

# A clear solution to glass partition safety



Scott Sinden, managing director at ESG, looks at the aesthetic benefits of glass partitioning, and considers the Health and Safety regulations of glass safety materials within the workplace.

**H**SE L24 Workplace Regulation 14 is a legal requirement, introduced to prevent serious injury to persons through accidental collision with glazing at work.

The code of practice states that when a risk to health and safety is presented by glazing, the glass must be made of safety materials. In most cases, this means every window or glazed area in a wall, partition, door, or gate (which is less than 800mm from floor level) and/or adjacent to a door should be made from a safety material or protected against breakage.

Whenever glass is used within the workplace, it is imperative that companies carry out a risk assessment. This is a key factor in determining whether the area of glazing in question presents a risk to the health and safety of employees, customers or any other visitors.

Aesthetic features such as glass partitioning are often situated in places where contact with the glass is likely, as well as areas where serious injury could occur. In the past, some businesses have been found in breach of these regulations, simply through a lack of awareness.

These instances occur when the glass in the workplace has not been protected against breakage, or has been made without safety materials, such as laminated or toughened glass, causing the glass to shatter into large pieces – sometimes resulting in serious injury.

Glass partitioning systems can help to create the perfect office environment,

combining function with the clear, aesthetic benefits of glass. Partitioning provides an office divide, allowing for unobstructed vision while ensuring that individual offices retain their privacy.

Panels of glass can also be placed alongside one another, either in straight lines or curved formations, in order to create virtually seamless, aesthetically-pleasing architecture.

As glass partitioning becomes a more practical and attractive solution within the office, it is also important to understand the Health and Safety regulations covering the use of glass in the workplace. Although glass partitions are attractive additions for an office, the type of glass used could affect the safety of employees.

## Safety glass materials

Safety glazing material must conform to BS EN 12600 Class 2 in doors and side panels over 900mm wide, and Class 3 in those less than 900mm wide. Low level glazing must also comply with a minimum of BS EN 12600 Class 3. This entails the use of laminated, toughened or safety-wired glass, or plastic glazing sheet that meet BS EN 12600, or glass with plastic film applied, so that the pane of glass with the film meets BS EN 12600 Class 1 or 2.

In order to ensure that existing glazing conforms to these safety requirements it is necessary to check if the glass installed is laminated or toughened glass, plastic glazing sheet, or safety-wired glass to comply with requirements for impact safety.

Of course, installing glass that has not been rigorously checked is very illadvisable – the consequences could be horrendous.

A popular solution to meet HSE safety requirements is the use of fire-resistant safety glass. This will not only address the importance of people's safety, but will also comply with recent government Building and Fire Regulations, to meet the demand for fire resistant safety glass within the office workplace. A physically robust safety material such as fire resistant safety glass can be supplied to offer integrity only or integrity and full insulation.

Using safety materials such as toughened and laminated glass in partitions will not only provide the attractive aesthetic looks of glass, but will also improve the overall safety of anyone who is in contact with it.

Specialist glass such as toughened-laminate combines the strengths of toughened glass, which is normally five to seven times stronger than ordinary float glass, and when broken, breaks into small harmless fragments, with those of laminate.

This means that if a panel of toughened-laminate is broken, the polyvinyl butyral (PVB) layer between the glass keeps the fragments bonded together and therefore the panel remains in place rather than leaving a void.

The use of fire safety, toughened, laminated or toughened-laminated glass throughout the workplace, especially in glass partitions could, in the event of an accident, prevent serious injury.

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