Workplace Safety
The Ultimate Guide to Health & Safety!

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Why Workplace Health & Safety are Important

You may know that health and safety in the workplace are important, but you may not have thought of the reasons for it. The fact is there are probably more reasons than you have considered.

First, health and safety in the workplace benefits each and every person who works there. When people are healthy and safe, they are better able to do their jobs. This in turn benefits the company. When employers and employees alike spend their work hours in a place where there is less risk of illness or injury, they will not need to take time off from the job to deal with these problems. Everyone will be more productive.

Second, a safe and healthy work environment aids in preventing unnecessary complications. As no company needs to deal with complaints or lawsuits from workers who are injured on the job, the better condition the workplace is in the less risk there will be of these problems.

Third, a healthy and safe work environment is great for company morale. This includes the company as a whole, as well as each individual person. The workplace that is consistently neat, clean, and organized, encourages everyone who works there to do their best and feel good about getting the job done.

Increasing health and safety in the workplace is not difficult. It also does not require a large amount of time. When you start with a basic framework of what is necessary to accomplish this goal, and share it with everyone else who works there, you will soon see positive results. You will have fewer worries. Everyone will feel confident about the time they spend on the job. More will get done, with fewer problems.

The good news about implementing health and safety plans for the workplace is that after you have begun to develop these plans, they will soon come naturally. It will truly be a great place to work!

It Takes Team Effort!

The best way to reach any goal is with teamwork. When each person knows that he has a stake in a project, it increases his willingness and motivation to contribute to it. He wants to give it his very best. These concepts are as true for health and safety in the workplace as they are for any other kind of project.

One reason for this is every person wants to feel as if he is contributing something worthwhile to the overall good of his company. When each person participates in increasing and maintaining the health and safety of the workplace, it is much more likely to be a long-term success.

A second reason is that it can be quite unfair to expect one or two people to cover everything. Even if they are fully qualified, it can cut into their time and give them much more work to do.

While you are reading these tips about health and safety in the workplace, the best way to begin is to apply team effort to each concept. If you know that specific people have special abilities or talents, those people can be assigned to tasks which make the most of those abilities and talents.

Making sure that no one is left out is the best way to gain cooperation. When each person sees rules and duties as factors which are not imposed upon him, but as factors which he is a part of, disagreements and noncompliance will be minimized. Many unnecessary hassles can be reduced and even eliminated by ensuring that every employee is a part of the plan.

Regardless of each person's role in the workplace, team effort should be all-inclusive. Not only will it be a healthier and safer environment in which to work, but each person will take pride in the results. As is the case with virtually every other aspect of a thriving company, applying the principle of teamwork to developing good health and safety practices is the most positive way to reach your goal.

Some Rules are Essential

The overall safety and health in the workplace depends upon sensible rules. When each person knows that everyone who works there is expected to follow the same rules, it can reduce the risk of noncompliance.

One of the most important rules in any workplace should be for employees to stay home when they are sick. While this may seem to be nothing more than common sense, you may be surprised at how frequently it is dismissed. First, the person who is ill cannot do his job very well. Even if he puts in a full day at work, less will get done and the quality will suffer. If he works in a group setting, it can have a negative effect on the entire group's projects.

Second, when an employee insists upon going to work with a contagious illness, he is putting everyone he works with at risk of becoming ill. From strep throats to the flu, a contagious employee can sabotage everyone's health. "Stay home when you are sick" needs to be one of the top rules in any workplace setting.

Another important rule is to immediately notify one's supervisor or other person in charge of any and all on-the-job injuries. Even if it is relatively minor, having injuries assessed immediately can prevent unnecessary complications. Lawsuits over on-the-job injuries, worker's compensation, and prolonged absences from the job due to injury can be minimized when any injury is checked as soon as it occurs.

Depending upon the nature of the job, there are instances in which immunizations should be a part of the company's rules. For example, employees who routinely work with potentially-dangerous instruments and equipment can increase their health and safety by keeping their tetanus shots updated. Employees and employers who work in group settings, especially during the winter months, should make flu vaccinations a regular part of their personal health care routines. These factors are for the benefit of the individual, as well as for the company as a whole.

The less risk each person is of contracting an illness or sustaining an on-the-job injury, the more it will benefit the individual, the company, and everyone else who works there. Every person should be encouraged to apply the highest standards to his or her own personal health care.

