



Crisis Management

The HSE frequently relies on reports by companies investigating their own incidents. There is a fine line between self-implication on the one hand and implausibility on the other, and the involvement of an experienced professional consultant at this time cannot be overstated.

Trespasser's death on a building site

At dawn on New Years Day, the body of a middle aged man was found on a building site, half buried under a collapsed tunnel which he had dug into an earthen bank. The site was being prepared for house construction, and soil remediation work had created the reduced level bank of earth into which the man had excavated. He was a collector of antique bottles and the site, originally a Victorian Terrace, had been thought to be an old ash pit and was thought a good source of bottles.

The solution

4See Risk Management was on-site within an hour of being notified and commenced an investigation in preparation for the HSE visit two days later. The 4See report showed that the site was well fenced, and security personnel had been on duty to safeguard valuable earthmoving plant. The tunnel was filled in as soon as the body was removed, and security was increased; press reports had referred to the high value of antique bottles and several more attempts were made to break in on subsequent nights.

4See was working for the ground remediation company, but also assisted the well known house builder which although not yet occupying the site, was attracting much of the media interest. There was no HSE action.

Averting HSE prosecution

A supervisor fractured his skull and almost died when he fell two stories into the basement of a shopping mall construction project. One of the sub-contractors on-site had worked with 4See, and advised the company implicated in the accident to invite 4See into early discussions with the HSE. The consultancy was soon retained for the duration of the investigation.

The solution

Conflicting statements and defensive posturing by several of the involved parties provoked an aggressive approach from the HSE, and there was a real threat of a major prosecution. 4See, which had compiled a report into the accident soon after it was retained, was forced to invoke legal professional privilege to keep confidential the material it had prepared in its client's defence.

The work had been poorly designed by the principal contractor and the two storey hole into which the supervisor fell need not have been there. While there was doubt about whether the supervisor had worn a safety harness, it was clear that he had failed to apply a safe system of work.

The investigation ran for over a year, and eventually the threat of prosecution receded. Timely use of the legal professional privilege and the swift intervention by 4See contributed much to this outcome. The supervisor made a full recovery.

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