AI and Risk Assessment – does it work?

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How can emerging tools, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and software programmes, build trust in the risk assessment process and make the life of the health and safety professional easier?

These were the questions explored in the afternoon session of Ibec's occupational safety and health (OSH) seminar held in Kildare recently. Wayne Beck, managing director of IProtectU, who provide EHS software solutions, reminded delegates of how common risk assessments are in workplaces.

Up to 76% of workplaces across the EU complete risk assessments regularly. Only 43% of these use digital technologies – anything from personal computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones to computerised equipment or machinery – in their risk assessments.

What this means is that all these technologies require risk assessments, and with less than half of workplaces meeting this requirement, it highlights a growing need for a better way to manage them.

Risk assessments need to be dynamic, explained Wayne. They need to be continuous, ongoing and reflect changing circumstances and situations. And they need to be linked to other safety documentation, for example procedures, training, preventative and corrective actions. All of this makes the case for having software which can do this, he explained.

Integration is key

The difficulty with the old model of pen and paper, or Word and Excel style risk assessments, is that they are static, he noted. They quickly become out of date and are often stored across multiple locations. What is necessary is a single point tool, which can manage all of your data, including a live risk register, risk assessments, incidents, audits, training, actions, performance indicators and alerts. "The gap is integration, not awareness", he told the audience.

To understand the importance of integration, he gave the example of a company completing a travel risk assessment for staff travelling abroad on business. An integrated system can pull in information on security risks, weather updates, it can track the locations of employees whilst they are abroad for their safety, and it can be updated in real time, and shared quickly with relevant employees, he explained. A static system cannot.

Agreeing with the need for a more proactive approach to risk assessment using AI, Ed Harnett of Habitus Health explained how it can be used in manual handling risk assessments. Their platform, he explained, can use AI-powered video assessments which can identify hidden risks and eliminate them in real time, whilst providing office and manual workers with instant reports and solutions.

Delving further into the practical application of AI for health and safety professionals, Elaine Bowers and Darrell Fernandes of Ibec Academy spoke conversationally on how it can be used. For example, when drafting policies, developing risk assessment or planning a framework for training. Also, for those who are lecturing it can be helpful to draft exam questions. Copilot was given as one example of a tool which is used.

Ultimately, Elaine and Darrell agreed that all these tools require human oversight and a level of competence to review and check anything which is produced. "The human judgement element is essential", they concluded.

More information:

iProtectU health and safety software: *https://iprotectu.com/*

Habitus Health: *https://www.habitushealth.net/*