Rewarding Compliance

You may be familiar with businesses which operate on the principle that it is essential and even honorable to never miss a day of work. While this is a good theory, it is not necessarily as good in practice. When employees feel that they will be rewarded for attendance, it encourages them to go to work when they are ill and to not report injuries.

Acknowledging compliance with your company's health and safety rules is a much better approach. While an employee should not expect to be rewarded for doing what he is supposed to do anyway, creating an overall work atmosphere of acknowledging compliance as being positive is a very useful approach.

The popular practice of rewarding one hundred percent attendance can lead to health and safety risks. This is as true in the business world as it is in the many school systems which also operate under this practice. One hundred percent attendance should not be the goal for a thriving company which has its employees' interests in mind. A one hundred percent record of the workplace being without on-the-job injuries or health concerns is much better.

When going to work each day does not include unnecessary worries over health and safety issues, the entire workplace will be more productive.

One good approach is to appoint a committee to oversee your company's health and safety issues. They can keep track of whether the rules are being followed, and address any problems which may occur. Your safety committee can post relevant signs in the office or at the jobsite, circulate memos, and other easy tasks to keep everyone up to date. A company newsletter is also a good idea for keeping everyone informed.

While accidents, other injuries, and illness do occur, there will be less risk of these problems when everyone is involved in keeping the workplace free from accidents and illness. Acknowledging when everyone is doing his or her part to keep the workplace healthy and safe is a much better approach than rewarding people for going to work.

You Need a Backup Plan

Whether you work alone, in an office, or on a jobsite, you need a backup plan to keep everything running smoothly. A good way to start is to think about these topics, and adjust them accordingly to suit your particular place of business.

When a job needs to be done, it needs to be done. Whether you are dealing with deadlines or basic productivity, an illness or injury preventing you from working can cause everything to come to a standstill. As illnesses and injuries do occur from time to time, it is best to have a backup plan in mind. Depending upon the job situation, this may include another competent employee covering for the person who is absent, or another appropriate course of action. Whatever type of plan you believe is best for your company, all employees should be aware of it.

Other situations can occur in the workplace which can made getting a job done difficult or impossible. For example, a maintenance problem can occur on the spur of the moment. From a sudden ceiling leak to an important piece of equipment failing, these kinds of issues can cause the workday to come to a standstill. If you have a backup plan for how to deal with them immediately, employees will be able to get back to work that much sooner. Equally significant, the risks of associated injuries, such as slips, falls, and electrical shock, will be reduced.

In many regions, the possibility of weather-related hazards must be considered in advance. For example, winter conditions such as icy roads and slick parking lots can lead to injuries. In these instances, your company may agree to change its work hours or even close if your employees cannot safely get to work, and ensure that all outdoor walkways and parking areas are properly maintained for these weather conditions. Your employees should be instructed to practice safe driving, parking, and walking habits at all times, but especially during inclement weather.

When you think ahead to potential safety hazards, and implement an appropriate backup plan for those which may occur, everyone in your company will be more confident about going to and being at work. In addition, suitable backup plans are the best and easiest way to ensure that minor problems do not escalate into disasters. The workplace will be a safer place for everyone.

Dealing with Issues and Concerns

The best and most productive way to deal with issues and concerns in the workplace is to deal with them as soon as possible. When these issues and concerns involve job-related health and safety, it can also mean the difference between someone noticing a problem and getting it taken care of before it leads to more serious problems.

Although it will differ according to the particular workplace, some of the issues and concerns which your staff and employees may wish to address can include maintenance problems, cigarette smoking, the use of radios or other sound devices, and virtually anything else which has the potential to undermine safe, healthy work conditions.

If it is possible, having meetings on a regular basis can give everyone the chance to bring up these and other issues. If a problem is acknowledged, it can be dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Companies which are too large, or whose employees work erratic hours, may find this method too difficult. In these instances, a memo box where anyone can leave a message about his or her concerns can be a good method. When the messages are read on a regular basis, proper action can be taken to deal with the problems.

Regardless of the size of the company or the number of employees who work there, lack of communication about important concerns can result in unnecessary disasters. Whenever everyone is encouraged to speak up about their concerns, or bring possible hazards to their supervisors' attention, the risks will be significantly decreased.

Whether it is a matter of employees smoking in areas where it is not allowed, doors or windows not being secured at the end of the work day, or too many equipment cords becoming entangled in the office, there are many health and safety issues in the workplace which can easily be dealt with if they are addressed as soon as they occur. Your workplace will be safer for everyone, and everyone will feel more confident about being there.

