

Corporate Governance and Effective Health and Safety Management by Employers

HEALTH & SAFETY

Protecting the health and safety of your employees and anyone else who may be affected by the activities of your organisation (e.g. contractors and members of the public) is an essential part of risk and hazard management and should be proactively led by the top of your organisation.

Introduction

The consequences of breaching your health and safety obligations can have a significant short and long term impact on your organisation, particularly in the event of a serious or fatal incident.

Consequences may include:

- damage to your organisation's reputation and brand resulting in a loss of customers and sales;
- decreasing the prospects of a successful outcome when involved in competitive tenders (health and safety offences are criminal offences);
- payment of a very large fine as well as the possibility of having to pay not only your own legal costs but also those of the prosecuting authority;
- disqualification of directors;
- increased insurance premiums; and
- a significant amount of lost management time in dealing with an investigation and prosecution.

Key principles

Robust and effective health and safety management can be achieved and maintained by following essential principles:

- Strong and proactive leadership from directors and management.
- Making sure that business decisions are taken with health and safety management in mind.
- Train and engage the workforce to work safely and follow safe working practices through identifying and managing health and safety risks and putting in place suitable controls and safeguards to minimise or, if possible, prevent health and safety risks arising.
- Monitor your workforce to make sure that they are following safe systems of work and continually review control measures to ensure that they are suitable – things can, and often do, change!

How can an organisation put in place effective health and safety management systems?

The Health and Safety Executive recommends that organisations adopt the "Plan, Do, Check and Act" approach which can be summarised as follows:

PLAN

Directors and senior management should make sure that they are aware of the significant health and safety risks faced by their organisation in order to be able to effectively plan how they will be managed and who is responsible.

A policy should be in place that clearly sets out the commitment from the top of organisation to ensuring that health and safety is integral part of the organisation's culture, and how the organisation will communicate, promote and champion health and safety.

There are a number of ways in which this can be achieved in practice. For example, by making health and safety a regular feature of the board agenda, appointing a health and safety 'champion' and setting targets designed to improve health and safety performance.

You should consider checking your plan with your workforce to ensure that it will work in practice and to encourage 'buy in' to this culture.

DO

Put your plan into practice. An effective management system needs to be in place to ensure the safety of employees and anyone else who may be affected by the work activities of your organisation.

Management systems should aim to protect people by ensuring that risks are dealt with promptly, responsibly and proportionately.

You must ensure that that risks to health and safety arising from the organisation's work activities are identified, properly assessed and controlled, with suitable and sufficient equipment being provided and ensuring that employees are given training on the safe use and operation of work equipment.

Make sure that employees tasked with carrying out work activities are competent to do so. With young or new employees or employees that have been asked to take on a new role or activity, organisations should make sure that proper training and information is given to such individuals and that they should also be subject to an appropriate level of supervision to ensure that they are aware of, and follow, safe working procedures.

You may need to consider obtaining external health and safety advice in relation to certain issues.

CHECK

Monitoring and reporting are key elements of an effective health and safety management system and culture.

Procedures should be in place to ensure that any health and safety issues are reported to as possible to the top of the organisation so that any concerns can be promptly addressed.

Monitor employees to make sure that they are following the organisation's health and safety policies and procedures to ensure that a culture of safety is maintained, and that unsafe working practices and failing to follow the organisation's procedures and safe working methods are not tolerated.

Consider the health and safety implications of introducing new processes, policies or procedures. It might be the case that existing systems, controls and practices are no longer suitable.

ACT

Regular reviews should be carried out to assess performance and identify any shortcomings that need to be addressed.

Investigate and learn lessons from incidents, accidents and situations which could have, but did not, lead to injury or ill-health to identify and remedy any shortcomings and deficiencies and to prevent a recurrence.

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