in a cut to his wrist, severing his artery, tendons and a nerve. This was a horrendous injury that happened in a split second. So to cut a long story short, we tried our best to stem the flow of blood until the paramedics turned up and took over. He was operated on that night and thankfully is on his way to what we hope is a full recovery. We are very lucky to have the experts from the NHS to patch us up when things go wrong.

After the initial drama and worry, the dust settles and now as an employer I am aware I have to follow H&S procedure. This is when I am glad to have attended the Risk Assessment Course arranged through the Federation and my 2 employees attended the Cleaning Windows Safely Using Waterfed Poles & Portable Ladders course only last year. Even with the best will in the world and procedures followed accident can still happen at any time.

I think I know the procedure following an accident but the more I look online the more I am starting to doubt myself. This is when I decided to phone Beryl at the Federation for advice.

Beryl straight away offers calm advice, understanding, and gives me the contact details of the Federation H&S Executive Andrew Lee.

When I telephoned the FWC Chairman - Andrew Lee who, despite being a busy person himself, straight away gave me his attention and advised me of the correct procedure to follow. Also, what would likely happen in the coming weeks/months. He also invited me to get in touch anytime if I felt I needed his advice again.

As advised, I reported the accident to RIDDOR and to my Employers Liability Insurance immediately.

My insurer decided to do an investigation in case there is a claim against me in the future. They sent out an investigator to meet me onsite. He was interested in any formal training attended, H&S Policy, Risk assessments and Method Statements. I was able to provide all these straight away as they are all kept up to date and even though I have only 2 employees I took the decision years ago to make written policies as good practice. As far as I am aware, HSE were satisfied the correct procedure had been carried out.

I then received a call from the HSE who also want to investigate. Again, I was to send them all the relevant Training certificates, RAMS and H&S Policy for them to check they are in order.

They arranged to meet me at my house to take statements and to explain exactly what happened on the day.

I am advised at the first visit that if I am found at fault, I will have to pay for the cost of the whole HSE investigation.

They left with all the information they needed and arranged to meet with my son the following week.

After meeting with my son, they are to speak to colleagues and decide if there is any further action required.

2 weeks later I received an email confirming the investigation has now been closed and no breaches of law were identified.

I have no doubt the fact that we have all attended Safety courses, and my Policies are all up to date and in writing, helped the HSE investigator see we take safety seriously. She also commented the policies were above and beyond what was needed for a company of this size. I explained the HSE website, although it is helpful, is so big it takes a long time to get information relevant to window cleaning. Asked where my information came from, I told her 90% of it comes from the Federation website and courses attended.

Previously I had been very unsure of the HSE but since this incident I have now changed my opinion completely. They are there mostly to help and to advise us of any procedures we can implement to help make our work safer.

If any members reading this are thinking of attending Safety courses or updating H&S Policies, I can strongly recommend you do so asap. If like myself, you have an accident you will be so glad you have.

Finally, I would like to thank the Federation for all their help and advice throughout the years. With a special thank you to Beryl and to Andrew Lee for their help during this particular incident.

David Mutch