How to Deal with Noncompliance

Team effort and cooperation are keys to a healthier, safer work environment. When these factors apply to the office or other jobsite, most people will agree that it is a good thing, and that it is in everyone's best interest. However, you may find that you have one or more employees who do not follow the rules. Some may break the rules unintentionally, while others are openly defiant.

Noncompliance with the rules of the workplace need to be dealt with as soon as it is noticed, firmly, and fairly. When the rules are fair, and for the good of both the company and its individual workers, making exceptions without a valid reason can result in problems. At its worst, noncompliance can lead to health or safety problems; at its least, it can appear as favoritism, and lower the company's morale.

The first step to take when an employee is violating a company rule or policy is to be sure that he is aware of the policy. It may be possible that he does not know his actions or behavior is against the rules. If he is aware of it, it is important to not jump to conclusions. It may have been an honest mistake, or something over which he had no control.

If the person is knowingly breaking a rule without a valid reason, corrective measures are necessary. These can range from giving the person a second chance, to terminating him from his job entirely.

For any company to operate smoothly, rules and policies do need to exist. In situations which involve health or safety matters, it is essential for policies to be in effect and to be observed. It is never wise to increase risks in the workplace for the sake of catering to employees who intentionally decide to ignore the rules. It is also never in anyone's best interest to appear to be showing favoritism to those who break the rules on purpose.

While it is often a good idea to grant a person the benefit-of-the-doubt that perhaps he was not aware of a policy or perhaps it was an unintentional mistake, having one clear set of rules or policies for everyone to follow is the best way to keep company morale strong, and keep the workplace healthy and safe.

Remember What the Workplace is for!

The workplace should be a place where every employee feels comfortable, and motivated to do his job. When employees actually enjoy being at work, more can get accomplished. Unfortunately, you may find employees who take the idea of comfort and enjoyment too far, forgetting that they are in a place of business.

People who see the workplace as a social arena may need to be reminded that it is not. Their habits may include pestering other employees for the sake of chatting or visiting, making or taking unnecessary personal phone calls throughout the work day, or even having friends or family members stop by the office frequently when there is no legitimate reason for it. Not only can these habits affect the person's own job performance, they can also be quite an annoyance for others in the office who are trying to work.

Other people may feel that they need to be entertained throughout the work day. They may run a radio or CD player, or put time in which they should be working into computer games and similar activities. They may need to be reminded that they are not getting paid to goof off, as well the fact that these kinds of practices can interfere with other employees' concentration.

If you have a very casual work environment, you may decide that some of these practices are acceptable. If this is the case, you also need to consider how they affect each and every person who works there. Perhaps music or an occasional guest will not disrupt the office, or perhaps employees will get less done if they are consistently exposed to these kinds of distractions.

Creating an atmosphere of business is essential for work to get done and the day to proceed smoothly. Whether you decide that some of these practices are acceptable or not, taking everyone's needs into consideration is the best course of action. You need to decide on a policy that works for everyone. This will increase the sense of teamwork, and make it easier for everyone to do their jobs.

Make Your Workplace a Good Place

Employees will be happier, healthier, and get more accomplished, when the workplace is a good place to be. They will look forward to going to work each day, and be more motivated to do a good job. This is not to say that you should turn your office or jobsite into a fun zone or a place to be lazy. What it does mean is when employees are comfortable and relaxed on the job, they will be more energetic, and less likely to sustain accidental injuries.

While the specifics must be adjusted according to your particular workplace, there are some ideas which most workplaces have in common. One example is the time spent away from one's tasks. This generally includes periods of time for lunch, use of the rest rooms, and perhaps other breaks as well. In order for these breaks to be positive, employees should not feel unduly rushed, but also not consider their breaks to be an excuse for wasting time. Breaks should reasonably accommodate the needs of all employees, yet not be extensive enough to seriously impact work hours.

Some offices and jobsites include the availability of coffee and other beverages, snacks, and even break rooms. All of these can provide a refreshing pick-up during the workday. They are especially effective if all employees use them in a reasonable manner, and not take unfair advantage of these perks.

Some companies offer a number of other perks as well. Your business may have a cafeteria, on-the-job daycare facilities for employees with small children, or a recreation room. While they can make the workday easier for your employees, it is important to ensure that they are being used properly.

