

Health and safety prosecutions triple in past year

Health and safety prosecutions against bosses have rocketed three-fold over the past year, research from a City of London law firm revealed yesterday.

Figures from the Health and Safety Executive show that 46 company directors and senior managers were prosecuted in the year to March 31, 2016, compared with 15 in the previous year.

Of the 46 prosecutions, 34 found were found guilty, resulting in 12 prison sentences. The longest prison sentence imposed was two years.

According to Clyde & Co, the Square Mile legal practice that analysed the figures, the number of employees prosecuted has fallen, with the executive taking action against just one individual employee during that time compared with ten in the previous year. The majority of director prosecutions related to small and medium-sized businesses. However, the law firm pointed out that recent "game changing" sentencing guidelines that included turnover-related fines had affected directors at businesses of all sizes.

Separate research from the lawyers showed that the total value of fines imposed in the wake of HSE prosecutions in the first six months since the guidelines were introduced (February 1, 2016) had risen by 43 per cent compared with the same period in the previous year. HSE figures showed that fines totalled £20.6 million from February 2016 to August 2016, compared with £14.4 million in 2015. That figure did not include sentences imposed in cases prosecuted by local authorities and, anecdotally, Clyde & Co analysts maintained that the true figure was likely to be higher.

There has been a recent spate of large high-profile fines. Network Rail was fined £4 million, Foodles Production was fined £1.6 million for an incident involving the Hollywood star Harrison Ford, and Merlin Entertainments received the highest fine to date of £5 million in relation to a rollercoaster accident.

Source: The Times