

5 Tips for Effective Health and Safety Management

Health and safety compliance is an ever-present challenge for many businesses. Company directors must ensure they are providing a safe and healthy environment for employees and visitors. Documentation must be current and valid, all risks measured and controlled and staff need to be properly trained to deal with any aspect of health and safety which presents a significant risk. To effectively manage health and safety, all employers must understand that it's an ongoing process, not a short one-off project.

1 UNDERSTAND YOUR LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

All employers have a number of general health and safety responsibilities.

Competent Person

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires employers to appoint a 'competent person' or advisor. The role of the 'competent person' is to assist the employer in undertaking the measures needed to comply with the requirements of health and safety legislation. This person can either be an employee of the business or an external service or person.

General Risk Assessment

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, all employers must carry out an assessment of the risks to both employees and others. A risk assessment will identify any hazard that exists in the workplace and should develop strategies to reduce or remove the risk associated with the hazard. Employers must also carry out specific risk assessments on all activities which present significant risks.

Fire Safety Regulations

The Regulatory Reform (Fire safety) Order 2005 requires a risk based approach to fire safety at business premises. Fire certificates are no longer valid. The employer or owner is regarded as the 'responsible person' and is required to implement all of the following:

- ✓ Fire safety risk assessment
- ✓ General fire protective measures
- ✓ Fire management plan
- ✓ Staff training in fire safety (fire wardens, fire marshal and incident controller)

Health and Safety Policy

All organisations must draw up a health and safety policy. This is the document that sets out the strategy for managing health and safety. It will outline who is responsible for each aspect of the health and safety management process.

Health and Safety Training

The employer has a duty under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to ensure that staff are trained in their health and safety responsibilities so they can undertake their daily activities safely. Fire wardens and fire marshals in particular, should all receive regular training.

2 USE THE DOCUMENTATION - IT'S THERE FOR A REASON

Ensure you say what you do, do what you say and have the paperwork to prove it.

Enforcement authorities aren't looking for health and safety documentation that is in pristine condition and is filed away in the director's office. They want to see a well used document which is used and adhered to. Make sure that every employee can access the policy document and manual and make sure they are not afraid to use them.

3 ENSURE EMPLOYEES ARE INVOLVED IN HEALTH AND SAFETY

Do your workers feel they are involved in health and safety issues? The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that 60% of UK workers are never consulted about health and safety issues and therefore they feel excluded from the decision process. Without the active support and cooperation of your employees, you cannot promote a positive health and safety culture.

To overcome this problem, organisations must ensure that all staff are involved in health and safety; ask them for suggestions on how to improve health and safety, and request feedback on the current processes that are in place. Appoint a representative that attends health and safety meetings, who can report the latest health and safety developments back to colleagues.

4 LEAD FROM THE TOP

If the commitment from the top is not there, then why should the employees take it seriously? Health and safety messages should cascade from the top down through the business. Senior management must follow health and safety processes at all times. Employees will notice if you do not follow the rules yourself.

5 TREAT HEALTH AND SAFETY AS AN ONGOING PROCESS, NOT A PROJECT

Complying with the minimum requirements of health and safety legislation is vital; however it's just the tip of the iceberg. Enforcement authorities don't just want to see the relevant documentation, they want to see a positive health and safety culture that is embedded in the organisation.

Organisations that take on a management approach to health and safety do not treat it as a 'separate' and disjointed function of the business. They focus their efforts on a holistic preventative strategy that is part of daily business.

CONCLUSION

Whether you're managing your health and safety in-house or working with an outside consultancy, you need to be getting it right. Failure to implement and provide evidence of the above can result in debilitating fines and damaging press coverage that can destroy your organisation's reputation. Many businesses are not able to recover after a health and safety prosecution. ***Don't wait until it's too late, act now.***

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