

FOUR STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING A
SAFETY PROGRAM
FOR YOUR SMALL BUSINESS



As the owner of a small business, you have a thousand responsibilities, from dealing with clients to paying the bills, and just about everything in between. But perhaps the most important responsibility is your employees' safety. Your employees are the greatest resource you have, and keeping them safe is a priority. To do this, you need a safety program that assesses hazards and risks, defines safety policies, describes necessary training and training schedules, and is regularly audited. Not only must your safety program do all of these things, but you must continuously evaluate and update the program to ensure that it addresses your organization's ever-changing needs. This guide outlines some of the steps that will help you implement a safety program in your organization so you can protect your business' most important assets and get back to work on all the other things you need to do.



Find Out What You Need

You wouldn't be a successful business owner without extensive knowledge of your industry; you probably know what hazards exist in your workplace, as well as what processes, equipment, and substances are potentially hazardous. Use your knowledge to perform a hazard assessment that thoroughly catalogs the hazards and risks in your workplace.

Specific safety policies, procedures, and training are likely necessary if any of your employee's' job duties involve:

- Driving
- Electricity
- Radiation
- Chemical Substances
- Machinery
- Extreme Temperatures
- Lifts, Scaffolds, Ladders Use
- Lifting Heavy Objects
- Confined Spaces

The list above is a starting point; it's not all-inclusive. There are many other situations where specific training or policies will be necessary, so it's important to thoroughly evaluate all risks and hazards, as well as familiarize yourself with all applicable regulations.

It's important to review local, state, and federal regulations for other specifications that might be necessary such as specific policies or hands-on training. OSHA has many free resources available to help small businesses comply with regulations that are worth taking advantage of, including a comprehensive handbook. There may even be an organization in your area that offers free, on-site consultations to help small business owners evaluate the safety needs of their companies.

While you're reviewing the elements that your written policies will need, consider the other aspects of your safety program as well. Review your workplace for practices that you may be doing and identify any gaps that are present. This could include signage and labels, personal protective equipment (PPE), chemicals and tools used, and incident trends.



Build Your Safety Policies

Once you have performed a hazard assessment and have identified the risks and hazards present in your work environment, use that information to create written policies and procedures which are part of your safety program. This can include how to eliminate the hazard, engineering controls such as machine guarding, administrative controls such as safe practices, and the appropriate personal protective equipment. Your policy may also include support documents such as certification forms, and audit frequencies and checklists. Other examples of topic specific information to be included are what chemicals are being used, where confined spaces are located and your emergency evacuation plan. Your policies will also specify if more than one method of training is required and what those methods are.



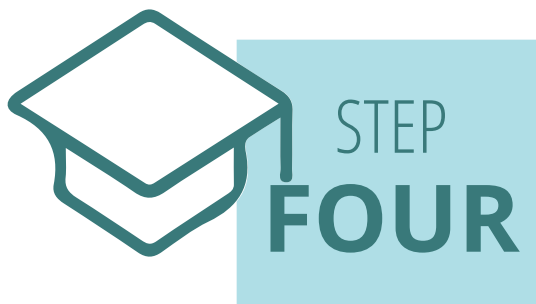
Pick Out A Training System

Effective training takes time and resources. Training protects your most valuable assets, and is important to the success of your company. Online training systems are a resource that can provide you with the training you need at a general awareness level. With e-learning, training becomes more efficient to support your company. Your employees can complete training when it fits best. This will allow you to free up time for both employees and yourself to take care of your other business responsibilities also.

Cost is a huge consideration in a business that's growing, and even though safety matters to your company, your budget may not include that right now. While it might not be fiscally sound to hire a whole safety department, you're not limited to second-rate training solutions. An online learning management system (LMS) can provide you quality safety content, written by safety experts, at an affordable price. Traditional classroom training methods can be costly when you're paying session by session, especially if you're paying for an instructor to talk to a half-empty room. Instead, consider subscribing to an e-learning system that gives you access to all the courses you need, with a price scaled to the number of people you need to train.

An added benefit to an online learning management system is that it can do some of the work for you. Find a system that will keep training records and generate compliance reports instead of manually controlling and maintaining your records. An online training platform can help you schedule training and automatically remind users when training is due.

For unique training needs, an LMS that has courses on all of the general awareness safety topics can free you up to create the content specific to your site. Additionally, a learning management system that will allow you to incorporate your custom content will streamline your training process. An LMS with support options - a staff that will assist you with implementing the training system and troubleshooting issues that arise - can also alleviate some of the headache of training.



Commit To Safety Practices

It's not enough to just adhere to the letter of the law when it comes to safety; the business and the team that you've built are too important to risk by breezing through training courses and taking shortcuts that could result in loss of life, equipment damage, product loss, or injury to your most valuable asset. Any of those unfortunate circumstances could cost thousands in regulatory fines, repair and replacement fees, insurance, or workers' compensation payouts, as well as costing your business its reputation.

As a founder of a company, it might be hard to relinquish control over certain aspects of your business - after all, you've put so much into it. But safety can't just be your responsibility, it has to be the responsibility of all members of your team. It has been said that safety starts from the top down, and you're at the top. Commit to safety by communicating and following the company safety policy, taking safety training, using safe working practices, and implementing precautionary measures in your company.

When you've made safety a priority, so will your employees. Remind them that their efforts are all integral to the health, safety, and success of the company and themselves. Don't be afraid to delegate either; empower your employees to champion safety, be it by creating new safety practices or by suggesting process improvements.

And don't forget that implementing a safety program is just the beginning of an ongoing commitment to safety. Over time, and with the addition of new processes, equipment, and employees, you will need to re-evaluate the safety needs of your business through employee feedback, observations, and any new hazards, and alter your program to meet those needs with new policies, procedures, and training.

Safety has more value for your organization than just as a means of avoiding OSHA fines; it creates a workplace that retains and attracts talented workers and reinforces the mutual commitment between business and employee--workers who feel like their employer cares about them care more about their work.

To do what's best for your company and your team, you need to promote an environment of safety in the workplace. Running a small business is a huge challenge, and putting a safety program in place can add to that challenge. The laws and regulations regarding safety can be complicated and convoluted, but being safe isn't. It starts with implementing your safety program, in just a few simple steps: find out what you need, build your program, train your people, and then, just do it - commit to safety

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