

YOUR GUIDE TO MONITORING HEALTH AND SAFETY

Your Practical Guide



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Introduction

You are required to measure and monitor your performance by being proactive as well as reactive.

Monitoring health and safety in the workplace is not simply a once a year activity. Your responsibilities as an employer do not end when you have written and launched your health and safety policy.

Implementing the policy in the working environment is just the first step. Health and safety management changes continually and you need to be proactive in monitoring the effectiveness of the policy. In real terms, this means being able to identify potential problems and taking action to prevent them becoming reality. There is also a need to be reactive to any breaches or near-breaches of health and safety, by investigating why an incident has occurred, for example.

Why Monitor Health and Safety?

Employers need to be able to measure and assess the overall effectiveness of the safety management system for several reasons. These are some of the most important.

Cost

The working time that is lost through injuries costs companies money. There is an additional cost where plant and machinery are damaged.

Morale

The morale of the workforce can suffer if employees feel that their safety and welfare are not being adequately safeguarded. Productivity levels are then likely to suffer.

Legal Reasons

An employer has a 'duty of care' to employees and members of the public. In the event of a dispute, it may be necessary to prove that this duty was professionally discharged and to produce supporting evidence.

Monitoring Methods

Compare 'where you are now' in terms of your health and safety performance with 'where you should be' and find out 'what is the difference and why?'

There are two ways of measuring how well your health and safety policy has been implemented:

- Proactive monitoring means taking action before accidents happen. This takes two forms:
 - regular safety inspections to check that your standards are being implemented and management controls are working
 - more detailed safety audits.
- Reactive monitoring is about examining events after they happened. It involves learning from your mistakes – whether they have resulted in injuries, illness, damage to property or just near misses.

Regular Safety Inspections

The simplest method of proactive monitoring is a formal safety inspection. Employees from your own organisation who have had some training in identifying hazards and assessing risks normally carry this out.

In some cases, usually by formal agreement with a Trade Union, inspections may be undertaken by the Union's appointed Safety Representative.

The results should be properly recorded and evaluated so that you can assess:

- whether the health and safety standards in your business remain acceptable
- the extent to which your company complies with the relevant health and safety legislation – which is often a direct indication of how effectively hazards have been identified, controlled or eliminated
- whether standards have improved or deteriorated since the last inspection.

This type of monitoring involves a systematic collection of information about the nature and scale of the hazards and it is an important aspect of health and safety performance measurement.

Priority should be given where the risks are greatest. Look closely at those with the potential for serious injury or damage – bearing in mind what both the immediate and underlying causes of a possible accident could be.

A written report should be compiled after the inspection. This, together with any supporting information, may need to be referred to those people in your management structure who have the authority to sanction the appropriate remedial action to be taken – particularly where it entails a high level of expenditure or organisational and policy changes.

It is also an opportunity for a critical appraisal of all the elements of your health, safety and welfare arrangements.

In smaller organisations the approach to these inspections can be flexible and need only be as sophisticated as the complexity of your work and the nature of the hazards demand.

Safety Inspection Report and Checklist

It is good practice to use a standard report form for safety inspections. The form should include:

- a checklist of the processes, activities and parts of your premises that are to be inspected
- a section for identifying hazards and potential risks
- space for comments on any remedial action that is recommended or has already been decided upon
- an agreed timetable for completing the remedial action.

The items in the checklist will depend on your business. As an example, a safety checklist could include some of the points on the list opposite.

Example Checklist

- Do employees wear the hearing protection that you supply and other forms of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)?
- Are push sticks used for wood-working saws?
- Are the guards on machines in place and are they correctly adjusted?
- Are oxy-acetylene gas bottles properly secured (and not free-standing)?
- Do forklift truck drivers carry out daily checks on the safety of their equipment?
- Is all lifting equipment regularly tested and in good condition?
- Are office carpets and computer cables properly secured in place so that people are unlikely to trip on them?
- Is all portable electrical equipment properly maintained and safe for use?
- Is waste cleared away regularly without being allowed to accumulate?
- If liquid or some other substance is spilled, is it cleaned up properly and promptly?
- Are fire extinguishers in their proper location and are they maintained at least annually?

Note: This list is indicative only and is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to safety inspections. See the health and safety website at www.hse.gov.uk for the latest health and safety information.

Safety Audits

A safety audit is a detailed and analytical review of the management of health and safety across all the areas of the company. It requires extensive pre-planning, and takes much longer to complete than a safety inspection.

A health and safety professional or a body specialising in safety auditing normally carries out the audit. The aim is to produce a root-and-branch report assessing:

- your company's health and safety policy and rules
- whether your company complies with health and safety legislation.

Audit protocols and terms of reference must be agreed in advance of the audit.

The key areas of an audit are typically:

- any examples of non-conformance with the company's health and safety policy
- any instances of non-compliance with the relevant legislation
- an action plan to correct the deficiencies.

Issues should be graded according to the degree of severity and, where legislation is not complied with, the degree to which your business is left exposed to the legal process.

Taking Corrective Action

Whenever the need for remedial action is highlighted – whether in an inspection or audit, or after an accident – it is vital to implement it as soon as practicable. Sometimes this may involve reviewing your health and safety policy itself.

If a problem is identified as the result of an accident, or even simply in the course of normal working, it is important to rectify it immediately rather than wait for an impending inspection or audit.

Taking proactive measures that increase compliance with your health and safety arrangements will immediately reduce the risk of accidents.

These measures often include training employees and empowering people to take suitable action whenever they recognise dangerous situations.

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