

LAZY WORKERS ESCAPING PUNISHMENT OVER SICKIES

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A quarter of small businesses are so scared about being sued that they are refusing to tackle their own lazy staff.

According to a survey by Employment Law Advisory Services (ELAS), one in four small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) has far more staff throwing "sickies" than it has taken action against.

Yet almost nine out of ten businesses said they would discipline their workers if they were legally confident to do so.

Now ELAS has come up with a possible solution by devising a piece of software to help employers stay on the right side of the law.

Lawyers at the firm have devised a personnel package which not only keeps a record of workers' sick days, but alerts managers when absenteeism levels become a problem.

It then guides them, step by step, through the correct disciplinary procedures to take.

"Many companies these days are so convinced that employment law is weighted on the side of employees that they are afraid to tackle what are serious issues in the workplace," said Peter Mooney, head of consultancy at ELAS.

"This survey shows that for a large number of businesses, that means suffering at the hands of lazy workers rather than face up to issues such as excess absenteeism.

"They are so scared that they will end up in court for tackling an issue head on, that they sit back and suffer when they don't need to."

ELAS surveyed 600 small businesses about their attitudes towards absenteeism and found that just over 25 per cent had significantly more staff whose attendance was a "serious problem" than they had taken action against.

Yet 88 per cent of firms claimed they would tackle lazy staff if they were confident what they were doing would not result in an expensive tribunal.

As well as giving employers that confidence to tackle problems they know exist, Employersafe can help spot other issues which managers might be less aware of.

For example, it can identify not only when the level of a worker's absence is too high, but also patterns in their absence, singling out those people who only fall ill, for example, on Mondays or Fridays. The software – which has been developed at a cost of £600,000 - even calculates just how much each workers' absenteeism is costing the company.

The software also reminds employers when contracts are due for renewal or review, guides them through how

to deal with pregnant workers and simplifies complex legal procedures into simple step by step action plans.

Using a simple traffic lights system, it alerts employers as to whether they are in the clear, have a legal issue which needs addressing, or whether they need to take urgent action to solve a potential crisis.

And because ELAS is the only company to offer both software and comprehensive legal advice hand in hand, whenever Employersafe finds a problem where on screen advice is not enough, it directs employers to call the company's 24-hour telephone helpline for support.

Mr Mooney, a senior consultant at Manchester-based ELAS, added: "This software acts as an extra legal brain working around the clock to keep businesses in the clear.

"It does not wait until you have a problem. It will spot the issue for you and, using very simple traffic lights, tell employers what is wrong and what they need to do to put things right.

"That way, employers needn't be scared to act when there is an issue, but can relax knowing that they are complying with the law at all times."

Note to editors

For more information, or to arrange an interview with Peter Mooney, please call Chris Marritt at Mason Media on 0151 707 4514 and 07908 214950.