

Safety Management for Small Business Owners

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Successful accident prevention programs depend on:

- Employer leadership
- Safe and healthful working conditions
- Safe work practices by employees

If any of these three essentials is missing, accidents on the job are more likely to occur, and could result in injuries or deaths, damage to property, production loss and increased insurance and compensation costs.

Employers, company presidents and plant managers must be willing to accept the responsibility for occupational safety and health as an integral part of their jobs. Top management cannot delegate responsibility in this area. Instead, owners and managers must establish safety policies, stimulate in others an awareness of safety and show their own interest if others are to cooperate in making working conditions safe and healthful.

Who should establish a safety management program?

The belief that only manufacturing firms need safety management or accident prevention programs is a fallacy. All employers, regardless of their business, should implement them. A good accident prevention program creates an awareness of the need for safe working habits and establishes the discipline necessary to handle emergencies when they occur.

The following seven-point program outlines a typical accident prevention plan. If implemented, it can start a small business on its way to being a safer and more healthful workplace.

Seven-point workplace program:

- Management leadership: Owner or manager attitude toward job safety and health will be reflected by the employees. A manager should leave no doubt about his personal concern for safety and health and the priority he places on them in the workplace. A statement of policy from top management will help reinforce this commitment. Regularly provide your employees with accident prevention guidance.
- Assignment of responsibility: In terms of management responsibility, the direct supervisors of your employees are usually your key personnel in all operations. After you have set your company's basic policy, you can delegate the program's details to the same people who carry out operation and production details. Make it a part of their job to operate in a safe and healthful manner.

When considering responsibility, don't forget to include all of your employees. Each employee has an obligation to follow your safety and health procedures and instructions. Each one also has the responsibility to recognize hazards in the immediate work area and to take any action within reason to control them. Encourage this procedure whenever and wherever possible.

- Identification and control of hazards: To maintain a safe and healthful workplace, you need to:
 - Identify workplace hazards which exist or could develop.
 - Control these hazards or take action to eliminate them, if possible. Selected control mechanisms should be checked with a formal follow-up.

To get started, you need to take a careful inventory of your business. A qualified safety professional can help. Assistance is available from:

- Your business and industry specialist with University Extension. Call your local University Extension center for more information.
- Center for Applied Engineering Management at the University of Missouri-Rolla. phone (573) 341-4559.
- Your business insurance broker.
- Missouri Bureau of Labor Standards. Call Fred Seamen at (573) 751-3403.
- Employee and supervisory training: Owners and managers must make sure that all employees know about the materials and equipment they are working with, what known hazards are present and how those hazards may be controlled or eliminated. Employees should be instructed to:
 - Never undertake a job they feel is unsafe.
 - Report all unsafe conditions encountered at work.
 - Report any illness or injury suffered at work.
 - Use all available safety devices and procedures.
 - Understand that following safety rules is a condition of employment.
 - Make suggestions for improving the workplace in regards to safety.

Regular and periodic safety training and discussions should be scheduled for all employees.

- Safety and health record keeping: Records of accidents, related injuries, illnesses and property losses can help an owner or manager to learn from past experiences and to make corrections for future operations. If your firm deals with toxic substances you may be required by law to record employee exposure to these substances and sources, report physical examination results, keep employment records and more.
- First-aid and medical assistance: It is imperative that employers provide access to first-aid supplies and medical care for emergency treatment of all injured employees. If supplies and care are not available on site, specific instructions for summoning outside aid must be provided. Local health care professionals, police, fire and ambulance service should know exactly how to reach your business by at least two routes. You should prepare such a map and distribute copies to the appropriate persons. If your business is remote from medical facilities, you should have at least one trained first-aid person available at all times. Training arrangements can be made through your local Red Cross, your insurance carrier, your local safety council and others.
- Employee awareness, acceptance and participation: Get all employees involved in inspecting, detecting and correcting safety hazards. Include them in all of your safety plans and ask for suggestions and assistance. Consider forming a joint labor-management safety committee, if appropriate. Committees can be an excellent way of communicating safety and health information. Consider rotating committee assignments so all employees can have an active part in the safety and health program.

Reference

OSHA Handbook for Small Business #2209, U.S. Department of Labor.

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