

SAFETY IN 'HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS'

FROM BRASS FOUNDRIES TO THE BBC, **PAUL HOPKIN** HAS SEEN MANY ASPECTS OF HEALTH AND SAFETY'S IMPACT ON BUSINESSES.

In a fit of madness after graduation, I went to teacher training college, and taught physics and maths in a school in Bristol for five terms. Teaching didn't suit me at all. I didn't like being confined to one place and jumping to attention each time a bell rang. A friend put me in touch with someone who had just joined the HSE as a factory inspector. He was so enthusiastic about it that I decided to follow suit.

MUCH MORE VARIETY

I applied to be a factory inspector, and began my career in health and safety. The HSE provided excellent training, including six months' full-time education at Aston University. I loved the variety and the flexibility. I was out of the office for three days a week, travelling to different workplaces and industries. My first position was in Bristol, but I routinely travelled as far as Dorset and the Cotswolds. After four years I moved to Birmingham, where travelling was more restricted, but I was

in the centre of the brass and bronze industries. Accident rates were lower than might be expected, given that it was such a hazardous industry, but any incidents that did occur were terrible – molten metal could burn a worker's feet off. Health issues were probably underrated, but were very common – lung problems due to silica dust, lead hazards,



vibration white finger due to grinding machines, and heat exhaustion.

THE TRUE COST

My next role was to move into the insurance broking industry, working for Sedgwick. I ran training courses for their clients, from induction training to fairly sophisticated safety case work. Offering health and safety training to employers reduced the number of accidents, which in turn reduced insurance premiums.

I then spent five years as a self-employed health and safety consultant. I enjoyed the flexibility, but being a one-man band did get rather lonely. In the early 1990s, the HSE downsized and many factory inspectors moved into consultancy, making advice cheaper and more widely available. I took the opportunity to move to BET, where I worked as a loss control manager, devising means for the organisation to reduce the frequency and cost of losses. It can be helpful for health and safety managers to consider insurance implications, not just legal and regulatory matters. There are real financial benefits to managing absence and reducing insurance premiums.

A COMPLEX EXPERIENCE

After four years, I became head of risk management at the BBC. The BBC was very complex, with many self-employed people including electricians, engineers, cameramen and actors. The drama and news departments were most complex, where there were often accidents and sometimes fatalities while filming. One of the requirements of the job was to train people who were going into 'hostile environments' (which is the polite term for a war zone). I moved on to work for the Rank Group, where I co-ordinated health, safety and insurance programmes across a large number of businesses.

I became a member of IIRSM in the mid-1980s, joined the board in 1999 and became Chairman in 2002. There have been huge changes in that time – membership had quadrupled, and IIRSM's independence has increased hugely. I hope that enhancing the status of IIRSM has in turn enhanced the status of members of the Institute, one of my key objectives in this role.

Paul Hopkin FIIRSM is Chairman of IIRSM's Board of Governors.

