

Construction company avoids illegal working fines with online ID authentication service

Even though identity fraud is a growing menace, many companies in the construction sector remain unaware of the importance of conducting identity checks. To complicate matters, UK-based construction companies generally deploy a diverse workforce comprising their own staff as well as workers employed by subcontractors. In turn, this makes it difficult to establish who is actually present at any given moment on any given site. Few industry participants are aware that construction companies are considered the legal employer of all individuals who work on their behalf. Moreover, they are expected to be aware of the identity of each of 'their' workers. The UK Border Agency regularly fines construction companies for illegal working, and fines can be as high as £10,000 for each case uncovered. Often the recipients of these fines were unaware that the ID documents in question were forged. While they may have acted in good faith, the fine is nevertheless theirs. After all, making a copy of a document is not the same as conducting an ID check. But if companies can demonstrate to have complied with the law by checking an ID document they can acquire a statutory excuse and avoid penalties.

The opening up of international borders has caused the number of foreign nationals working to increase. Of course, the ID documents and work permits issued to foreign nationals are not the same as those used in the UK. So how do you know if the ID document presented by a foreign worker is valid? For that matter, how do you know if a worker employed by a subcontractor is who he claims to be?

"In the past, we made a copy of someone's ID document, thinking this would be enough".

One of the first construction companies to implement a solution that allowed it to avoid fines while complying with prevailing legislation is J.P. Van Eesteren B.V. (part of TBI Bouw in the Netherlands). J.P. Van Eesteren realises construction projects throughout the Netherlands, focusing on commercial and industrial construction, residential construction, urban regeneration, restoration, conversion, maintenance and renovation. The organisation has been involved in several highly prestigious projects, including the redevelopment of the Dutch Central Bank building in Rotterdam, the development and renovation of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and the renovation of the Dutch Lower House in the Hague.



Daniel Suess (Keesing Reference Systems) & Arjan Hamburg (JP Van Eesteren)

Arjan van Hamburg, Head of QHSE at J.P. Van Eesteren, first came across Keesing Reference Systems while searching the internet for a viable solution.

Van Hamburg: "Keesing offers a variety of

products and services that help prevent identity fraud, including ID DocumentScan. In the past, we made copies of ID documents, thinking this would be enough to comply with legal requirements. We were completely unaware that we were also required to conduct an identity check.

The Dutch Health and Safety Inspectorate visited several of our construction sites this year. Unfortunately these inspections showed that the ID documents of several workers employed by subcontractors were not in order". J.P. Van Eesteren was nevertheless held accountable. This highlights that keeping a copy of an ID document simply is not sufficient.

"We can check ID documents without having to leave the office".

To prevent identity fraud and illegal working, J.P. Van Eesteren has since taken out a subscription to ID DocumentScan, an online solution for the verification and filing of ID documents. "ID DocumentScan proved to be an ideal solution: it allows us to authenticate ID documents from the office while enabling subcontractors to put people to their work. As the programme is easy to use, we were able to use it straightaway", according to Van Hamburg. J.P. Van Eesteren works with many subcontractors and is responsible for the entire workforce deployed on site. This includes workers employed by subcontractors. The organisation has informed all its subcontractors of the need to conduct compliant identity checks; it has also set up a special ID DocumentScan project group (which forms part of the QHSE department). Van Eesteren employees can use the system by submitting a scan of an ID document presented by a worker employed by a subcontractor. To this end, a special email address is used. The project group subsequently verifies the document, among others by conducting automated checks. Using ID DocumentScan, the team is able to confirm the authenticity and validity of the ID document, often within a matter of minutes.

"We set up a project group because we believe the construction team should not be tasked with conducting identity checks. However, the process we use does require subcontractors to provide us with copies of original ID documents for all (new) employees." To make sure this actually happens, all foremen must be aware of the importance of conducting identity checks. Van Hamburg: "They must be made to see the benefits. In the end, they are only required to submit a scan of an ID document." Once received by the project team, the scan is uploaded to ID DocumentScan. The team subsequently conducts a step-by-step check, the outcome of which is available within minutes. Suspect ID documents can automatically be forwarded to forensic experts in the Netherlands for a second opinion. Van Hamburg: "ID DocumentScan is easy to use. Just as important, it provides proof that an identity check has been conducted". ID DocumentScan automatically retains an inspection report, which can be shown to the UK Border Agency whenever the need arises.



Verification by project group

Preventing identity fraud by implementing practical solutions

Van Eesteren recently conducted a random check of some 15 workers. Using ID DocumentScan, the team was able to discern that two ID documents were not in order. Using the system allows the organisation to (i) protect itself against illegal working, (ii) meet current legislation and (iii) avoid high fines.

Source: Actief (*Specialist magazine for the building and construction sector in the Netherlands*), September 2008.