



ESGMARK®

QUICK GUIDE

CREATING YOUR WORKPLACE HEALTH + SAFETY POLICY

ESGmark®

FEBRUARY 2022



ESGmark® Quick Guide: Health and Safety Policy

What is Health and Safety?

Historically, Health and Safety has been an employer's responsibility to ensure the physical safety of employees. Whether that safety was on a factory floor where the work force was engaged in day long physical labour or whether it was office-bound issues such as a correctly set up desk or ensuring IT wiring was correctly housed, the focus was on employees physical surroundings. For now, Health and Safety remains a fairly traditional document-and a bureaucracy-heavy process with an emphasis on 'near miss accident' reports and office chair ergonomics.

These remain a critical responsibility of the employer.

However, general employee wellbeing (state of mind, work-place satisfaction etc...) is increasingly being incorporated into the 'health' aspect of the policy by progressive organisations. Given that a large percentage of an employee's life is spent at work, forward thinking employers should pay attention to how they can improve an employee's life. The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development defines wellbeing as: *'The creation of an environment that promotes a state of contentment which allows employees to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of them and the organisation'*. The creation of such an environment doesn't happen overnight, nor does a wellness policy document translate into a tangibly healthy working environment, but they do lay the foundation for progress in that direction, and a declaration of intent for what a given organisation hopes to achieve.



What is a Health and Safety Policy?

A company Health and Safety Policy outlines the approach that businesses takes to ensuring the health and safety of persons and employees at work.

Where a business has fewer than five employees there is no need to have a written health and safety policy; for businesses with five or more employees it is a **legal requirement** to have a written health and safety policy. For larger companies, or businesses with complex safety needs such as manufacturing plants, a lawyer is often part of the policy drafting stage.

Crucially a health and safety policy will display an employer's **commitment and attitude** to the health and safety of its employees, while giving concrete instructions and information to employees, customers and other third parties who have contact with the business.

The Health and Safety Policy needs to provide:

- a statement on the **general policy** of health and safety of the business and what should be achieved through its implementation;
- the **responsibilities** of relevant persons for specific actions to ensure compliance with health and safety regulations; and
- what **arrangements** will be made by the business in practical terms in order to ensure compliance and implementation of the policy.

Where applicable, the policy requires companies to carry out risk assessments and other practices required of employers by the Health and Safety Executive. The necessity of an official risk assessment is dependent on your industry and business operations.

The policy should be made **easily available with and communicated to** any employees of the business. It is common to display a health and safety policy in an easily accessible public area (such as a kitchen or entrance way) so that persons connected with the business in any way can easily see the commitment the business has made to upholding standards of health and safety.



Many employers may include the Health and Safety Policy as part of the Company Handbook or in/alongside an employee's Contract of Employment.

In order for the policy to be **valid and effective** it must be **signed and dated** by the **most senior person** in the company. It is the responsibility of that person to ensure that aims, responsibilities and arrangements contained within the document are carried out.

Your company Health and Safety policy can be revised or altered at any time – pro-actively keeping up to date with legislation as well as workplace trends will help you keep the policy completely up to date. Remember - any **revisions and alterations must be communicated effectively to employees** at the earliest opportunity.

What about working from home – what can employers do?

A huge challenge posed by COVID is ensuring employers remain responsible for their employees during working hours, whilst those employees are working from home.

The Government's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidelines are clear: ["As an employer, you have the same health and safety responsibilities for people working at home as for any other worker."](#) Whilst this may seem difficult given that employers cannot physically check an employee's homeworking set up, nor can they keep an eye on them 'in real life', the HSE is refreshingly pragmatic in its approach: *"Most of the time, risks to home workers will be low and the actions you should take to protect them will be straightforward."*

Employer's primary responsibilities to employees working from home are:

- Monitoring stress and poor mental health
- Ensuring the correct display equipment and IT set up
- Assessing an employee's work environment

Keeping an open flow of communication, taking responsibility for the quality of employees' computers and work-related electronics and ensuring that employees know you take an interest in their mental health and physical surroundings are all essential to your duty of care as employers, as we continue to navigate long term remote working.



We recommend the UK government's [Health and Safety Executive](#) as the most thorough introduction and information hub available for UK based organisations. For non-UK based members, our board and International Representatives are well placed to guide you in this area – please contact us at info@esgmark.co.uk for support with this.

What about working from home – what can employees do?

With many businesses moving to a more permanent work-from-home policy for staff, it has become necessary for staff to take more pro-active responsibility for their own home office safety checklist.

