

“Vandals broke into our workshop and badly damaged a vital piece of equipment – it halted production for nearly a fortnight.”

There are three reasons for equipment failures in the workplace:

- wear and tear, which should be managed by effective, preventive planned maintenance
- accidental damage
- malicious damage.

Both accidental and malicious damage can be minimised when employees are trusted and treated with respect.

Accidental damage can have a number of causes, including:

- not following safe working procedures
- overloading equipment, for example forklift trucks or electrical sockets
- rushing the job and cutting corners
- poor design of software/hardware interfaces
- lack of training
- being unaware of data confidentiality
- collisions involving internal transport
- poor stacking of goods
- objects falling from heights.

As with injury accidents, make sure you investigate all accidents and near misses to prevent a recurrence.

Malicious damage includes:

- theft
- embezzlement
- misuse of information and work equipment
- sabotage/industrial espionage
- acts of recklessness.

Malicious damage is generally premeditated, but in some instances can be the result of workplace stress or conflicts.

Tips

- Once you've identified problems, assess their negative impacts on the business. Then, decide on and implement effective control measures, for example:
 - put in place clearly defined HR and security policies
 - introduce a positive, fair-blame culture that includes praising people for doing things right
 - include regular walkabouts by managers.
- Create a pleasant working environment, using ergonomic techniques.
- Encourage the objective reporting of damage accidents, near misses, errors, mistakes and violations.
- Develop specific instruction and training programmes aimed at minimising acts of damage.

- From a security viewpoint, consider:
 - access control
 - spot checks or searches
 - surveillance (CCTV) systems
 - inventory checks
 - managing access to keys
 - monitoring email and telephone usage
 - protecting your intellectual property.
- Provide adequate supervision at all times.
- Be aware of human reliability and human error concepts.

Useful link

IOSH free booklet, 'Promoting a positive culture: a guide to health and safety culture'
www.iosh.co.uk/files/technical/PromotingAPosCulture%2Epdf