Modern slavery in business – what it means for you

Modern slavery is not something we expect to hear too often in 21st century Britain, but a report in 2013 titled it ‘It Happens Here’ revealed shocking findings that propelled the Government to act.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was introduced to allow courts to process cases which include human trafficking and forced labour, establishing them as serious criminal offences and maximum punishment.

While most UK businesses will feel so far removed from such cases and have nothing to do with slavery or trafficking themselves, supply chains could pose more of a risk. The most likely examples come from sourcing cheap goods from factories in developing countries, with workers operating for next-to-nothing in heinous conditions.

The Act serves as a measure that will require businesses to be transparent about what they’re doing, right down the supply chain. It’s no longer acceptable for businesses to claim they didn’t know what was going on, or ignore issues, let alone benefit or gain profit from the ill-treatment of employees or those working on its behalf.

Many businesses are already taking action to promote ethical practices and policies, however more needs to be done to ensure transparency.

All large businesses in the UK (private and public sector, with an annual turnover of £36m or more) are now required to produce a slavery and human trafficking statement each financial year. This statement will detail the steps they’re taking to ensure there’s no modern slavery in their own business and in supply chains.

The Government advises that all businesses, not just those with a turnover exceeding £36m, should do more to obliterate modern slavery, not just because they’re legally obliged to but because they know it’s the right thing to do.

In addition to protecting human rights and vulnerable workers, the Government has set out a number of business benefits including:

- Protecting and enhancing an organisation’s reputation and brand
- Protecting and growing the organisation’s customer base, as more customers seek out businesses with higher ethical standards
- Improves investor confidence
- Better staff retention and loyalty base
- Developing more stable and innovate supply chains

Find out more about Modern Slavery Act 2015.