



New Health and Safety Normal at Work

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The world of work is being profoundly affected by the global pandemic. In addition to the threat to public health, the economic and social disruption threatens the long-term livelihood and well-being of millions of people around the globe. Government, employers and employees must play a crucial role in combating the effects of the outbreak, ensuring the safety of individuals and the sustainability of businesses. To ensure the best outcome, it is imperative that safety and health be at the forefront not only during this pandemic, but as we move forward.

The importance of health and safety in the workplace cannot be underestimated. In addition to being a rule of law, it is part and parcel of being a good employer to ensure your staff are not at risk of any injury while performing their daily roles/tasks. However, these established health and safety standards were not only designed to protect

your staff, they are also enacted to protect visitors, customers, sub-contractors and the general public who may do business with you or come into contact with your organisation in any way.

As an employer, you have a duty of care in accordance with the Safety and Health at Work Act, 2005 (SHaW) but more than that, it is good business practice to adhere to health and safety laws. Businesses that contravene these health and safety laws can face losing staff, incur higher recruitment costs, lower retention rates and lower profitability. Therefore, as an employer you should have health and safety procedures in place to reduce employee illnesses and injuries. These procedures can help you and your employees understand the potential hazards in your work environment.

Potential hazards are present in almost every workplace. Equipment, chemicals, furniture, certain behaviours and activities can potentially cause injury or harm to you or your workers. Health hazards can range from contamination of food due to unsafe handling and preparation practices to infectious disease outbreaks caused by improper hygiene and personal care.

If you work with dangerous chemicals or gases, there is always the risk of improper handling, maintenance, or storage, which can lead to dangerous exposure for you and your workers. In these cases, you must follow specific hazardous material handling guidelines set out in section 63 (9) of the SHaW Act, and you should have emergency and evacuation plans in place.

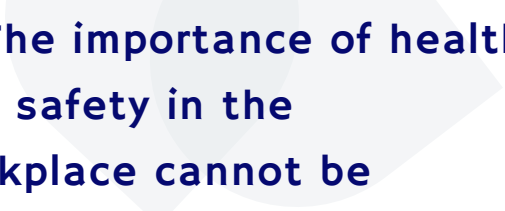
In accordance with section 7 (5) of the SHaW Act you only need a written policy if you have ten (10) or more employees. However, it is a good practice to have a written policy even if you do not employ the stipulated number of persons because it ensures that companies properly assess potential risks to businesses and put measures in place to control them.

The policy must contain a general statement on health and safety and how you intend to manage it. It should also detail who is responsible for health and safety in your organisation, adequately outline the risks to your business and what steps have been taken to mitigate or eliminate them. This policy should be reviewed annually or more often where necessary.

In addition to incorporating the recommended policy, you should ensure that your staff have the equipment needed to do their jobs properly and safely. It is also important to have the right signage and as per section 19 (b) of the SHaW Act training in respect of safe use of machinery to reduce the risk of errors occurring.

Good health and safety management systems should have a top down approach. If you categorize something as unimportant so will your staff, so it is important to stay on top of safety matters. It is recommended that safety and health be an agenda item at all meetings or huddles, this way the staff realizes the importance of the topic and starts to take it seriously. This lends to the development of a positive safety and health culture and effective safety and health management system within your organisation. Additionally, employers should stay up to date with the latest news, trends and changes in the law relative to health and safety. If you take a proactive approach to health and safety, you will build a reputation as a caring and conscientious employer and your staff will react accordingly.

If you require any further guidance please do not hesitate to leverage any of the competent governing bodies in Safety and Health protocols for Barbados which is inclusive of the Barbados Employers' Confederation or the Labour Department.



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