

## How to get sued - an idiot's guide

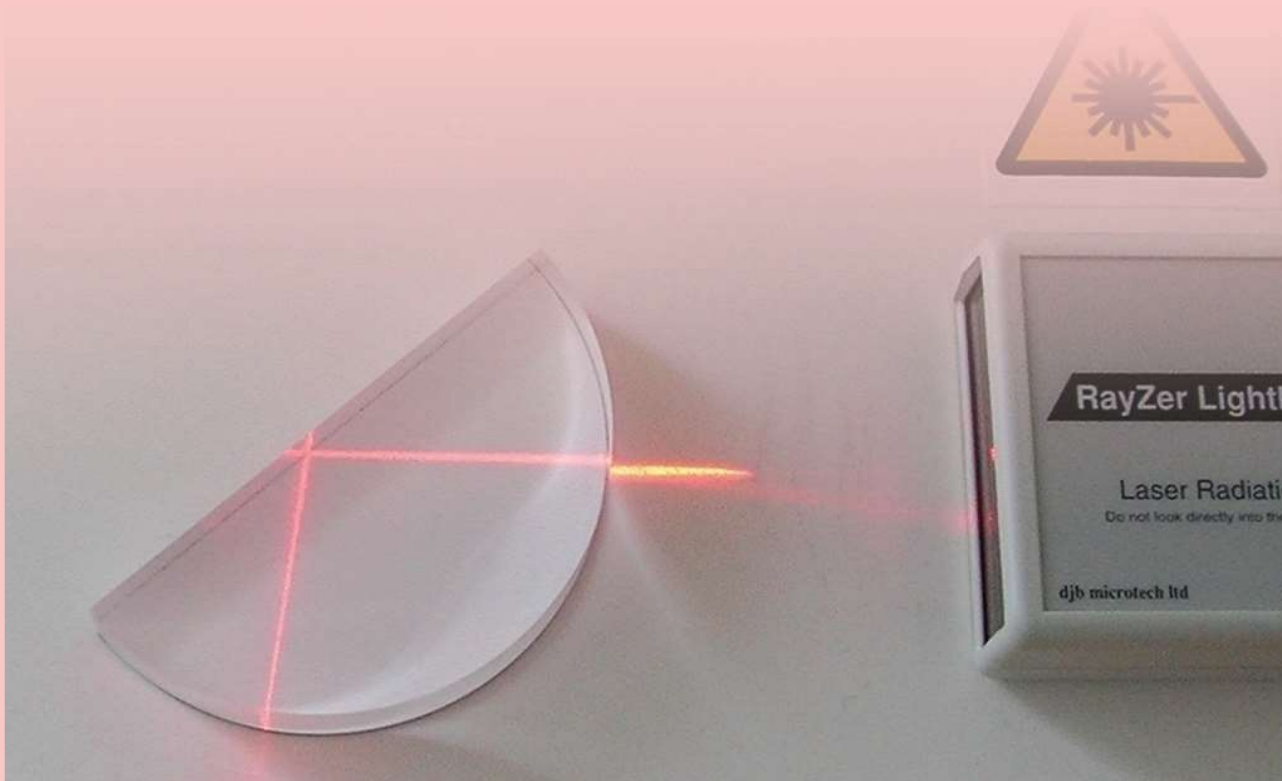


Figure 1 - Safe, effective school laser raybox.

Very few teachers and technicians find themselves in court due to health and safety breaches, but if you really want to get in trouble, it can be done. All you need to do is disregard your employer's health and safety guidance. Suppose you are carrying out a demonstration with an alkali metal. This has been risk assessed and you have been instructed to use a safety screen, eye protection and a lump of material about 3 mm by 3 mm by 3 mm. (Note: this is not the full list of control measures for this experiment. Please consult the Hazardous Chemicals section of our website.) You perform the demo, it goes well and your pupils are impressed. Then the trouble starts. "Gonnae use a bigger bit?" says one of the children. Egged on, you repeat the experiment until a golf ball-sized piece causes a reaction that no safety screen can protect against. Had a freak accident occurred with the small piece, you would have the law on your side. You followed your employer's guidance. In using a golf ball-sized chunk, you stepped outside of this legal protection.

We came across a more subtle case recently. Figure 1 shows an effective, safe laser raybox. Lasers like this are entirely suitable for pupil use. They are Class 2: they give out only visible light and their power is such that should the light enter your eye, your natural aversion reflex - blinking or turning away - will kick in before any damage has been done. Supposing an equipment supplier sells a laser product that is more powerful than the Class 2 specification (we know of some on sale). What are the consequences of using such a laser? Your employer looks to SSERC for advice on such matters and SSERC says no. Advice on lasers is contained in our guide to Optical Radiation [1]. Do have a look at the section on school sources and, in particular what we have to say about safe laser use and laser pointers. If you buy and use a device that is deemed unsuitable and a pupil is harmed, or claims to have been harmed you could be in trouble. This is not to scare you - more to highlight the ways in which sensible teachers and technicians stay out of trouble.

### Reference

[1] <http://tinyurl.com/SSERC-OPTIC>.