

Covid at Work: harm, evidence and law

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25 November, 2020

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In May, PM Johnson urged people to return to “Covid-19 secure workplaces”

HSE would be “having spot inspections to ensure businesses are keeping employees safe”

Pledged £14m of additional funding for HSE

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Some Evidence #1

- Up to this point, UK (England) suffered more than most countries both in terms of adverse health and economic effects
- Many workers had never stopped going to work (and even fewer in current 'lockdown') ...
- ... and they lost their lives as a result
- HSE were complicit in this, eg.
 - Construction
 - PPE in health care settings

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Some Evidence #2 HSE Enforcement ...

- Funding fell from £239m in 2009-10 to £135m in 2017-18 (£104m cut)
- Between 2010 and 2019, total HSE staff fell by 34%, and frontline staff, including all inspectors, declining by 27% (1066 'frontline' staff)
- Between 2010 and 2019, total HSE Field Operations Directorate Inspections fell by 38% (18,052 in 2018/19)
- Between 2010 and 2020, total Enforcement notices issued by HSE fell by 36%, with the most serious, Prohibition notices, falling by 50% (7075 notices in 2019/20)
- Between 2010 and 2020, total offences convictions following HSE prosecution fell by 39% (467 in 2019/20)

March 2020, Martin Temple, then Chair of the HSE, revealed that the statistical likelihood of any one duty holder being inspected by the HSE in any one year is one in 275

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Some Evidence #3 LA Enforcement ...

- Between 2010 and 2019, total number of health and safety visits by Local Authorities fell by 78% (42,800 in 2018/19)
- Between 2010 and 2019, total Enforcement notices issued by Local Authorities fell by 69% (2,263 in 2018/19)
- Between 2010 and 2019, total offences convictions secured by Local Authorities fell by 70% (80 in 2018/19)

April 2020:

- Seven Local Authorities had no health and safety EHO FTEs in place
- 135 Local Authorities had less than 1.0 FTE of a Health and Safety EHO.

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Widespread workplace harm has long been the norm in the UK – and Covid-19 has exposed this

Neither HSE nor LA regulation is fit for purpose – law without enforcement

Covid-19 shows that workplace health is public health