

When is disciplinary action appropriate?

In my opinion, disciplinary action is only justified when managers have fulfilled their basic safety obligations to employees first, and have provided adequate training, supervision and guidance.

Of course if discipline is applied in the right circumstances it sends out a strong message that Senior Management is watching, concerned and expects workers to do the right thing.

But can discipline be used as part of the follow up to an injury?

It's critical to understand that before administering progressive discipline, managers and supervisors should evaluate how well they themselves have fulfilled their basic obligations to employees.

To me if there is any doubt or if the system has failed, disciplinary action is not justified. Taken the wrong way disciplinary action can be seen as punishment and this may cause a down turn in moral and a reduction in the reporting of incidents in fear of action against the employee.

With the above point in mind what I believe needs to be decided before action is taken is 'when is disciplining someone justified', and this must include the two, three or four other employees who make the same mistake each week.

So how do we do this? I personally believe we need to clearly distinguish between deliberate breaches from ones where there has been a lack of knowledge, awareness or understanding!

Once an individual has been trained and is then disregarding that training then discipline maybe in order. But only after the root cause(s) have been established;

Muscles may give, bones may break, individuals slip/ trip and fall and it's not always due to carelessness.

Determining the root cause is critical, because failure to do so may result in a kickback via an Industrial Tribunal and as we all know Tribunals are time consuming and costly in more ways than one.

In order to demonstrate that management is really committed to the safety of its workers, they must provide and get involved with, and add to, the education and training of employees and they need to provide reminders (signs and notices, and conduct safety tours etc...)

To the individual the most influential person in their daily working life is their direct line manager, so they need to be clear that they have a responsibility to ensure that your message is getting through.

As I see it supervision and a clear understanding of the job role is essential and before we dish-out disciplinary action we need to check the facts and establish the root cause. However Employees who are obviously disregarding the rules and are putting themselves and others at risk need to be brought to book.



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