



What is a Health and Safety Policy?

A health and safety policy is a statement of your general approach and commitment to health and safety, your aims with respect to health and safety, and details of the organisation and arrangements your company has in place to manage health and safety.

Why do I need a Health and Safety Policy?

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act (HASAW 1974) it is a legal requirement to prepare a written statement of health and safety policy and to review and revise this regularly. The HASAW Act also makes it a requirement for employers to publicise the policy statement and any revisions to employees.

A separate regulation, the Employers' Health and Safety Policy Statements (Exception) Regulations (1975) exempts organisations with fewer than five employees from the requirement to have a written health and safety policy.

So, if you have five or more employees (including part-time workers) you will need a written health and safety policy. Even with fewer employees it may still be worth having a simple written policy. It is a requirement of the occupational health and safety standard BS OHSAS 18001 to define and authorise a health and safety policy.

It also makes good business sense to have a health and safety policy. It doesn't take long to write one, and it is a useful check that suitable arrangements are in place to manage health and safety - and to stay within the law. An appropriate health and safety policy, well communicated, can enhance your organisation's reputation with customers, employees and the regulator.

What should a Health and Safety Policy include?

Your health and safety policy should include:

WHAT? A statement of general policy: your commitment to providing a safe and healthy place of work, to comply with legal requirements, to consult employees on matters affecting their health and safety, to ensure all employees are competent to do their job safely, providing training where necessary, and to review and revise the policy as necessary at regular intervals. This statement should show a commitment to continuous improvement.

WHO? Responsibilities: named people with responsibility for overall health and safety (normally a senior manager or board member), for day-to-day health and safety management (such as line managers), and for specific roles such as first-aiders and fire-wardens.

HOW? Arrangements: the practical measures in place for planning, organising and controlling hazards, for monitoring compliance, and for measuring the effectiveness of health and safety management. For example, this could explain who will carry out risk assessments, who will approve action required as a result of risk assessments, and how often risk assessments should be reviewed.

How detailed does the Health and Safety Policy need to be?

The health and safety policy should be appropriate to the size and type of risks that the organisation faces. The sample policy provided by the HSE (www.hse.gov.uk/business/policy-statement.pdf) is 11 pages long - this is enough for a small or medium business with no major hazards. An organisation with specialist hazards - such as dangerous chemicals, or lifting equipment - may need something more detailed.

How often does my Health and Safety policy need to be reviewed?

The HASAW Act states that the health and safety policy should be revised "as often as may be appropriate". In order for the policy to remain relevant and appropriate you should review it when:

- Health and safety legislation changes;
- New information becomes available about existing hazards;
- Working practices change, which may introduce new hazards, for example using new equipment, new substances, or a new contractor;
- Anyone named in the health and safety policy leaves the organisation or changes their role;
- Annually, if there has been no other apparent reason to review the policy.

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Is a Health and Safety policy expensive?

For a small organisation it is relatively straightforward to write a health and safety policy using the HSE guidance at www.hse.gov.uk/business/policy.htm. The policy must be communicated to employees and other relevant people such as key clients or contractors. The ongoing work of monitoring compliance with the policy and measuring effectiveness should be part of day-to-day good management.

Although a full prosecution is unlikely for not having a health and safety policy, many companies have had improvement notices or prohibition notices issued by the HSE for not having, or for having an out-of-date or inappropriate health and safety policy. These notices are published on the HSE website and affect the reputation of an organisation.

What can you do about it?

- See the sample health and safety policy on the HSE website at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/business/policy-statement.pdf>.
- Consult with others in your organisation.
- Produce your health and safety policy
- Communicate the policy to those affected
- Monitor compliance and measure effectiveness
- Review and revise the policy as necessary.

Note:

Whilst this fact sheet gives general guidance on the law relating to this topic at the time of drafting, it is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to this area of law. You are advised to seek specific advice in relation to any particular issues that need to be addressed in relation to this topic by a competent person.