First and foremost, the workplace is a place of business. Doing one's job should be every person's main priority. When you make the workplace a good place to be, you are increasing every employee's appreciation of his job and his company. He will be in good spirits at work, more attuned to taking safety precautions, and more motivated to do his job. Instead of feeling rushed, overwhelmed, and tired throughout the work day, he will be in great shape to meet each new task.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is a necessary part of any company. Taking it seriously can mean the difference between disgruntled employees who become careless and unconcerned about their own welfare and that of others, and employees who are always ready to give and do their best.

Conflict is a part of human nature. In a work setting, where a large number of people are together for many hours every day, conflict should be expected. After all, each person brings his own individual personality, experiences, outlook, and ways of doing things, when he comes into work each day. As your employees cannot reasonably be expected to shed their uniqueness when they arrive at work, some degree of conflict will surely happen. When you are prepared for conflict, and prepared to resolve it as quickly and easily as possible, it is best for everyone concerned.

Positive conflict resolution is done with fairness to all involved parties. When conflicts in the workplace are due to arguments or disagreements between two or more employees, an unbiased mediator can be very helpful. When each person is allowed to speak his mind, a mediator can assist in determining the best solution to the problem.

Good conflict resolution is not only about settling arguments between people. You may also find that one of your employees has a complaint of his own, about the job he is doing, company policies, or another factor. Allowing the person to air his grievances is not only a step toward resolving them, it also gives him the message that his complaint is taken seriously. In many cases, simply being heard is as important as finding a solution to a problem.

There are a number of reasons why good conflict resolution needs to be a part of the workplace. Keeping communications smooth and effective is only one reason. When the workplace is relatively free of disagreements, employees will get along better with each other. This in turn makes the workday more productive.

Another reason why conflict resolution is necessary is that conflict affects one's emotional health. Conflict leads to stress, tension, anxiety, and even depression. If these factors become intense or prolonged, it can have an effect on the person's general health. Conflict resolution reduces these factors, and the impact of these factors. When conflict is dealt with as soon as possible, it lowers stress and reduces the risk of health-related complications.

A third reason for making conflict resolution an essential part of your work life is that the emotional complications from conflict can increase the risk of on-the-job accidents and injuries. The person who is severely or consistently stressed-out, anxious, worried, or depressed over on-the-job conflicts is more prone to being

careless and reckless. He may be so focused on the unresolved problem, or how he is feeling about it, that he may neglect sensible safety precautions, and even endanger himself or others without intending to do so.

There are a number of different methods for conflict resolution. You need to decide which method or methods are most appropriate for your particular business and your employees. For the optimum results, you may wish to consider more than one method, and determine which is best on a case-by-case basis. Some ideas which you might like to consider include forming a grievance committee to assist with individual concerns and disagreements between employees, or a counselor to be available for more serious problems.

The workplace which is free from ongoing conflict is healthier and safer for everyone who works there. Emotional health plays a role in how well an employee performs on the job, gets along with others, and is less prone to becoming ill. The risk of accidental injuries is also greatly reduced.

In addition to the health and safety issues involved in a conflict-free workplace, it also makes the workplace a better and more pleasant place to be. A calm, cooperative environment is conducive to doing the job well, and enjoying one's job.

Whether your company employs only a few people, or whether there are many people in the workplace every day, making a good plan for conflict resolution and putting it into practice whenever it is necessary will keep the company and its employees at their very best.

Are Dress Codes Appropriate?

If your company does not require its employees to wear uniforms, you may not have thought much about dress codes. Even if a workday does not involve employees wearing suits or other business attire, there are some factors related to dress codes which can be appropriate for your workplace.

First, clothing which the average person would consider offensive or distracting should be avoided. While most people who are serious about doing their job are aware of this, you may find those who prefer off-beat, shock-value, or attention-getting attire. No matter how casual the work environment may be, this is not appropriate. The workplace should not be seen as a place to get attention, make a statement, or express oneself. Your employees should be encouraged to reserve these for their own time, when they are not on the job.

Second, some kinds of accessories can increase the risk of accidents. For example, long pendants and earrings can easily become caught and tangled in work equipment. If a person is working with potentially-dangerous equipment, even long hair can present a hazard. In these kinds of situations, long hair can be worn up, and unnecessary jewelry can be removed.

Some companies feel that it is best, and easier, to set specific standards for appearance in the workplace. They can cover clothing and accessories, cosmetics, and tattoos and piercings. A good rule-of-thumb is to decide on the tone you believe is appropriate for your company, and be sure that all of your employees are aware of the policies you set.

