

DMCC Health & Safety Guide for SMEs
Volume 1: Why Health and Safety is Important

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Hazards at Work

Whatever sort of business you are in, there is always the possibility of an accident, property damage or a risk to someone's health.

All types of work expose people to hazards; for example:

- Loads which have to be manually handled;
- Dangerous machinery;
- Toxic substances;
- Electricity;
- Working with display screen equipment or even psychological hazards such as stress.

The Cost of Safety Failure

The reason there are not more accidents and diseases caused by work is because systems of prevention are put in place, which have been built up over generations.

Safety does not come about by accident; most accidents happen because they have not been prevented. Even small businesses have accidents. Accident rates in small businesses can be higher than in large operations, for instance the fatality rate in SME manufacturers worldwide is twice that of large ones.

Underlying Principles

Attention to health and safety is not just about being socially responsible. It also makes good business sense and you should regard it as just as important as the achievement of any other key business objectives.

Of course, working out what the UAE health and safety law means for your business can be quite a headache. But don't be put off. Essentially, you have to ensure absence of risk to safety and health of employees and others.

- **Have a System in Place to Manage Health & Safety**

You have to have a system (e.g. have a policy, designate people and have clear procedures) in place to manage health and safety). You need to be able to show how you plan, organise, control, monitor and review preventative measures. And you need to appoint a competent person(s) to help you comply with your legal obligations.

- **Identify Hazards**

You have to identify your main hazards (things that could cause harm), for example open filing cabinets could lead to slips trips and falls.

- **Assess Risk**

You have to assess your risks (the probability that significant harm will occur) and record the results of your assessment.

Risk assessment is the key to working out what needs to be done - but don't make it over-complicated.

Remember, it is really only any use if it can be used as a working tool - to help you prove to yourself and your employees that you have identified the main things in your business, which could cause harm and that you are doing everything you should to prevent that harm from happening.

- **Risk Control Measures**

You have to make sure that your risk control measures are adequate and that they are used and maintained and that they continue to work. (You also have to put in place any backup measures that may be needed like health surveillance or emergency procedures). And you have to inform, train and supervise employees.

There is an underlying requirement to reduce or eliminate hazards at source, or isolate people from them (for example, by guarding machinery) before using other forms of control. Relying on the use of personal protective equipment - like respirators or protective footwear - is a last resort and is only acceptable when all other options have failed.

- **You also have to:**

- Report and record accidents;
- Provide certain basic workplace, first aid and welfare facilities;
- Have employers' liability insurance;
- Consult your workforce and their representatives; and so on.

Getting Started

If all this is new to you, where do you start? Well, first of all, you need to get a good overview of the subject. Start with some basic reading such as free HSE leaflets.

You can visit the DMCC website or contact HSE@dmcc.ae for some basic information on what you must do to make sure your business complies with health and safety laws.

Contact other Authorities or check on their websites such as Civil Defence or Dubai Municipality, which contain numerous publications and legal documentation.

Where Are You Now?

Armed with the knowledge you have gained, try to answer the following questions:

"When it comes to health and safety, where are we now as a company?" and "Where do we want to be this time next year?"

- Start by looking at your company's health and safety policy statement. It should be the basis of your company's health and safety action plan.
- Ask yourself whether you have an effective health and safety management system in place - in other words, a planned way of tackling problems.
- Have you got clear policies and objectives for health and safety?
- Have you organised key people to achieve them?
- What training do they need?
- Have you appointed a competent person to help you comply with your duties?
- Have you identified your main hazards and assessed the risks involved?
- Have you selected the right control measures to tackle these main risks?
- Are they adequate or do you need to do more?
- Are they actually being applied in practice?
- Are you monitoring progress - for example, by regularly inspecting the workplace or investigating accidents and 'near misses' - to learn from your mistakes?
- Have you set a date to review your health and safety performance against your plans?

Working Together

Although if you are the person in overall control of your business, 'the buck stops with you'; you cannot achieve a safe and healthy working environment on your own. It has to be a team effort and you need to consult your employees and, where appointed, safety representatives.

You need to get proper health and safety coordination going with other stakeholders with which you come into contact such as clients, customers, suppliers or contractors.

You need to build ownership and commitment to safety throughout your workforce.

Don't Delay - Get Started Today!

Above all, you need to remember that besides protecting people and the environment, action on health and safety can also make a major contribution to business success. Not only will it help stop accidents and work related ill health among your staff, but it will reduce your accident losses, improve your profit and loss statement and help you become more efficient.

Don't think accidents and occupational ill health can't happen in your company and above all, don't wait for things to go wrong and then go for the 'quick fix'.

Build health and safety in from the start. Don't delay - make time and space to get started today!

For further clarification or related enquiries, please contact us on the below contact details.

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