

Five things to know about health and safety

 By [Yvonne Nhuta](#)

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By law, everyone is entitled to a safe and healthy working environment. Consequently, all businesses should be aware of their legal responsibilities to commit to high standards of health and safety in the workplace.

By providing a safe and healthy working environment for your workers, you will be able to prevent unnecessary injury, illness and loss. Here are five things every business should know about occupational health and safety:

Stay informed

As an employer, you need to be fully aware of what your responsibilities to your employees are according to law.

The South African Occupational Health and Safety Act (Act 85 of 1993) was written as a proactive attempt by government to ensure that employers and employees work in a safe and healthy environment. With certain guides and regulations, the Act places a responsibility on organisations to act on their implied moral obligation to provide a safe working environment for their employees. As such, the labour inspectorates are tasked with enforcing this legislation and businesses that do not comply with the conditions and regulations of the Act will have action taken against them. Find out more about the act [here](#).

Make a plan

A health and safety policy is an essential aspect of any functional business. What is contained within this policy should be specific to the industry. It will normally cover three sections:

- **The statement:** This outlines the aims and purpose of the policy.
- **Organisation:** This outlines specific employee roles and how they affect health and safety.
- **Arrangements:** This gives details of the specific systems and procedures used to assist in the implementation of the policy statement.

This policy, to which employers and their employees should refer and have access to, is essential to ensure that employees will have a clear idea of the company's health and safety strategy. This will then allow the employer to accurately manage the health and safety of the employees. It is also important for the policy to be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis as significant organisational and legislative changes are likely to take place and consultation with employees can indicate that the health and safety policy is no longer totally effective.

Provide training

It is often a legal requirement for an employer to provide health and safety training to their employees. This type of training should be provided on recruitment, induction or at the introduction of processes with increased risk. It may also be necessary to provide additional training where new legislation is introduced or where there have been a series of accidents that call the health and safety policy into question. Training course topics often include:

- The role and functions of the safety delegate
- Health and safety legislation
- How to identify hazards
- How to carry out a workplace inspection
- Employer's health and safety arrangements, including emergency procedures

Companies should also provide employees with supplementary information and additional reading on occupational health and safety to ensure success of training beyond the actual sessions.

Have a committee

For organisations that have a significant number of employees, a health and safety committee is often the easiest and most effective method of consultation. It is usually most successful however when the health and safety representatives placed on the committee discuss and implement both management and employee concerns.

By setting clear objectives, which reflect those of the company's health and safety policy, the committee is likely to ensure that the company is able to keep up the standard of health and safety.

Record and report

Identifying, assessing and managing hazards in the workplace is an important aspect of achieving good health and safety standards. However, it is just as important to investigate, record and report on incidents, injuries and illnesses. This will give a comprehensive idea of the effectiveness of the health and safety management system in controlling risks.

By involving employees in the process to improve health and safety, employers will be able to gather information from all levels of the organisation about the health and safety management system.

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