Sometimes all it takes for sensible employees to present themselves in a sensible manner at work is to remind them that they are on the job, rather than on their own time. In other cases, you may need to set rules and insist that your employees follow them. While people should feel comfortable in the workplace, personal choice should not extend to distracting others and risking accidents.

Minimizing Distractions

The more distracted a person is when he is on the job, the more likely it will be that an accident will occur. Distractions which get in the way of doing one's job, or paying attention to basic safety precautions, should be minimized.

Many people find unnecessary noise to be a distraction. A noisy work environment can result in employees being unable to concentrate and focus properly, becoming argumentative or confrontational with others, nervous, agitated, and stressed out. Whether noise is in the form of employees who consistently chatter with others or on the phone, hearing someone else's music on an ongoing basis, or sounds from ill-kept office equipment, noise can be intrusive and unhealthy. Some people refer to it as "noise pollution."

A chaotic work environment is another form of distraction. The workplace where there is always something going on is neither in the best interests of employee health or productivity. Whether it is the constant motion of people walking in and out of the office, or frequent arguments amongst employees, these distractions set a very negative tone for the workplace.

Clutter can also be a distraction. Whether one or more individual employees have the habit of leaving personal possessions lying around, piles of paperwork on their desks, or general messes, or whether the entire office is very casual in this manner, clutter is more hazardous than one may realize. In addition to being psychologically unhealthy, it also raises the risk of accidents. Slips, falls, and being injured by items which cannot readily be seen, occur much more frequently in a cluttered work environment.

There is yet another way in which clutter can become a problem in the workplace. Clutter makes it more difficult to find items when they are needed. While this can include small office supplies and similar objects, a cluttered workspace can also prevent employees from being able to notice important memos posted on a bulletin board, signs with information about safety hazards and precautions, and other relevant information. All of the safety-related details posted around the office or jobsite for the employees' sake is useless if the workplace is so cluttered and messy that they will not see it.

How can you minimize the distractions in your workplace so that it will be a healthier, safer environment? A good start would be to assess the condition of your workplace. You can take a clear look at what kinds of distractions are present, who is responsible for them being there, and the effect they are having on the health, safety, morale, and productivity of the people who work there. While the effects of some kinds of distractions, such as clutter and messes,

should be obvious, you might not be aware of other kinds of distractions which can affect employees' ability to concentrate, and be generally bothersome.

After you have assessed the types of distractions in your workplace, reducing them will be easier and more effective if you have everyone's cooperation. Some people may be unaware that their noise or clutter presents a problem. Even the best attempts to reduce distractions will not be very effective without everyone doing their part so it does not reappear.

When you have noted the distractions and their effects, informing employees of the need to keep distractions to a minimum may be helpful. However, it can require informing some employees that they must make some changes in their habits. If you find employees who insist that their habits are necessary for their own sake, you may need to remind them that the health, safety, and comfort of all employees is more important.

The office or jobsite that is calm, tidy, and as free from unnecessary distractions, is the workplace where employees will be able to do their jobs properly. It is also a healthier, safer environment for everyone concerned. A little cooperation can go a long way in attaining this goal.

People Who Work After Hours

In many companies, there are people who work after hours. When there is one, or a few, employees who are on the job at times other than the normal workday, some factors must be taken into consideration for their health and safety.

The employee who comes in to work much earlier than other employees, or is in the workplace late into the night, can have special safety concerns. From working alone in the building to going to and from his car in an empty parking lot, he should not be in danger or subject to undue fears. He should be advised of how to take sensible precautions for his safety when he is working alone.

Some of these special precautions may include making sure that the office where he is working, or perhaps the building itself, is locked. He should not be at risk of dealing with unwanted intruders, including those who may be dangerous. Having good lighting is also appropriate. This includes areas around the rest room and in the parking lot, in addition to the area where he is working. The person who works alone after normal business hours should also be advised to keep his car locked, and how to get to and from his car safely. As working alone can make a person more vulnerable, the employee needs to apply common sense when being on the job after hours.

The employee who works before or after business hours should take precautions to avoid accidents in the building and outdoors. While it is important during the normal workday, avoiding falls and other injuries when working alone means not placing oneself at risk when there is no one present to help him.

The person who works after hours should be advised to keep distractions to a minimum. While he may believe that he can play music when there is no one else present to be bothered by it, distractions decrease one's alertness. Safety when working alone means paying attention to one's surroundings and being alert to unforeseen dangers.

