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**Employment****Employers' health and safety responsibilities**

Employers have responsibilities for the health and safety of their employees. They are also responsible for any visitors to their premises such as customers, suppliers and the general public. Find out more about your employer's duty of care.

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**The Health and Safety at Work Act**

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 is the primary piece of legislation covering work-related health and safety in the United Kingdom. It sets out a lot of your employer's responsibilities for your health and safety at work.

The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for enforcing health and safety at work.

[Health and Safety Executive](#)

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**Risk assessments**

Your employer has a 'duty of care' to look after, as far as possible, your health, safety and welfare while you are at work. They should start with a risk assessment to spot possible health and safety hazards.

They have to appoint a 'competent person' with health and safety responsibilities. This is usually one of the owners in smaller firms, or a member of staff trained in health and safety in larger businesses.

**Businesses employing five or more people**

For businesses employing five or more people, there must also be:

- an official record of what the assessment finds (your employer has to put plans in place to deal with the risks)
- a formal health and safety policy, including arrangements to protect your health and safety (you should be told what these are)

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**The employer's duty of care in practice**

All employers, whatever the size of the business, must:

- make the workplace safe

- prevent risks to health
- ensure that plant and machinery is safe to use, and that safe working practices are set up and followed
- make sure that all materials are handled, stored and used safely
- provide adequate first aid facilities
- tell you about any potential hazards from the work you do, chemicals and other substances used by the firm, and give you information, instructions, training and supervision as needed
- set up emergency plans
- make sure that ventilation, temperature, lighting, and toilet, washing and rest facilities all meet health, safety and welfare requirements
- check that the right work equipment is provided and is properly used and regularly maintained
- prevent or control exposure to substances that may damage your health
- take precautions against the risks caused by flammable or explosive hazards, electrical equipment, noise and radiation
- avoid potentially dangerous work involving manual handling and if it can't be avoided, take precautions to reduce the risk of injury
- provide health supervision as needed
- provide protective clothing or equipment free of charge if risks can't be removed or adequately controlled by any other means
- ensure that the right warning signs are provided and looked after
- report certain accidents, injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences to either the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or the local authority, depending on the type of business

### [Frequently Asked Questions about health and safety](#)

### [Safe manual work](#)

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## **Making the workplace safe and healthy**

So that the work premises provide a safe and healthy place to work, your employer should:

- make sure that workplaces are properly ventilated, with clean and fresh air
- keep temperatures at a comfortable level - a minimum of 13 degrees C where the work involves physical activity or 16 degrees C for 'sedentary' workplaces eg offices but there's no maximum limit
- light premises so that employees can work and move about safely
- keep the workplace and equipment clean
- ensure that workrooms are big enough to allow easy movement with at least 11 cubic metres per person
- provide workstations to suit the employees and the work
- keep the workplace and equipment in good working order
- make floors, walkways, stairs, roadways etc safe to use
- protect people from falling from height or into dangerous substances

- store things so they are unlikely to fall and cause injuries
- fit openable windows, doors and gates with safety devices if needed
- provide suitable washing facilities and clean drinking water
- if necessary, provide somewhere for employees to get changed and to store their own clothes
- set aside areas for rest breaks and to eat meals, including suitable facilities for pregnant women and nursing mothers
- let employees take appropriate rest breaks and their correct holiday entitlement
- make sure that employees who work alone, or off-site, can do so safely and healthily

[Download 'Working alone in safety' \(PDF, 38K\)](#)

[Download 'Workplace health and safety', \(PDF, 234K\)](#)

[Help with PDF files](#)

[Rest breaks](#)

[Holiday entitlements: the basics](#)

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## What to do next

You also have responsibilities for your own health and safety at work. You can refuse to do something that isn't safe without being threatened with disciplinary action.

If you think your employer isn't meeting their responsibilities, talk to them first. Your safety representative or a trade union official may be able to help you with this. As a last resort, you may need to report your employer to the Health and Safety Executive or to the environmental health department of your local authority.

If you are dismissed for refusing to undertake an unsafe working practice, you may have a right to claim unfair dismissal at an Employment Tribunal.

[Employees' health and safety responsibilities](#)

[How to resolve a problem at work](#)

[Protection if you report your employer - more details](#)

[Unfair dismissal](#)

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## Where to get help

For more information on where to get help with employment issues visit the employment contacts page or find out more about trade unions.

[Employment contacts](#)

[Joining a trade union](#)

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