

A man in a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie, wearing glasses, is looking down at a folder or stack of papers he is holding. The background is a blurred office interior with a grid ceiling and a circular light fixture. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

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Creating a Health and Safety Policy Guide for Businesses



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What is a Health and Safety Policy?

It is a legal requirement to have a documented health and safety policy outlining how your organisation plans to manage health and safety. It explains how you, as an employer, will approach health and safety in your businesses. Not only that it should clearly lay out who does what, when they do it and how they do it.

If you have more than five employees, you must write this policy down and keep a file of it. Although this isn't a legal requirement for business with fewer than five employees, it's extremely useful for you to do and ensures you are following best practices.

When created, this policy must be shared with your employees, and then you must inform them of any changes to it when they occur.

Who Creates a Health and Safety Policy?

A health and safety policy should be completed by a competent person who has ideally received training and is knowledgeable on health and safety matters. There is usually a person made responsible for this on site. This would ensure that the policy is fit for its purpose.

When and How Often Does a Policy Need to Be Reviewed?

Internationally, it's a requirement in many countries for a health and safety policy to be reviewed each year, especially when there have been significant changes in a business.

An annual review is the standard for most organisations. However, if an organisation undergoes frequent sweeping changes, the policy must be reviewed more regularly to ensure it remains relevant.



Guide for Creating and Implementing a Health and Safety Policy

Statement of Intent

This is the foundational element of a health and safety policy, a statement of intent which outlines your aims as a business for the management of health and safety.



This statement's primary purpose is to demonstrate your attitude towards the arrangements, practices and management systems that you will have to put in place in order to comply with health and safety legislation.

Employers or the most senior person responsible in the company must sign the Statement of Intent and review it regularly.

Clear Responsibilities for the Employer and Employees

Be sure to also lay out the responsibilities of both the employer and employee with regards to health and safety. Include details of specific people within the organisation who have a responsibility for health and safety management.

You must include details of how you will approach and delegate these duties, in order to prevent ill-health, accidents, injuries and death.

Arrangements for Health and Safety

There will need to be [arrangements made for health and safety](#), so you will also have to include a section for this. This section will outline how you will meet the commitments you have made in your Statement of Intent. Include any information on what exactly you'll do to remove or mitigate hazards and the associated risks in your workplace.

These sections can include detailed information regarding safety training, safety monitoring, accident investigation and reporting etc. Risks assessments are a prime example of a measure you'll be taking, and you will need to delegate the responsibility for who will carry out, document, monitor and review your risk assessments.

Access to Competent Advice

You must appoint a competent person to assist in the health and safety needs of the business. This person will have the necessary skills, knowledge, qualifications and experience needed to manage health and safety. This can be you, an employee or even someone from outside the business, such as a consultant.

Effective Communication of the Policy

Communication is the cornerstone of any great business, and the policy must be shown to employees and revised whenever the need arrives. This about the variety of means that employees will need to hear the information in order to assimilate it into their work.

Team meetings at each site or delivered via line managers are both effective options, and remember to share all health and safety information with any new joiners in the business.



Expert Tip:

Be sure to also identify who will be affected by the subject matter (employee, contractor, members of the public etc.) and explain how this will be addressed.



Societal Factors that Could Influence Your Organisations Health and Safety Policy

There are several external factors which will influence your health and safety policies and procedures, such as:

- ▶ Economic Climate
- ▶ Government Policy and Initiatives
- ▶ Industry / Business Risk Profile
- ▶ Globalisation of Business
- ▶ Migrant Workers
- ▶ Sickness and Incapacity

Economic Climate

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) sponsored research into the effects of economic downturn on health and safety performance during the most recent, and previous, recessions.

The key findings of the HSE and other research are that accident injury rates fall during periods of reduced economic activity.

This could be down to:

- ▶ An increase in average levels of experience (fewer new recruits / fewer young males) leads to a decrease in average risks of injury.
- ▶ Reduced 'work effort' as a consequence of falling levels of demand leads to a reduction in average working hours, lower levels of fatigue and a corresponding drop in average risks of injury.
- ▶ Reduced incentives for workers to report minor injuries.

There is also some conflicting evidence that 'corner cutting' by employers can lead to increasing rates of injury, because of reduced investment and training and the weaker bargaining position of workers due to higher unemployment.

The overall effect though is one of a reduction in accident injury rates. In the 1989-1993 UK recession the rate of reported major injuries fell by > 10%, and the numbers of injuries fell even further, because of the drop in employment levels. The effects were most pronounced in the construction and manufacturing sectors.

Government Policy and Initiatives

In addition to the introduction of legislation, the government can impact upon health and safety standards and priorities by focusing the resources of the Health and Safety Executive and other departments on specific issues.

Over the years, government departments and other agencies have introduced numerous policies and initiatives focused on the health and / or safety of workers.

The HSE is currently working to a ten-year strategy 'Protecting people and places' which is programmed to run from 2022 to 2032. There are five key areas in this strategy, including:

- ▶ Reduce work-related ill health, with a specific focus on mental health and stress.
- ▶ Increase and maintain trust to ensure people feel safe where they live, where they work and, in their environment.
- ▶ Enable industry to innovate safely to prevent major incidents, supporting the move towards net zero. They have a significant part to play in the safe delivery of the government's commitment to achieve net zero greenhouse gas by 2050.
- ▶ Maintain Great Britain's record as one of the safest countries to work in.
- ▶ Ensure HSE is a great place to work, and they attract and retain exceptional people.





Industry / Business Risk Profile

The risk profile of an organisation informs all aspects of the approach to leading and managing its health and safety risks.

Every organisation will have its own risk profile. This is the starting point for determining the greatest health and safety issues for the organisation. In some businesses the risks will be tangible and immediate safety hazards, whereas in other organisations the risks may be health-related, and it may be a long time before the illness becomes apparent..

Globalisation of Business

Profit is the driving force in capitalist society and the history of health and safety legislation is one of companies trying to find loopholes for commercial advantage.

A fall in the rate of profits in the industrialised world in the 1970s meant that many global businesses looked for new methods to lower costs and increase productivity.

Large chunks of manufacturing were outsourced to the Asia-Pacific region where wages were low and health and safety concerns non-existent.

Migrant Workers

The UK has an ageing population because of longer lifespans and reduced fertility rates. To be sustainable there will be a need for people to work longer and for an increased proportion of migrant workers.

Over 80% of migrant workers are under 35 and many are highly qualified with around 70% having studied in the UK before entering the workforce, often in highly skilled and well-paid sectors including banking, IT, education and medicine.

IOSH research in 2008 showed that many employers considered language barriers to be a problem but that 50% of the businesses surveyed had done nothing to improve health and safety communication to those with poor English language skills.

The Health and Safety Executive advice in this area is to focus on good training, communication (provided in other languages where possible), competence, and attitude towards health and safety.

Sickness and Incapacity

Sickness absence rates vary by gender, age, occupation, sector, region and the size of the workplace. Individuals who are out of work for long periods of time due to sickness experience a drop in incomes which can result in poverty and social exclusion and, the longer someone is not working the less likely they are to return to work - someone who has been off sick for 6 months or longer has an 80% chance of being off work for 5 years.

You can refer to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's guidelines PH19 for more information on how to help people return to work after short-term and long-term sickness and reduce recurring sickness absence.



Astutis Ltd

6 Charnwood Court
Parc Nantgarw
Cardiff
CF15 7QZ

Call: +44 (0)345 241 3685

Email: enquiries@astutis.com
www.astutis.com

Registered in the UK: 07349554



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