



## **SDG 8, decent work and economic growth: Ensuring Safe Work Environments. The Case of Glas-seal NI Ltd**

Sustainable economic growth is a key development goal for businesses and nations. Achieving this growth relies on human capital, whether in the public or private sector. According to behavioural theories, a safe workplace is essential for productivity. Historically, labour rights and safety standards have evolved in response to workplace accidents. England was the first country to introduce workplace safety regulations, including the Factory Act of 1802, one of the earliest laws aimed at improving working conditions (History of Occupational Safety and Health n.d.).

Over time, additional regulations have enhanced workplace safety. The Factories Act of 1833 introduced government inspectors to enforce safety standards, while the Health and Safety at Work Act of 1974 established comprehensive guidelines for employers and employees (History of Occupational Safety and Health n.d.). Advances in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as helmets, gloves, and safety goggles, have also significantly reduced workplace injuries. But, according to an ILO (2024) report, many workers still face significant risks: 2.93 million workers have died due to occupational accidents and diseases, and at least 395 million workers have been injured (ILO 2024). To address workplace safety globally, ISO 45001:2018 was introduced as an international standard to ensure health and safety in workplaces (International Organization for Standardization 2024).

### **Workplace Accident at Glas-seal NI Ltd**

The glass industry plays a significant role in sustainability, as glass is 100% recyclable and reduces natural resource consumption. However, glass manufacturing presents unique workplace hazards like: heat exposure, injuries from machinery and equipment, chemical exposure, eye and hearing damage, ergonomic hazards, etc. To mitigate risks, companies must implement safety standards, conduct training programs, and provide appropriate PPE. Without these measures, workplace hazards can lead to injuries, absenteeism, low morale, and increased compensation costs.

In 2022, an employee at Glas-seal NI Ltd in Ballynahinch tragically lost his life due to inadequate safety measures. During the incident, a large pack of glass, known in the industry



as an ‘end-cap’, collapsed and fatally struck him. The company admitted to breaching health and safety regulations, highlighting the critical need for proper handling and storage of heavy materials in the glass industry (HSENI 2024).

The HSENI found that Glas-Seal (NI) Ltd did not have proper measures for the storage, handling, and processing of large glass packs. They also had insufficient measures to ensure the safe storage of end-caps, which posed a significant hazard. Additionally, employees were not properly trained to manage these risks. The company was fined £30,000 (HSM 2024).

As the HSENI inspector mentioned, this tragic accident would have been entirely preventable had proper safety measures been in place to securely store the large packs of glass. It is crucial for businesses to take appropriate measures for safety. For example, in this case, it was possible to handle the heavy goods to ensure their storage processes and safety systems were up to standard. At the same time, employees need to be well-trained to handle and process these heavy loads safely (HSM 2024).

Workplace safety is essential for ensuring the well-being of employees and sustaining productivity. The case of Glas-Seal NI Ltd illustrates the devastating consequences of inadequate safety measures and highlights the importance of regulatory compliance, training, and proactive safety protocols. Continuous improvements in safety standards and investment in protective equipment can significantly reduce workplace accidents and create a safer working environment for all employees, not only in glass manufacturing but in all other sectors.

### **Questions:**

1. What are the most common risks faced by workers and how can they be effectively mitigated?
2. How do regulatory frameworks such as ISO 45001 impact workplace safety?
3. What lessons can be learned from the workplace accident at Glas-Seal NI Ltd?
4. How can automation and AI-driven monitoring contribute to workplace safety improvements?
5. What role does leadership play in fostering a culture of safety within the company?
6. What additional steps can governments and industry regulators take to ensure compliance with workplace safety standards?

### **List of references:**



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Author: Teona Maisuradze  
t.maisuradze1@seu.edu.ge