Working before or after hours can be positive for the employee who wants to get more accomplished. All it takes are some sensible precautions to make it a safe and productive experience.

Reasonable Expectations and Time-Management

The workplace where reasonable expectations and sensible time-management are an everyday part of the job is the workplace that is safest for its employees.

You may not have thought of these factors as being relevant to on-the-job health and safety. They can have a very negative effect, or a very positive effect, depending upon the approach your company takes to these issues.

The company or employee with unreasonable expectations produces an unhealthy work environment. When employees are overburdened with work, this does not make them more productive. Instead, it can lead to a significant amount of stress. It can also cause the employees to become careless with basic safety issues.

Ineffective time-management can also cause problems. The employees who do not have a basic framework of the tasks they need to do and when they need to be done, can find themselves in the position of putting things off until the last minute, and then rushing to complete them. This can also result in carelessness.

The company which operates on reasonable expectations is the workplace where all employees feel confident in their abilities. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by the job, or unsure of whether they can do it, they know they can do the job correctly. As self-confidence greatly decreases stress, good emotional health will go hand-in-hand with getting more done.

Knowing how to manage one's time wisely is not only necessary for getting the job done, it is also necessary for a healthy, safe work environment. Rushing to get something done at the last minute can result in unnecessary accidents. The person who is hurrying to finish something is not paying due attention to his surroundings, or to his own actions.

When the company and its individual employees have a sensible framework of everything that needs to be done during the workday, there will be much less room for error. Reasonable expectations and good time-management will reduce the amount of chaos in the workplace. The less chaos there is, the less risk there is of accidents, injuries, and stress.

Your Fire Safety Plan

While most businesses do have fire safety regulations, not enough people are aware of what is involved and what they must do in the event of a fire. It is a good idea to be sure that everyone in your company has the facts.

First, everyone should know their company's regulations on sprinkler systems, fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, and fire alarms. They should be informed of where the fire extinguishers and fire alarms are located, as well as being instructed on how to operate them if it becomes necessary.

Second, your company should have an evacuation plan. A good fire safety evacuation plan includes making sure all employees know the safest and fastest ways to get out of the building, and where they should all meet afterward. Windows, doors, and any other emergency exits should be clearly labeled. They must be unobstructed at all times. All of these emergency exits should be checked on a regular basis. Windows or doors which cannot be opened quickly in the event of a fire need to be repaired.

An evacuation plan also includes the safest methods for exiting a building. Although the fire itself can threaten lives, smoke inhalation is equally destructive. Your employees should be instructed in how to get out of a burning building without inhaling smoke. If some, or all, of your workplace is on an upper level, your employees also need to know the fastest, safest means of exiting the building from upper level offices.

When a fire occurs, human safety is the first and main priority. Although most people know this, it is a good idea to discuss it with your employees. Lives can be lost if people insist on trying to rescue personal items or job-related equipment. Everyone must know that getting out of the building safely, and ensuring the safety of others, is the first concern.

In many cases, fire can be prevented. A good fire safety plan also includes prevention. This can include making sure wastebaskets which are intended for paper are not used as ashtrays, and being alert to problems in your office's electrical wiring.

It does not require much time or effort to make sure everyone has the facts about fire safety and the evacuation plan for your company. The time everyone puts into becoming knowledgeable, and discussing this issue, can prevent lives from being lost if a fire does occur in your workplace.

Being Organized

The more organized a workplace is, the less risk there will be of both health-related problems and accidental injuries.

One factor in reducing these risks is to be sure that your workplace is always clean. Whether you have a regular maintenance staff or depend upon an employee to deal with this issue, it is essential to keep your workplace clean at all times. Floors need to be cleaned on a regular basis, and wastebaskets and other receptacles must be emptied.

Although most companies do acknowledge the need for cleanliness, sometimes it is not enough. All it takes is a wet or sticky spill on the floor for someone to slip and sustain and injury. Wastebaskets which may be used for tissues, lunch bags and food wrappers can contain bacteria. A healthy, safe workplace is kept free of residue and germs.

Neatness counts in terms of health and safety. While most workplaces do observe this fact, all it takes is one or more employees who are careless to undermine the safety of everyone in the workplace. If you have an employee who routinely leaves piles of paperwork on the desk or on the floor, these things can get in other people's way and cause an accident. Lunch bags, purses, and other personal items can also result in someone tripping or falling. If you have one or more employees who are careless or sloppy, they should be reminded to put such items away in their desks or in a locker.

