

The Importance of Competency Based Training

Knowledge must come through action; you can have no test which is not fanciful, save by trial.

Sophocles (Greek tragic dramatist, 496 BC - 406 BC)

Introduction

Falls from a height continue to be one of the largest causes of death and injury in the workplace. It is therefore essential that measures be taken to protect workers. In summary, legislation requires that those involved in work at height must be competent (or, if being trained, supervised by a competent person). In addition, every person shall report any activity or defect relating to work at height that they know is likely to endanger the safety of themselves, or another person. So, whilst competence is an issue at the heart of the regulations they do not go on to define what this means.

What is competence?

It is usually taken to be a blend of knowledge, skills and experience. At its simplest, competence may be defined simply as, “the ability to do something well”. There must, however, be a standard against which to make a judgement. Alternatively, it is, “the mental ability to distinguish right from wrong and to manage one’s own affairs”. It is more than the possession of a qualification, with a need for sufficient and relevant experience as well.

The concept of individuals recognising hazards is important and guidance can be found in BS 8437 . This states that, “Users should ... understand fully any potential hazards related to the work and the equipment to be used ... (and) ... detect any technical defects or omissions in that work and equipment ...”.

How is it assessed?

The emphasis in competency based training is on “performing” rather than purely “knowing”. A good training provider will set out the learning objectives, so that they can be assessed and trainers will know what training or learning is to be provided. For example during work at height training for wind turbine generators a trainee will be required to demonstrate the use of rescue equipment to recover a casualty from a ladder, as well as the recovery of a casualty suspended after a fall. Training is more than classroom based.

Who can assess this?

There has been an increasing demand for people to receive training for work at height, with this demand driven partly by legislation and partly by an increasing trend within industry for a more professional approach to be taken.

Any training is dependent upon the quality of the training provider, the syllabus to be delivered and the way in which it is delivered. A good height safety training provider will utilise BS 8454. This provides recommendations to assist in ensuring that training is delivered to a high standard, in a safe, controlled environment by competent and experienced staff. Guidance is

The heightec Group Ltd, Lake District Business Park, Mint Bridge Road, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 6NH, UK

Tel: +44 (0) 1539 728866

Email: admin@heightec.com Web: heightec.com



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also given on the information to be given to clients, to enable them to select a course that is suitable for their needs. It does not give a detailed specification of course content and, with no accreditation route, training providers claiming compliance with the standard are expected to be able to justify their claims.

Closing remark

Training is part of the equation, but competence has to be maintained ...

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Company no. 03435385

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