

The Changing Face of Health and Safety in FM

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Health and Safety is huge within the FM industry. The number of H&S issues to take into consideration in this sector are almost too vast to count. From fire safety to first aid, and from hi-vis wear to hand sanitiser – the list of responsibilities of a Health and Safety professional within FM is endless.

Here, we speak to Matthew Montague, Health and Safety Manager at [Pareto FM](#). He tells us all about the growth of Health and Safety within FM, the challenges of his work and how the sector will evolve over the next few years.

Matthew is one of two dedicated health and safety advisors for Pareto FM, who are further supported by a wider network of people trained in NEBOSH (The National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health). Together they are responsible for all the Health and Safety issues for both Pareto and their clients.

Having been in his current role for a year and a half, Matthew has worked in Health and Safety for the last 12 years, having gotten a taste for the industry from his dad, who also worked in H&S.

He explained: “I’d been working with cars – that’s all I’d ever wanted to do – but then one day my dad suggested I go and work with him for a week to see how I got on. I loved it! I took to it straight away and knew there and then that I wanted to make a career out of it.”

“I love my job,” Matthew added. “It’s very rewarding and no two days are the same. There’s so much to consider when it comes to Health and Safety, and very often it’s things that the client hasn’t even thought about. For example, if we’re refurbishing an external staircase, you must make sure you’ve told all the tenants that the staircase will be closed for a while. You also need to consider whether you’re putting

plastic sheeting around any scaffolding, and whether or not you've considered the wind loading effect. Our job is to make sure that there is a proper and full design and that the business is educated enough to know which questions should be asked in terms of H&S."

Matthew added: "There are a lot of risks that we need to control. That's where we as a department get fully involved because it's just that next step of thinking in terms of what happens in certain cases. For example, I'll consider that although the weather is lovely now in the summer, what happens when it comes to winter and someone's using that staircase in icy weather wearing high heels? Have we made sure that the tiles we're laying on those staircases are compliant to everything that we need to in terms of what the building regulations state? Because ultimately, if someone slips and falls, we're liable because we haven't done our job properly. That's the level of detail we're looking at."

Are businesses more accepting of Health and Safety now?

Health and Safety has, in the past, received a somewhat unfair reputation. It wasn't rare to read about ridiculous things in the press followed by the words, 'it's health and safety gone mad'. But has that changed? Are businesses more accepting of Health and Safety regulations now?

"A lot of our clients are very health and safety orientated, which is great. It makes it easy to work with them when they understand that we must do what we do," Matthew explained. "It's our job to highlight what needs to be done, and to explain why. As long as we set out clear boundaries, tell the clients the reasons behind everything and cost it correctly, they are very pro-health and safety and there are no issues."

Health and Safety for all

Keeping on top of Health and Safety in an FM company like Pareto obviously has its challenges, with so many different plates needing to be juggled at once. So just how does Matthew do it?

"It's definitely an exciting role," he said. "The nice thing about Pareto is that we're small enough to care, but big enough to cope. When we recruit new staff, we go through a rigorous process of inducting our employees into the company, making sure they're right for us and ensuring they know all about health and safety right from the word go. I've just recently rewritten our induction presentation and used 40 slides to cover Health and Safety; previously there were five or six! So, it's now a very rigorous process which helps us keep on top of H&S issues. It's ingrained in all our staff across the company, with everyone looking at safety all the time."

A simple, yet effective feature of Pareto's induction process in relation to Health and Safety is the issuing of health and safety reporting cards. Matthew explained: "Every new employee is given one of these cards which contains information on how to report accidents and incidents, near misses and observations. It also carries a message from the CEO that nothing is so important that we can't take the time to do it safely. We go through everything on these cards as part of the induction process, ensuring that we convey to our employees the message that if ever they don't feel capable of carrying out a task, be it through a lack of training, lack of equipment, lack of information or instruction, then they have the absolute right and backing from the health and safety department to stop that job immediately."

The evolution of Health and Safety

Health and Safety is a fast-paced and ever-changing field. Matthew explained that it's changed considerably over the years he's been in it. He said: "Every time I go to a Health and Safety expos I can see it changing. For example, the amount of tools and equipment out there now, and the level of safety we go into is crazy compared to what we used to do."

And within the FM industry specifically? "I think Health and Safety is definitely at the forefront of the FM sector now," Matthew said. "Everyone is getting to the right level of knowledge in terms of what they need. For example, when we go for tenders, when the health and safety questions are asked, everyone has their response ready to go because it is just an absolute standard now."

The future of Health and Safety

And what do the next 5-10 years hold in store for the Health and Safety world? "For Pareto, I'd like to get to a point where my phone never rings," Matthew said. "That will mean that we've given all our employees absolutely everything they need to monitor and manage Health and Safety for themselves. I want to completely remove the fear that's sometimes associated with H&S; you say the words 'risk assessment' and everyone panics. But there's no need. We carry out risk assessments in our lives every day - every time you hop in the car or cross a road - it's just a part of life. And that's what it should be like at work as well."

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