Limiting the amount and kinds of personal items which employees can bring from home can also make the workplace neater and more organized. While everyone should feel comfortable on the job, this does not have to mean feeling as if the workplace is their home away from home. Large numbers of family photographs, books, music devices, plants, and other personal items can be distracting to other employees, and may get in their way.

It is a good idea to have a policy for what kinds and amounts of personal possessions are allowed in the workplace, where they should be located, and what constitutes too much. Some people may need to be reminded that they work at the office or jobsite, they don't actually live there.

Organizing your workplace also includes making sure everyone knows where everything is located. Whether an employee needs a particular office supply or a vending machine that is on the other side of the building, knowing where to readily find whatever he needs will eliminate rushing and frustration.

Keeping the workplace neat, clean, and organized makes for a much safer environment. Even if you already have a regular maintenance staff, it can be helpful to appoint someone in your office to oversee these conditions on a daily

basis. It is also a good idea to let all of your employees know that they are expected to do their share to keep the workplace in good condition.

In addition to the basic, daily tasks for the upkeep of your workplace, you should also have regular checks for potential maintenance problems. The electrical wiring system should be checked regularly for signs of problems. The plumbing system needs to be kept in good working order. Light bulbs and smoke detectors must be operating properly. Office equipment should also be monitored so it can be repaired or replaced if problems do occur.

An organized workplace is a joint effort. Regardless of whether you have a maintenance staff to clean your office and professionals to attend to any serious problems, organization only works as well as the employees who cooperate. If all of your employees are informed of what they need to do in the interest of everyone's health and safety, they will be more likely to cooperate and do their fair share. Not only will you have a healthier and safer workplace, everyone will have pride in their contributions for keeping it in great condition.

Plan for Emergences

No one likes to think of emergencies occurring in their workplace. Unfortunately, not thinking about it often results in not making plans. If you plan for possible emergencies in advance, and make sure everyone who works there is aware of the plans, it can prevent emergency situations from becoming disasters.

In addition to fire safety, some emergency situations which may occur on the job can include an injury or sudden illness, illegal activity such as drug use or unauthorized persons in the building, and emergencies which involve an employee's personal life. The proper course of action for these and other emergencies should be discussed in advance.

Even in the healthiest, safest work environments, people do experience sudden illnesses and injuries. All employees should be instructed on what to do in these situations. Everyone should know how to get medical assistance immediately if a coworker becomes seriously ill or injured. They should also have their personal information readily available, such as carrying a wallet card which lists any medical conditions or allergies, and contact information for their family members.

A basic first-aid kit should be in your workplace. While everyone needs to know how to use the products in such a kit, it is also not unreasonable to expect adult-aged employees and even adolescents to be instructed in first aid and basic life-support (BLS) techniques. These classes can often be found free of charge, or at a minimal cost, at community colleges and high schools. With little or no cost, and very little time, this knowledge can save someone's life.

Employees may occasionally have a family emergency which requires leaving work. While this is especially a concern for those who have children or elderly family members, emergencies can happen to anyone. It is a good idea to have a plan for how an employee's duties will be dealt with while he or she is out of the office.

Emergencies which involve illegal activity must be dealt with immediately, and in the safest manner possible. Whether your building has an intruder, or whether an employee has stolen someone else's property, your workplace should have an advance plan for how to deal with illegal activity without anyone getting harmed.

Promoting a Safe Environment

Your workplace should be a safe place for everyone. From executives to staff to volunteers, the hours spent on the job need to be free from threat and unnecessary dangers. Although most people consider it only common sense, a healthy and safe environment may require making everyone aware of what is acceptable and what is not.

The workplace must have a "zero-tolerance" policy for bullying and sexual harassment. All employees should be made aware that these types of behaviors will not be tolerated. They should also be encouraged to report instances of bullying or sexual harassment, whether it happens to someone else or to themselves.

The "zero-tolerance" policy must also include the use of illegal drugs. Many businesses forbid the use of alcohol as well, whether it is in terms of drinking alcohol on company property or coming to work under the influence of alcohol. The policy which you decide is best for your company and the overall welfare of your employees needs to be strictly enforced.

These days, more and more businesses are starting to forbid the use of tobacco products on company property, and even in surrounding areas. If this is your company's rule, it is a good idea to have adequate breaks for smokers, and inform them of where they need to go to smoke.

