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knife Safety

While statistics show that statistics show that the main risk areas for the catering industry are caused by slips and trips and manual handling accidents. Accidents involving knives and cleavers are common and usually involve cuts to the non-knife hand and fingers but can lead to injuries on the upper arm and torso.

Under current Health and Safety Legislation employers are required to carry out a risk assessment (Regulation 3(1) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations [MHSW]) and, where possible eliminate risk. If it is not possible to remove knives from the workplace, as would be the case in a kitchen, then the facility manager must consider reducing the risk so far as is reasonably practicable.

Under Regulation 4 of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER), the employer is required to select work equipment that is both safe and suitable for the task. Following risk assessment it may be possible to select a knife that, through its safety features and suitability, will eliminate or significantly reduce the knife injuries identified under Regulation 3 of MHSWR.

Even if the current knife is considered safe, or a safety knife has already been introduced, it is still good practice to review hazardous operations periodically to ensure that the task and the risk itself has not altered and that there is no new product on the market that would be safer.

When carrying out the assessment, the knife users should be carefully observed to capture the current operating methodology. By involving staff in the process, their in-depth knowledge of an operation or area may well identify risks that the untrained eye may not spot or are not present at the time of the assessment.

Effective training is a critical element of any kitchen operation particularly in the safe use of knives and safe working practices when sharpening knives. Key principles to be covered include the identification of knives suitable for the task and for the food being cut; The importance of keeping knives sharp and always cutting on a stable surface; How to handle knives carefully when washing up and carrying a knife with the blade pointing downwards; Storing knives securely after use and using protective equipment as required.

*The HSE provide guidance on knife safety in catering at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/catering/knives.htm>
This includes a downloadable powerpoint presentation on the safe use of knives including sharpening*