



## **Water Management Society Guidance**

### **Competence – a guide for employers**

Employers have a duty to ensure that any person who carries out a task, as part of his employment, is competent. If a person is being trained, a competent person must supervise that person until he can carry out his work effectively and safely.

This duty also extends to people who employ contractors. A duty holder must be able to show that his / her organisation has done enough to reassure itself that the contractors it has engaged are competent.

#### **Definition of Competence.**

A competent person requires three main attributes:

the ability to carry out and complete tasks effectively  
the ability to work safely alone and/or with others  
the knowledge of his / her limitations

For many positions in the water treatment industry and other related disciplines (risk assessors, consultants, water treatment chemists etc.) the person must also have the ability to communicate well.

#### **Recognising Competence.**

The qualities sought when establishing an individual's competence (as defined above) include that the person:

- has undergone appropriate training
- is sufficiently experienced to carry out the activity effectively and safely
- possesses the ability to communicate verbally and in writing
- has the ability to use his/her experience to work safely in unusual situations (eg when carrying out risk assessments)
- has demonstrated the ability to manage time (their own and perhaps other people's time)
- is able to meet deadlines without compromising safety

Competence is recognised in a practical way. This means that on-the-job assessment is required in order to show that the employee/sub-contractor has the ability to work in a safe manner.

Competence cannot be assessed in the classroom. While training is part of being competent, that training does not have to be formal, classroom training; it can be on-the-job training. There are many people who work effectively and safely and have no formal qualifications at all. However, it is most unlikely that consultants, risk assessors, etc., will have no formal qualifications, and most will be professional people (most commonly scientists and engineers). They may be members of professional bodies, such as The Water Management Society, or even learned

associations such as The Royal Society of Chemistry. Even these people, however, will need to be able to show they are able to work safely and effectively.

### **Proving Competence**

A formal strategy must be put in place in order to demonstrate that individuals are competent, or that competent people are being employed. This will vary depending on whether the person is a contractor, or a direct employee.

This would also apply to a contractor who wished to be able to prove his/her competence to a client.

The basic requirements will be:

1. *References from customers (for contractors).* It is good practice to develop a habit of asking for these. A contractor should hold a portfolio of suitable references to produce as proof of competence. For direct employees of a contractor, line-managers within that business should be able to provide reassurance of a person's ability to work safely. For the self-employed, their present customers could be used.
2. *Legionella Control Association (LCA) membership* for service providers. Companies that are members of the LCA have a commitment to ensure their employees are competent.
3. *On-the-job checking on a regular basis.* When first employing a contractor their ability should be checked when introducing them to the site and ensuring they can work safely. For direct employees, a supervisor should check his/her work frequently and keep a record of the findings. In the case of a contractor, a site contact could be asked to do this if proof is required of ability or the ability of one of the contractor's employees.

### **Recording Competence**

Finally, it will be necessary to be able to show that every person employed is competent to do the job they have been employed to do. Even though all of the above may have been carried out, the person may be involved in a lost time accident. Proof may be required that everything practicable had been done to allow managers to believe the person was competent. This means that records will need to be maintained of all actions and observations. Those records need to be kept up to date [dated and signed], so be prepared to readdress all these aspects on a regular basis, at least annually or better every 3-6 months and whenever there are changes to personnel or their work.