If your company does not have a policy against cigarette smoking, common sense must be applied for the sake of everyone's health. The company which allows cigarette smoking should have an area designated for this purpose, preferably outdoors. Even in the most casual work environment, nonsmokers and people who have health conditions do not need to deal with second-hand smoke throughout their work day.

The workplace should be a healthy, safe, good environment for everyone who works there. Applying common sense to your policies, and insisting that every employee abides by the policies, is the fairest way to ensure a good work environment.

Performing Background Screenings

Your company should have an employee background screening policy in place for all new hires. An employer who has performed a comprehensive pre-employment screening on its applicants is more likely to make better hiring decisions which results in highly skilled employees that can be an asset to the company. A proper screening policy can help eliminate workplace violence.

At a minimum, a criminal records check, identity verification, prior employment and reference checks should be screened. If the new hire will handle money, then also perform a civil records and credit history screening. If the new hire will be driving company vehicles then perform a driving history record check. In addition, proper skills assessment testing can help employers not only predict if the new hire has the proper experience and knowledge for the job but can also predict the personality characteristics of the individual. An employer should also consider drug test screening in addition to their baseline background checks.

Screening Statistics:

Negligent Hiring Lawsuits - pre-employment screening demonstrates due diligence.

Workplace Violence - history of criminal acts is a major factor in predicting workplace violence - On-the-job violence costs employers $36 billion each year. 1 in 10 applicants has a criminal background.

Unqualified Applicants - up to 30% of applications contain material falsehoods.

Time Wasted Recruiting, Training, and Hiring the Wrong Applicants - one bad hire can cost $25,000 for a regular worker and 1 million or more for a CEO/Executive.

Wrongful Termination Lawsuits - yes, even if they lied in the hiring process!

Theft, Financial Loss, Sexual Harassment, and other Workforce Problems - 14.7% of all applicants admit to theft of merchandise from an employer & 33% of all applicants admit to being tempted to steal from an employer.

"When in Doubt, Check-em Out"

Do You Need Security Guards?

Security guards are a standard part of many businesses today. It can be helpful for you to look at both sides of the issue in order to determine if security guards will be an asset to your company.

At its best, having security guards increases safety in the workplace. Duties which include monitoring the building for unauthorized persons, making sure employees get to their cars safely at night, and being present to assist in a variety of emergency situations, make having one or more security guards on the premises a safer environment for all employees.

In addition to practical safety, the presence of a security guard can also help employees to feel more confident and secure when they are at work. Even employees who are naturally nervous or anxious will feel able to concentrate on doing their jobs.

There can also be negative aspects to having security guards in the workplace. First, the presence of guards can give employees the impression that their place of business is dangerous, even if this is not the case. Second, if guards are too visible, some employees may feel that their trustworthiness is being questioned.

In general, a business and its employees benefit from having security guards on the property. It is better to be safe and prepared, than to be nonchalant about the possibility of emergency situations.

Although each company differs in its needs, most workplaces can benefit from having security guards. However, in order to prevent employees from having undue worries about the jobsite or location, and to not undermine the positive atmosphere of the workplace, security guards who are clearly monitoring the building and its surrounding areas are usually the most effective.

Whether you decide to have security guards or not, it is best for you to make this decision with the specific needs of your company in mind.

Special Situations: The Handicapped

As more and more handicapped persons are entering the workforce, this can result in companies taking their special needs into consideration. Whether the handicapped person is working because of financial necessity, or to feel good about making a contribution, it should be as easy for him to do his job as it is for other employees.

The handicapped person needs to be able to get into, out of, and around the place where he works without any unnecessary difficulty. Wheelchair ramps and handicapped-parking spaces are basic parts of many businesses for this reason.

The special needs of the handicapped person can extend beyond these factors. Wheelchair-accessible rest rooms are one example. When you have one or more handicapped employees, they also need to be able to use desks, drinking fountains, and office equipment without undue difficulty.

In addition to these practical aspects of making the workplace more accessible to the handicapped person, making it comfortable and safe is also in his best interest. Keeping debris off floors and out of hallways is important for workplace safety in general, but even more essential to the person who is handicapped.

The attitude of others toward the handicapped employee makes a difference in how he feels about himself and his ability to do the job. When others do not make a noticeable issue of his handicap, and treat him as well as others, it will help him to see that he fits in and belongs there. Obviously, no clear bias against the handicapped person should be tolerated.

Handicapped people of all ages are a wonderful asset to many companies today. With a few special considerations, he can do a great job and be a part of the team.

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