

Retail Sales up 3 Months in a Row

“Retail sales grew by 2.2% in July against July 2012, making it 3 months of year on year growth in a row”

The British Retail Consortium also reports that this was the greatest July increase since 2006, with online sales growing 7.9%. January & April both saw falls. The BRC attributes some of this rise to successes in major sporting events and the consequent feel good factor.

The warm weather has also contributed along with strong discounting and the availability of great offers for customers. Whilst these figures are very welcome the BRC recognised that retailers still face considerable issues and the forward picture is remains variable.

Zero-Hours Contracts Reach Milestone

“The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development reports that up to £1m workers could be on zero-hours contracts”

Zero-hours contracts are those where the worker is not guaranteed any hours or pay. The CIPD claims 3% to 4% of the UK workforce is on such contracts, however 14% of those report that they are receiving insufficient hours.

The CIPD figures conflict sharply with those from the Office for National Statistics who claim that are around 250,000 (less than 1% of the workforce). Retail and health sectors have seen the greatest rise in zero-hours contracts as they are seen to provide the necessary flexibility in the current climate. Employees especially those with children, carers and students find that such contracts allow them to balance work and other commitments.

Companies Fined for Major Blaze Failures

“2 major companies were responsible for a major blaze in Leeds which led to the evacuation of 6 homes, a major road closure & gas supplies being cut-off”

Northern Gas Networks Operations Ltd (NGNO) & Morgan Sindall (Infrastructure) plc (MSI) both neglected safety measures when a new section of gas mains needed to be installed during a major construction project. Welding worked sparked a fire that sent 20-foot flames into the sky. HSE found that 2 subbies were only competent in specific parts of the job and neither fully understood the overall work being carried out.

NGNO was fined £35,000 with £8,453 costs for a single offence & MSI was fined £50,000 with £12,900 costs for a single offence.

For full details go to:-

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/press/2013/rnn-yh-northerngas-morgansindall.htm>

Insurance Fraud Exceeds £1bn

“Association of British Insurers reports that insurance claim fraud amounted a record £1.1bn in 2012”

The ABI found that nearly 2,400 fraudulent or false claims are made each week, amounting to around £21m. Figures show that the most frequent form of fraud is home insurance claims with over 50,000 discovered with a value of over £95m. However this figure pales into insignificance compared to the value of false motor claims which amounted to over £600m.

The ABI stated it is continuing its robust zero-tolerance approach and bringing the full weight of the law to bear on anyone found to be making false claims, as well as blacklisting offenders.

Both the ABI & a survey by GoCompare confirm that the compensation culture continues to take hold in the UK. The Ministry of Justice says that the UK is the world's whiplash capital with personal injury claims up 60% between 2006-12.

Can You Listen in on Employee Calls?

“You might want to listen in on the calls your employees are conducting with your customers, is this allowable?”

These circumstances are regulated by the Data protection Act 1988 (DPA) but more specifically the Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice) (Interception of Communications) regulations 2000. The regulations permit you to listen in without an employees consent but the employees must be aware that their calls may be monitored from time to time. Secret monitoring without this knowledge is wholly different scenario.

The Employment Practices Code permits secret recording only when (1) A serious crime or equivalent malpractice suspected and (2) any notification would prejudice the investigation. Generally the guidance is don't secretly monitor, include a clause in your contract which allows monitoring without consent & the above situation is covered anyway.

Firms Fined for N. Devon Quarry Blast

“2 Companies have been fined after a quarry explosion sent rocks flying 200 metres into the air & onto a public road causing damage to waiting cars”

Falling debris landed well outside of designated danger zones during the incident at Brayford Quarry on 24/02/11 & narrowly avoided striking a workman who had halted traffic whilst the blasting took place. HSE found serious control failings.

WCD Sleeman and Sons Ltd, of Valley View, Vallis Park, Frome, Somerset, was fined £20,000 and ordered to pay £17,000 in costs after pleading guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

Quarry operator Hanson Quarry Products Europe Ltd of Castle Hill, Maidenhead, Berkshire, was fined £20,000 with £14,000 costs after pleading guilty to single a breach of the Quarries Regulations 1999. For full details go to:-

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/press/2013/rnn-sw-wcd-sleeman-hanson.htm>