

Health and safety: Getting started

What is health and safety all about?

Health and safety is about preventing people getting hurt at work or becoming ill through work. Over 200 people a year lose their lives at work in Britain. Also, around 150 000 injuries are reported each year, and about 2 million suffer from ill health caused or made worse by work.

These things happen in normal workplaces - they could happen to you. Some basic thinking and acting beforehand can usually prevent them.

Health and safety measures do not have to be expensive, time consuming or complicated. Safer and more efficient working practices can often save you money but, more importantly, they can help to save lives.

This leaflet shows you some of the things which cause the more common accidents and harm to people's health. It lets you see what applies to your work activities, and tells you where to get more help and information. This is especially important if you are an employer, because you have legal responsibilities.

Why are there health and safety laws?

Because health and safety at work is so important, there are rules which require all of us not to put ourselves or others in danger. The law is also there to protect the public from workplace dangers.

Do health and safety laws apply to me?

Yes. To all businesses, however small, as well as the self-employed and employees.

Who enforces health and safety law?

Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or your local authority. For example:

- HSE at factories, farms and building sites;
- local authorities in offices, shops, hotels and catering, and leisure activities.

What do inspectors actually do?

They visit workplaces to check that people are sticking to the rules. They investigate some accidents and complaints but mainly they help you to understand what you need to do. They enforce only when something is seriously wrong.

Do I have to contact an inspector to get information?

No. HSE operates a confidential telephone information service called Infoline which is open Monday-Friday between 8 am and 6 pm. You can contact Infoline by telephone 0845 345 0055 or fax 0845 408 9566, or e-mail hse.infoline@natbrit.com. Or you can write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

How well do you manage health and safety?

Have you got health and safety under control?

Managing health and safety is little different from managing any other aspect of your business. You need to do a risk assessment (see Section 2) to find out about the risks in your workplace, put sensible measures in place to control them, and make sure they stay controlled.

Your health and safety policy clearly sets out how you manage health and safety in your workplace by defining who does what; and when and how they do it. Remember, keep it simple and actually put it into practice.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/smallbusinesses/must/policy.htm>

Does this affect me?

- Did you know all employers and self-employed people have to assess risks at work?
- Did you know employers with five or more employees have to record the significant findings of their risk assessment?
- Did you know employers with five or more employees should have a written health and safety policy?
- Did you know employers have a duty to involve their employees or their employees' safety representatives on health and safety matters?
- Did you know employers have to provide free health and safety training or protective equipment for employees where it is needed?
- Did you know it is likely you will need to register your business if you employ anyone? Contact Infoline for advice.
- Did you know it's the law to have employers' liability compulsory insurance if you employ anyone – and you should display the certificate?
- Did you know you need to display the health and safety law poster if you employ anyone? Or you can give each of your employees a copy of the same information in a leaflet called *Health and safety law: What you should know*.
- Did you know you have to report injuries at work and other incidents? For information on which ones and who should report them, see Section 19.

- Did you know you need to provide toilets, washing facilities and drinking water for all your employees, including those with disabilities? These are basic health, safety and welfare needs.
- Did you know you must have competent advice to help you meet your health and safety duties. This can involve workers from your business, external consultants or a combination of both.

What is risk assessment?

Your risk assessment

Risk assessment helps you protect your workers and your business, as well as comply with the law. It helps you focus on the risks that really matter – the ones with the potential to cause real harm.

A risk assessment is simply a careful examination of what in your work could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. The law does not expect you to eliminate all risk, but you are required to protect people 'so far as is reasonably practicable'.

When thinking about your risk assessment, remember:

- a hazard is anything that may cause harm, such as chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, an open drawer;
- the risk is the chance, high or low, that somebody could be harmed by these and other hazards, together with an indication of how serious the harm could be.

Step 1 Identify the hazards

First you need to work out how people could be harmed. The risk assessment form available to download from [HSE's website](#) includes tips on how to spot the hazards that matter.

Step 2 Decide who might be harmed and how

Identify groups of people who might be harmed and how they might be harmed, eg 'shelf stackers may suffer back injury from repeated lifting of boxes'.

Step 3 Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions

Having spotted the hazards, you then need to decide what to do about them. Compare what you currently do with what's accepted as good practice. If there is a difference, list what needs to be done.

When controlling risks, apply these principles, if possible in this order:

- Try a less risky option.
- Prevent access to the hazard.

- Organise work to reduce exposure to the hazard.
- Issue personal protective equipment.
- Provide welfare facilities.

Step 4 Record your findings and implement them

If you employ five or more people, the law requires you to record your findings. You can use the risk assessment form from HSE's website: www.hse.gov.uk/risk to do this. When writing down your results, keep it simple.

If, like many businesses, you find that there are quite a lot of improvements that you could make, don't try to do everything at once. Make a plan of action to deal with the most important things first.

Step 5 Review your risk assessment and update if necessary

Few workplaces stay the same, so it makes sense to review what you are doing on an ongoing basis. Every year or so, formally review where you are to make sure you are still improving, or at least not sliding back. Set a date for the review and put it in your diary so you don't forget it.

Risk management website: www.hse.gov.uk/risk

What are the big issues?

The areas which are of most concern to HSE are:

- Lifting and handling
- Stress
- Slips, trips and falls
- Workplace transport
- Falls from a height

INSERT SOME STATS AND MAKE A VISUAL STATEMENT TO HIGHLIGHT THE TOP 5?

