



GMB **UNION** GUIDE

Health and Safety in the Retail Industry

The Retail industry is a very important part of the UK economy. Some customers and some employers do not treat Members with respect. Through GMB organisation and representation GMB safety representatives can raise Members' concerns with management.

Some of the dangers encountered in the retail sector, such as lifting and carrying, slips and spills and violence, are obvious. Others maybe not so apparent, such as sitting or standing for too long.



SLIPPING, TRIPPING UP AND FALLING DOWN

Slipping up, tripping up and falling down are the causes of most incidents in the retail industry. Often the reason for the accidents is straight forward, like wet or uneven floors, obstructions and spillages. Your employer should put procedures in place for cleaning up spillages and safely removing obstructions. They should supply suitable footwear to minimise slips and trips. In a hectic retail environment some accidents are inevitable. The two most common injuries and accidents to members: Injuries to arms and hands
Injuries to legs, ankles and knees

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

- Find out what your employer's procedures are for reducing the risk of slips and falls – for example rapid response cleaning to deal with spillages both in the store and behind the scenes.

LIFTING, CARRYING AND STACKING

Lifting, carrying, stacking and moving goods that may be very heavy leads to the second highest number of injuries in retail. These include injuries to the back and arms.

It is not only the weight of the goods being moved that needs to be assessed. The shape and quantity of goods, the distance to be covered, whether they are pushed, pulled or carried, the height they are stacked at and the degree of twisting, bending and stretching are also involved.

GMB members who are being asked to move too much at any time should tell their GMB Safety representatives. Often the use of mechanical aids, such as flatbed trolleys or cages, can make the moving and lifting of heavy loads much safer.

As with many aspects of safety in your workplace, proper training in lifting is a must for everyone involved.

A particular danger in many shops is overloaded cage trolleys. Back strains and accidents can occur when reaching above your head to lift goods up and down from the shelves. Cage trolleys can also become overused and their wheels must be checked and repaired regularly.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

- Get all your colleagues to complain to the manager if they are being asked to move too much weight at one time, or if they have concerns about over-stacking or wobbly wheels on cage trolleys.
- Ask your GMB Workplace Organiser or GMB Safety representative to demand that all GMB members involved with moving goods receive manual handling training from your employer.

TOO HOT OR TOO COLD

Many shops are often too cold and draughty in the winter and too hot in the summer. Employers have a legal duty to ensure that the temperature is reasonable. There is a legal minimum of 16°C (13°C for heavy physical work) but no legal maximum. GMB, along with other trade unions are campaigning for a legal maximum temperature of 25°C.

Where there is a need to work in food chill areas adequate thermal clothing, classified as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be supplied and regular breaks built into the shift.



WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

- Check the temperature on a regular basis where you work and keep a record.
- Raise any concerns you and your colleagues have about cold or hot conditions with your GMB Workplace Organiser or GMB Safety representative.
- Talk to as many people at work as you can and make sure everyone working in cold areas has warm jackets and other PPE supplied by your employer.



CUTS, BURNS AND SCALDS

Most big stores have in-house bakeries, butchers and hot food counters. GMB members working in these areas report regular accidents common to every kitchen area as a result of faulty equipment, hot fat and water, and pressure to get prepared food to the customers too quickly. Sharp knives, hot appliances and tools need care and time to be handled safely. Staff should receive training in their use from their employer, kitchen areas should have enough staff to do the job safely and there should be adequate First aid arrangements on hand.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

- Ask your GMB Workplace Organiser or GMB Safety representative to get you a copy of your employer's risk assessment on the kitchen areas.
- Talk to your colleagues about the risk assessment and get a meeting with your manager or supervisor if you are not happy that it is being followed. Ensure everyone knows the First aid procedures, and the location of the official accident Book.
- Make sure any and all accidents are recorded in the employer's official accident Book.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Personal Protective Equipment, often shortened to PPE, covers a wide range of items that retail staff might have to use in the course of their work. These are likely to include warm fleece jackets for check-out staff at certain times of the year and for those working in chilled areas, but may also include gloves, heavy duty footwear, high visibility jackets and safety glasses depending on the work you do. All PPE required for work must be issued free of charge by the employer and maintained and cleaned regularly at the employer's cost. If GMB members are unsure of their rights to PPE contact your GMB Safety representative.



WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

- Talk to your colleagues at work about what they do and whether their job affects their health.
- Ask your GMB Workplace Organiser or GMB Safety representative if you think you or your colleagues are be entitled to PPE.

VIOLENCE AGAINST RETAIL STAFF

Increasingly retail staff have to ask for identification from younger people who may be attempting to buy age-restricted goods, such as alcohol, solvents, cigarettes, knives and DVDs. This can lead to personal confrontations and physical and verbal abuse. Other customers can be rude and violent for a number of reasons including drunkenness. Violence is not confined to physical or verbal abuse but can include intimidation. All of these can cause you stress.

Don't accept violence or the threat of violence, as just 'part of your job'. It should be treated as a foreseeable danger and risk assessment should be done by your employer to reduce the likelihood of violence against you.

The 24-hour opening of many shops should be accompanied by security cover at all times. Contract security staff in particular need to be supported both by their employer and by the owners of the store, as they are often the first victims of violence and abuse. There should be a clear policy on dealing with all forms of violent behaviour including publicising the intention to prosecute following a violent assault on a worker.

In some shops there may be workers who work alone, such as security staff and petrol attendants. They need special arrangements to ensure their safety, including being regularly checked on and an established means of calling for help in case they are assaulted or have a medical emergency.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

- Get a copy of your employer's risk assessment on the threat of violence where you work and show it to your workmates.
- Make sure notices are in place to warn customers of prosecution if they attack shop staff or contract security workers.
- Ask your GMB Workplace Organiser or GMB Safety representative to check your employer's policy towards paid leave if any colleague is injured or attacked.

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Bullying and harassment by managers or supervisors in the retail industry can take place for a number of reasons, many which increase during an economic recession. These can include pressure to cover for sick or absent colleagues; staying on when it is busy or going home when it is slack; working in other departments without proper training, and ignoring family needs and arrangements.

Bullying is carried out by those in a position of power or strength and can be physical, emotional or subtle. It can involve threats, including violence, favouritism on shifts or holiday arrangements, victimisation and harassment of a sexual, religious or racial nature.

There should be a clear, transparent policy in place to deal with all aspects of bullying and harassment and the policies should be followed in all circumstances. GMB Safety representatives can help GMB members raise and deal with issues of a sensitive nature in this area.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

- If you or any of your colleagues are feeling bullied or harassed – or if you witness bullying and harassment – don't keep quiet. Talk to your colleagues and find out if anyone else has had the same treatment from that manager or supervisor.
- Get everyone who is affected together with your GMB Workplace Organiser or GMB Safety representative and decide to raise it with your employer.



SITTING AND STANDING

Circulation problems can occur when a worker stands for too long, especially on hard surfaces. Under the Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992, if a worker can sit while doing their job they should be free to sit if they wish. This will apply to the checkout desk and any seat supplied must be suitable for the task. regular breaks must be scheduled in and the type and frequency of tasks varied as much as possible.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

- Check to see if everyone where you work who can sit while they do their job has a seat – in particular check-out staff.
- Ask your GMB Workplace Organiser or GMB Safety representative what your employers' policy is towards regular breaks for those who work standing up.

EMPLOYER'S RESPONSIBILITY – RISK ASSESSMENT

Management have a clear responsibility under law for workers' health, safety and welfare. The two most important laws are the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, which gives employers a duty of care to all employees, and the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 under which the employer must carry out risk assessments. Risk assessments are designed to look at dangers in the workplace, assess the risk associated with the danger, evaluate the seriousness of any outcome and then look to eliminate or at least reduce the risk. Risk assessments should be carried out by a competent person who should have the knowledge and experience to properly deal with issues and the confidence to ensure preventative measures are introduced. Some of the dangers encountered in the retail industry, such as lifting and carrying or violence are obvious. Others may be not so apparent, such as sitting or standing for too long.

