

Health & safety management systems

Why do I need a Health & Safety Management System?

There are legal, moral and financial reasons why an effective health and safety management system should be adopted by organisations.

To comply with their legal duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 employers and others responsible for health and safety must do all they can to provide a safe working environment for employees and other people who may be affected by the company's work activities.

Companies are also beginning to recognise that failure to safeguard employees, tenants, contractors and visitors against potential risk can prove costly and detrimental to the entire business. There is a growing acceptance that good health and safety management represents good operational practice which is integral to the operational efficiency of the company.

A health and safety management system can provide a systematic approach to handling health and safety. It sets out standard processes and procedures for dealing with health and safety tasks so everyone knows the correct way in which things should be done. It also enables you to set targets and monitor health and safety performance so you know how well you are managing health and safety and can identify any areas needing review or improvement.

What are the benefits of implementing a Health & Safety Management System?

Implementing a systematic approach to health and safety management makes it easier to manage and stay on top of your compliance responsibilities. Making sure procedures are put in place to handle health and safety activities ensures that everyone within the organisation adopts a consistent approach to handling key tasks. This reduces the likelihood of mistakes and the cost of rectifying problems. It also enables you to comply with legislation reducing the risk of litigation.

Other positive benefits include:

- Improved efficiency in managing health and safety should simplify tasks and result in reduced administrative costs
- Reduced accidents and incidents and their associated costs
- Demonstrating lower levels of risk may result in reduced insurance premiums
- Involving staff in the health and safety process and ensuring they receive appropriate training will help promote a positive health and safety culture within your business. If staff believe you are acting in their best interests this should improve morale and reduce levels of absenteeism
- A responsible attitude towards health and safety improves corporate image and makes your company more attractive to potential customers, employees and contractors
- Easier to demonstrate and satisfy the health and safety criteria required by procurement
- Health and safety performance can easily be measured and monitored against set targets

What do I need to consider when setting up a health & safety management system?

The British Standards Institution (BSI) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) produce a wide range of management standards. These standards have been developed based on experience and expert opinion as to what works best in practice. You may find using one of these recognised management standards may be more effective than designing your own system from scratch.

The standards don't lay down precisely what you have to do but aim to provide you with a framework from which to develop your own system. They will help you to identify the key issues whilst giving you the flexibility to allow you to produce a system that's right for your individual business.

There are several British Standards and HSE guidelines published which provide a framework for developing a health and safety management system. BS OHSAS 18001, BS OHSAS 18002, BS 18004 and HSG65: Successful Health and Safety Management can all be utilised in the development of a system suitable for your individual business.

Key components

- Development of statutory policy documentation
- Staff organisation – identification of roles and responsibilities
- Provision of the training and advisory support required for the development of a positive health and safety culture
- Planning and setting health and safety objectives
- Hazard identification and risk assessment
- Risk elimination and control (hierarchy of control)
- Prioritising health and safety activities and agreeing health and safety targets
- Setting measurable performance standards
- Active monitoring system to measure performance against agreed standards
- Auditing and review

You may wish to have your health and safety management system assessed against health and safety management standards. This can be done by either an external or internal auditor. Successful assessment lets you publicise the fact that you have an effective management system.

What should we do if we have no safety management system in place?

You need to put one in place. Health and safety law requires you to have a health and safety Policy as well as appropriate arrangements for Planning, Organising, Controlling, Monitoring and Reviewing the health and safety precautions that you are required by law to have in place.

How can we demonstrate that we have a safety management system?

Where your health and safety management system has been put in place in line with a recognised standard such as OHSAS 18001 or BS 8800:2004 you can demonstrate that you have a safety management system by the production of documented evidence, such as audit records which verify that the requirements of the relevant standard are being met.

Are there other ways to demonstrate that we have a safety management system?

Yes, provided you are able to show that you have the essential elements of a safety management system in place. If your safety management system is audited by competent auditors then a satisfactory audit report confirming that all the essential elements are present within your safety management system would suffice.

It is important to note that simply having a safety management system in place does not guarantee success in managing health and safety. Also it does not necessarily mean you are complying with all requirements of health and safety law.

Everything depends on how well your safety management system operates in practice. This is influenced by a number of factors including:

- Management leadership
- Effective implementation of safety processes and procedures
- Continuously improving the assessment of hazard and risks, followed by enhanced control measures
- Implementing communication and consultation processes that develop ownership at all levels in the business

All these must be supported by monitoring, review and improvement of the systems.

How do we know how well we are managing health and safety?

As with any business system it takes time to build a successful health and safety management system and then to fine-tune it so that it continues to deliver satisfactory standards of health and safety at work.

You can use performance indicators to see where you are now and to check your progress at appropriate intervals.

Corporate Health and Safety Performance Indicator

For larger organisations (over 250 employees) the HSE have developed the Corporate Health and Safety Performance Indicator (CHaSPI). This allows the company to assess its performance as regards health and safety using a recognised set of indicators. The results can be used to benchmark performance within or across sectors, as well as enabling performance to be tracked over time. It also allows the business to clearly and concisely communicate its occupational health and safety performance to external stakeholders, who are concerned about risk, particularly those from the financial sector such as investors and insurers

SME Performance Indicator

Small and medium size enterprises (fewer than 250 employees) can benchmark themselves against other employers using the Health and Safety Performance Indicator for small and medium size enterprises. This is a self-assessment tool which the HSE has developed in conjunction with Business Link and The British Insurance Broker's Association.

This is available free of charge at the Business Link website

You can use it to see how well you are doing compared with other businesses in your industry sector as well as to check your own progress over time. You put in your own information by answering some simple questions. This takes about 30 minutes. The answers you give remain anonymous and confidential. Nobody else can see your results. But you can see the collective results for all businesses using the indicator and compare your own score with the rest of your industry.

Metro SRM are able to work with you to develop an effective and easy to implement health and safety management system for your company. All systems are bespoke and developed in line with British Standards.