Do I have a problem with lifting and handling?

Do you suffer from sprains, strains and pains?

In Great Britain over a million people a year suffer from work-related back pain, repetitive strain injury (RSI) and similar problems affecting muscles, joints, and tendons. Many people hurt their back, arms, hands or feet lifting everyday loads, not just when the load is too heavy.

These injuries can happen in almost any workplace where people do repetitive, or forceful manual activities in awkward postures, for long periods of time. These can cause muscular aches and pains, which may be temporary, but if the work is not properly managed, and the early symptoms are not recognised and treated, they can become permanent. Damage can build up over time causing pain and discomfort in people's backs, arms, hands and legs.

Does this affect me?

- Does your work involve repetitive or heavy lifting, bending and twisting or repeating an action too frequently?
- Does your work involve exerting too much force or an uncomfortable working position?
- Do you work too long without breaks and is your working environment too hot or too cold?
- Do you have heavy workloads, tight deadlines and lack of control over the work and working methods?

Musculoskeletal disorders website: www.hse.gov.uk/msd/index.htm

Do I have a problem with stress?

Are you feeling stressed by your work?

There is a difference between **stress** and **pressure**. Everyone experiences pressure on a daily basis, and it often helps to motivate people and help them perform at their best. It's when there is too much pressure without the opportunity to recover that people start to experience stress. The HSE definition of stress is 'the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them'.

Stress at work can be tackled in the same way as any other risk to health – by identifying the hazards, assessing who is at risk and the level of risk, deciding how to manage the risk and putting the plans into action. Stress can be caused by: lack of control over the way people do their work, work overload (or underload), lack of support from managers, conflicting or ambiguous roles, poor relationships with colleagues (including bullying), or poor management of organisational change.

The benefits of tackling stress at work can include increased productivity and efficiency, lower staff turnover and sickness absence, and increased morale.

Does this affect me?

- Do you have a high staff turnover, low productivity or low morale?
- Have you noticed bullying, changes in behaviour, staff working late or increased sickness absence?
- Do your employees seem happy to come into work?
- Are you aware that some people are more vulnerable to stress and that situations at home can also affect how people cope with excessive pressure at work?

Stress website: www.hse.gov.uk/stress

Do I have a problem with slips, trips and falls?

What are the chances of slipping or tripping at work?

The most common cause of injuries at work is the slip or trip. They happen in all kinds of workplaces, but businesses such as food and catering report higher than average numbers. It's a particularly important subject if members of the public use your premises. The estimated cost to employers of all these injuries is over £500 million a year, and insurance only covers a small part of this. Effective solutions are often simple, cheap and lead to other benefits.

Does this affect me?

- Do you have floors which are, or can become, slippery, eg when wet?
- Is there spillage or contamination and is it dealt with quickly?
- Do people use unlit areas such as paths or yards in the dark?
- Are you having work done such as maintenance or alterations? It could introduce slipping and tripping hazards such as trailing cables.
- Do you use floor cleaning materials anywhere? Are the right methods and materials being used?

Slips and trips website: www.hse.gov.uk/slips

Do I have a problem with workplace transport?

What are the risks from transport in your workplace?

Every year about 70 people are killed and about 2500 seriously injured in accidents involving vehicles at the workplace. Being struck or run over by moving vehicles, falling from vehicles, or vehicles overturning are the most common causes. Often there is significantly more danger from vehicles in the workplace than on the public highway because the operating conditions are different.

Does this affect me?

- Do you have vehicles operating at your workplace? If so what kinds of vehicles are they?
- Are pedestrians separated from vehicle movements as much as possible?
- Are traffic routes suitable for the vehicles which have to use them? Are they clearly marked?
- Do you know who is allowed to drive or operate the vehicles? They should be trained and competent.
- Are loading and unloading operations carried out safely?
- Do you actively control driving behaviour?
- Are all vehicles properly maintained?

Workplace transport website: www.hse.gov.uk/workplacetransport/index.htm

Do I have a problem with falls from height?

Do you perform work at height and if so is it done safely?

There are around 60 deaths and just under 4000 major injuries each year because of falls from height. One of the main causes is falls from ladders. Make sure you consider the risks to all your workers, the work is planned, organised and carried out by competent people and you follow the hierarchy for managing risks. Make sure workers are properly trained and supervised, have the right equipment and know how to use it safely.

Does this affect me?

- Do you carry out simple maintenance or cleaning tasks that require working where you could hurt yourself if you fell?
- Can you avoid the need to work at height? Could the work be done using long-handled tools or by bringing it down to ground level?
- Do you have the most appropriate equipment for the job? It may often be safer to use a tower scaffold or mobile elevating work platform than a ladder.
- Is the equipment you have well maintained and do your employees know how to use it safely?

Falls from height website: www.hse.gov.uk/falls/index.htm

Further information

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995 Website: www.hsebooks.co.uk (HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops and free leaflets can be downloaded from HSE's website: www.hse.gov.uk.)

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055 Fax: 0845 408 9566 Textphone: 0845 408 9577 e-mail: hse.infoline@natbrit.com or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

This leaflet is available in priced packs of 00 from HSE Books, ISBN 0 7176 0000 0. Single copies are free and a web version can be found at: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg000.pdf.

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