Hunching over a kitchen table on a wobbly stool 8 hours a day is not conducive to good health when working remotely. But poor ergonomics is only one of many workplace health and safety issues we might face while dealing with a protracted break from office life.

We've put together the following safety tips that can help to improve your home office setup and avoid distractions. Employers may wish to share these tips with their employees as part of their communication around health & safety

- **Recognise Aches & Strains**

Recognising when something is going wrong is halfway to finding a solution. Many of us are still using the equipment we started using at the beginning of the pandemic – items that were never designed to be long term, professional grade equipment. When hastily chosen equipment, initial aches and pains can quickly develop into severe problems. If you start to experience discomfort, make a plan to fix the root cause of the problem before it gets out of control.

- **Buy A Comfortable Chair**

It's easy to discount the amount of strain that sitting at a desk all day can have on your body. Headaches, neck and upper back pain, lower back pain, sciatica, carpal tunnel syndrome, and pinched nerves negatively affect your health, productivity and quality of life.



A rolling chair that is adjustable for height provides lumbar support, and is rated for your weight, will make your daily schedule much more comfortable, and make spending long periods at your desk far easier.

- **Use A Desk or Kitchen Table**

While it may seem like the dream work scenario to roll over in bed and work with a cushion behind your back, prolonged periods spent in this position will play havoc with your neck, back, and leg muscles.

A proper office desk or kitchen table is the best place to complete your work. The height of your desk is vital for achieving the correct ergonomic position. Ideally, your elbows should touch the table when sitting up straight.

If the desk is too low, you will end up hunching over, which is a recipe for strained neck muscles as they try to support the weight of your head. A too-high desk will bring your hands into a position that puts additional strain on your wrists. Anyone who has experienced excruciating pain due to carpal tunnel syndrome will understand that ensuring an optimum hand position is crucial to long-term productivity.

- **Ensure You Have Enough Light**

Eye strain can cause daily, low-grade headaches and affect the quality of your vision longer term.

If you are constantly squinting to see your work or find yourself developing headaches, then the lighting in your workspace could be responsible. The ideal light source is natural light. But failing that, a daylight LED bulb either overhead or in a desk lamp will save you hours of squinting.

- **Install Anti-Virus Protection**

Without an IT department to look after your computer, it's easy to forget that we live in an era of hackers and other scammers. If your company doesn't provide anti-virus software as a standard for its computer users, ask your employers to do so, or simply install your own if that's the quickest way to protect yourself and your work.

The last thing you want is to end up with confidential information being stolen or your data destroyed.



- **Don't Overload Electrical Sockets**

You may not have sufficient electrical sockets to connect all your electrical equipment. If this is the case – it's best to be safe rather than sorry. Invest in extension cables and adapters with built-in protection to avoid overloading your domestic electrical supply with work equipment.

- **Keep Cables and Extension Leads Tucked Away**

Cable management is vital when setting up your home office. It's easy to forget that you have other electrical cords and other leads from computer peripherals lying about – tripping over electrical cables is one of the most common working from home Health and Safety issues, and one of the easiest to avoid.

It sounds so obvious, but to avoid tripping over them, use cable ties and other cable management devices to neatly store all the leads and cables. Not only does it look better, but it could save you a nasty, wholly unnecessary accident.

- **Make Time to Speak with Co-Workers**

As we quickly realised, working from home not only removes any commuting time, but also removes any possibility of the normal, accidental interactions you would have had with co-workers over the course of the day.

Zoom calls, Google Hangouts, Microsoft teams etc etc allow you to attend meetings virtually, but leave no scope to bump into a colleague in the kitchen, or stroll over to their desk to see what's what.

Taking time to message your favourite colleagues to say hello and check in is a vital part of working from home. It might not be the same as a cup of tea together, but it's a better substitute than no social interaction at all.



- **Schedule Times To Go for A Walk**

It's easy to get wrapped up in what you're doing. Working remotely means boundaries between work and home time are easily blurred, especially if you enjoy your job or have a substantial work-load.

Taking regular breaks is an essentially part of a healthy work routine. Taking breaks comes more naturally in an office when we are regularly obliged to do something else as interruptions are part of the natural ebb and flow of the working day. When working from home, schedule regular 'appointments' to get up, move around or even go for a walk.

For more guidance on formalising your work-place's Health and Safety Policy, and how best you can tailor it to your company's specific needs, please contact us at info@esgmark.co.uk