



Creating a Safety and Health Management System

The time to start your safety and health management system is now, as you can address the practical concerns of putting these elements together and coming up with a program to suit your workplace. You must now decide what you want to accomplish and to determine what steps are necessary to achieve your goals. Next, you need to establish how and when each step will be done and who will do it. When creating a safety and health management plan, consider your company's immediate needs and provide for ongoing, long-lasting worker protection. Once your plan is designed, it is important to follow through and use it in the workplace. You will then have a program to anticipate, identify and eliminate conditions or practices that could result in injuries and illnesses.

If you have difficulty deciding where to begin, a phone call to your state OSHA Consultation Program will help get you started. A state consultant will survey your workplace for existing or potential hazards. Then, if you request it, he/she will determine what you need to make your safety and health program effective. The consultant will work with you to develop a plan for making these improvements and to keep your program effective.

Whether you choose to work with a consultant or to develop your program in-house, many publications are available from your state on-site Consultation Program that outline the steps that you can take to create an effective safety and health program for your workplace. The rewards for your efforts will be an efficient and productive workplace with a low level of loss and injury.

Designating Responsibility

As the business owner or manager, you **must** determine who is the most appropriate to manage your safety and health system. Who can ensure that the program will become an integral part of your business? In many cases, it will be you. Sometimes it will be a plant manager or key supervisor. It could even be an engineer, personnel specialist, or other staff member. Whoever you choose should be committed to workplace safety and health, have the time to develop and manage the program and be willing to take on the responsibility and accountability that goes with operating an effective program. The individual will need your full cooperation and support, but the ultimate responsibility for safety and health in your workplace rests on you.

Ask for Help

Federal occupational safety and health law allows a state to develop and operate its own occupational safety and health program in place of the Federal OSHA program. It is possible that the regulatory aspect of the law (setting of mandatory minimum standards and conducting inspections of workplaces) is being operated by your state government as opposed to Federal OSHA.

One of the first things to learn is which branch of government, Federal or state, has current jurisdiction over your business. If you are not sure what agency is responsible for administering workplace safety and health in your state, contact the nearest OSHA area

office for more information. You will need certain Federal OSHA publications (or comparable state publications) for use in your safety and health activities, such as the following:

- OSHA Workplace Poster (*Job Safety and Health Protection*—OSHA 3165). You must display the Federal or state OSHA poster in your workplace. This poster is also available in Spanish (*Job Safety and Health Protection OSHA-3167*).
- OSHA standards that apply to your business. You need to have a copy of all OSHA standards that apply to your type of business available for reference. Standards are regulations that OSHA uses to inspect for compliance and should be the baseline for your inspections in determining what to do when hazards are identified. Most businesses fall under OSHA's General Industry Standards. If you are involved with construction or maritime operations, you will need the standards that apply to these classifications. (In states with state-run occupational safety and health programs, use the appropriate state standards.)
- Recordkeeping requirements and the necessary forms.
- Obtain a copy of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970* for reference.

Organize the Workplace

Poor housekeeping can contribute to low morale and sloppy work. Most safety action programs start with an intensive cleanup campaign in all areas of the workplace. Get rid of unnecessary items, provide proper waste containers, store flammables properly, make sure exits are not blocked, mark aisles and passageways, provide adequate lighting, etc. Also, get everyone involved and emphasize that you want to make your workplace safer, more healthful and more efficient.

Start Gathering Specific Facts About Your Situation

Before making changes in your safety and health operations, you should gather information about the current conditions and business practices that comprise your safety and health program. This information can help you identify problems and determine what is needed to solve them. Your workplace assessment should be conducted by the person responsible for your safety and health management system and/or a professional safety and health consultant. The assessment consists of two major activities:

1. Identifying any existing or potential safety and health hazards. This initial survey should focus on evaluating workplace conditions with respect to safety and health regulations and generally recognized safe and healthful work practices. It should include checking on the use of any hazardous materials, observing employee work habits and practices, and discussing safety and health problems with employees.

2. Assessing your existing safety and health program and identify areas that work well and those that need improvement. You should gather as much information as you can that relates to safety and health management in your workplace. Include the following in the review:

- **Safety and health activities.** Examine ongoing activities as well as those tried previously, company policy statements, rules (both work and safety), guidelines for proper work practices and procedures and records of training programs.

- **Equipment.** List your major equipment, what it is used for and where it is located. Special attention should be given to inspection schedules, maintenance activities and plant and office layouts.
- **Employee capabilities.** Make an alphabetical list of all employees, showing the date hired, their job descriptions, experience and training.
- **Accident and injury/illness history.** Review first aid cases and workers' compensation insurance payments and awards, and review your losses. Compare your insurance rate with others in your group. Give special attention to recurring accidents, types of injuries, etc.