Since 2005 the risk assessment within a store should also cover Fire Safety. This should be part of every shop worker's induction training and should specify evacuation procedure, emergency exits and assembly points, identify fire marshals, regular testing of the alarm, and the occasional fire drill.

GMB Safety representatives have the right to be involved in all risk assessments, which should be relevant to each individual shop and not just tick sheets issued centrally from head office. GMB Safety representatives can bring their local knowledge and practical experience when risk assessments are being carried out.

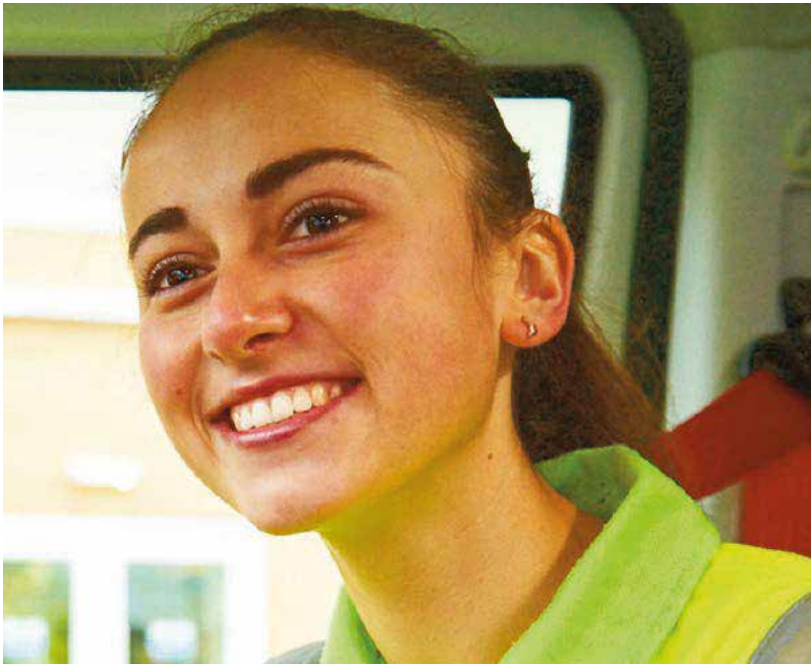
THE ROLE OF THE GMB SAFETY REPRESENTATIVE

GMB Safety representatives have lots of legal rights in the workplace. These include the right to establish a properly constituted Safety committee where meaningful consultation between employers and GMB Safety representatives acting on behalf of GMB members can take place. These meetings can ensure GMB involvement in risk assessments, the supply of PPE, drawing up violence and bullying policies and looking at accident statistics with a view to reducing them.

In addition GMB Safety representatives have the right to inspect the workplace on a regular basis, investigate accidents and talk in private with GMB members who have particular health, safety and welfare problems and then raise these with the appropriate manager.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

- Make sure as many people as possible where you work join GMB and get involved in making your GMB workplace a safer and healthier place to be.



GMB SAFETY REP'S CHECKLIST

YES NO

Have risk assessments been carried out in your shop/depot/
workplace?

☐☐

Have the risk assessments been done by a competent person?

☐☐

Are regular fire evacuation drills carried out?

☐☐

Has comprehensive manual handling training been given?

☐☐

Has PPE been issued, free, as required by the risk assessment?

☐☐

Are arrangements in place to deal with temperature changes?

☐☐

Do you get a break from sitting or standing too long at a task?

☐☐

Are the floors kept clean, tidy and well maintained?

☐☐

Is there a violence at work policy?

☐☐

Is the violence at work policy followed by the employer?

☐☐

Are you confident that your employer would resolve bullying &
harassment issues?

☐☐

Do managers consult the workforce on health, safety and welfare
issues?

☐☐

Is there a properly constituted Safety committee in your
workplace?

☐☐

This list is not exhaustive and there may be a need to raise other concerns with
management or involve your Regional Health & Safety Officer.

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