

Health and safety at work

A Guest Article by Nigel Lack
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Health and safety policies

Current legislation states that all employers must:

- provide a written Health and Safety Policy (if they employ five or more people)
- assess all the risks within their organisation to their employees, clients, partners, and indeed anybody who might be affected by their activities
- arrange for the effective planning, organisation, implementation, control, monitoring and review of their preventive and protective procedures to eliminate or minimise all risks
- ensure that everyone in their organisation has access to competent health and safety advice
- consult with all employees within their organisation on matters of health and safety.

Consequences of non-compliance

Failure to comply with the legislation can have very serious consequences, particularly for the named “competent person” dealing with health and safety. By signing the compulsory Health and Safety Law poster (which every organisation must display in the workplace), the competent person can be liable should things go wrong. If the poster is not signed then the liability rests with the owners/directors of the organisation.

So, now that you have read all that, you might be feeling a little uncomfortable, or even seriously concerned. But you needn't despair. There is a popular myth that health and safety law is too complicated, and that the current legislation is aimed against the practices of small business. There are many who are not compliant with all the ever-changing regulations, perhaps because they think that “it will never happen to me”, or perhaps because they regard it as simply another problem to deal with.

Benefits of compliance

The demands from Her Majesty's Health and Safety Executive might be there to ensure a safer and healthier environment for us all while at work. However, there are many hidden advantages for those organisations that gear themselves up towards compliance.

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Better systems usually lead to greater efficiency: simply having the correct policies in place and then following the necessary methodology will ensure many of the “best practices” companies need for growth.

Drawing up a policy

Many organisations look for the easiest option of copying a health and safety policy – maybe downloading one from the internet or asking an “expert” to put all they need in place to be compliant. Sadly, none of these options is actually any good, as these policies usually end up in a drawer or on a shelf and nobody within the organisation really knows anything about them. So the entire point of having a health and safety policy has been missed.

Health and safety at work involves everyone within a business and those who come in contact with it. The health and safety policy should not be an enormous document with a vast number of pages, as is often the case. All staff and management should be involved with, and also understand the process of how it concerns them, and those working around them.

Continued support needed

Management and staff must work together to ensure that their policy is workable and clearly understood by all. However, it does not need to be complicated. It is better to involve a third party who will work alongside and continue to support them, rather than have someone who will give the information required, and then expect it to be integrated without any help.

Policy content

If the policy contains a large amount of information that is not of any use to the people who are supposed to understand it, then there is no reason why they would enforce it. They will most probably never even read it.

For most organisations the type of policy required is no more than 20 pages. It must state how the legislation affects them and the steps taken to ensure a healthy and safe working environment. The policy is then underpinned by a full set of risk assessments. It is these assessments that must be carried out regularly, made known, and understood by everybody concerned.

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Advice and training

In many cases a certain amount of training will also be required. This again need not be onerous or expensive. However, it is very important to obtain the correct advice that will instigate the necessary actions.

Any changes to equipment, staff and premises and the introduction of new legislation will affect the policy and the risk assessments. Recording these assessments and ensuring that all staff are made aware of them, amending the policy, and arranging and recording relevant training are the main elements of the methodology mentioned above. And it is when these disciplines have been integrated into an organisation that a large amount of the groundwork required for expansion will already be in place.

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If you would like more information on any of the points covered in this Guest Article, please contact **TCii** on **020 7099 2621**.