After gathering facts, see if any major problem areas emerge such as interruptions in your normal operations, too many employees taking too much time off due to illness or injury, too many damaged products, etc. General help with this kind of problem identification can often be obtained from compensation carriers, local safety councils, trade associations, state agencies, major suppliers or similarly situated businesses in the same industry. If you discover a major problem, see what can be done to solve it. Once a problem is identified, you can work on the corrective action or a plan to control the problem. Take immediate action and make a record of what you have done. Even if you find no major problems, don't stop there. Now is time to develop a comprehensive safety and health program to avoid any major problems in the future.

Establish a Four-Point Safety and Health Program

The success of any workplace safety and health program depends on careful planning. This means that you must take the time to analyze what you want to accomplish and develop an action plan in order to attain your goals. From this standpoint, you can design a step-by-step process to take you from the idea stage to an effective safety and health management system.

The best way to create a safe and healthful workplace is to institute the Four-Point Program. In doing so, establish your **management commitment** and **involve your employees**. No safety and health program will work without this commitment and involvement. The first step is to designate a person to be responsible for your safety and health program. Then, involve your employees as widely as possible from the beginning. They are most in contact with the potential and actual safety and health hazards at your worksite and will have constructive input on the development of your program. The ultimate success of your safety and health program will depend on their support.

Make sure your program assigns responsibility and accountability to all employees in your organization. A good safety and health program makes it clear that each and every employee carries responsibility for his/her part of the program. Make safety and health duties clear and hold every individual accountable for his/her safety- and health-related duties.

In addition, establish and regularly conduct a **worksite analysis**. A successful safety and health program depends on an accurate identification of all the hazards and potential hazards in your workplace. This is an ongoing process that includes routine self-inspections. Beyond that, create systems and procedures to **prevent and control hazards** identified through your worksite analysis. OSHA standards can be helpful because they address controls in order of effectiveness and preference. The hierarchy of controls is engineering,

administrative, work practice and PPE. Whenever feasible, engineering, administrative or work practice controls should be instituted even if they do not eliminate the hazard or reduce exposure. Use of such controls in conjunction with personal protective equipment (PPE) will help reduce the hazard or exposure to the lowest practical level. Where no standard exists, creative problem-solving and consultant resources may help you create effective controls. The basic formula for controlling workplace hazards, in order of preference, includes the following:

- **Eliminating the hazard** from the machine, the method, the material or the facility.
- **Abating the hazard** by limiting exposure or controlling it at its source.
- **Training personnel** to be aware of the hazard and to follow safe work procedures to avoid it.
- Prescribing **PPE** for protecting employees against the hazard and ensuring that they not only use it, but that they know how to use it correctly.
- Establish and provide ongoing **training for employees, supervisors and managers** to ensure that everyone at your worksite can recognize hazards and how to control them.

Develop and Implement Your Action Plan

Developing an action plan to build a safety and health program around the four points can serve as a "road map" to take your program to where you want it to be. An action plan tells you what has to be done, the logical order in which to do it, who is responsible and where you want to be when you finish. It describes problems and solutions, but is not ironclad. An action plan can and should be changed to correspond with changes in the workplace.

A good action plan has two parts:

1. A list of major changes or improvements to make your safety and health program effective. Each item should be prioritized, have a target date for completion and identify who is responsible for implementation.
2. A specific plan to implement each major change or improvement, including what you want to accomplish, the steps required, who will be assigned to do what and a schedule for completion.

Once a plan is established, put it into action, beginning with the highest priority item. Ensure that it is realistic, manageable and addresses the steps you have planned for that item. A detailed description of the steps required will help you keep track of your progress. Keep in mind that you can work on more than one item at a time and that priorities may change as other needs are identified or as your company's resources change.

Open communication with your employees is crucial to the success of your efforts. Their cooperation depends on their understanding of what the safety and health program is all about, why it is important to them and how it affects their work. The more you do to involve them in the changes that you are making, the smoother your transition will be.

Putting your action plan into operation at your workplace will be a major step towards implementing an effective safety and health program.

Remember, a safety and health program is a plan put into practice. Keep your program on track by periodically checking its progress and by calling on a state consultant when you need assistance.

Any good management system requires periodic review. Take a careful look at each component of your safety and health program to determine what is working well and what changes are needed. Once again, a state consultant can assist you in this area. Any necessary improvements can be turned into new safety and health objectives for the coming year. Developing new action plans to implement these improvements will continue progress toward an effective safety and health program, reduce your safety and health risks and increase efficiency and profit.

Remember that it is important to document your activities. The best way to evaluate the success of your safety and health program is to have documentation of what you have done, which provides guidance on how you can make it work even better.

Also remember that technical assistance may be available through your insurance carrier, fellow businesspeople, suppliers of your durable equipment and raw materials, the local safety council and many local, state and Federal agencies, including the state on-site Consultation Programs and closest OSHA Area Office.

Establishing a quality safety and health management system will take time and involve some resources, but you should be pleased with the results. Employees will feel reassured because of your commitment to their safety and health on the job. You may save money through increased productivity and reduced workers' compensation insurance costs. You may gain increased respect in your community. The tangible and intangible rewards for a solid safety and health program far outweigh the cost of an accident, injury or workplace fatality.

Source: OSHA

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