

How to Create a Pets in the Workplace Policy



Allowing pets without compromising s health, safety, sanitation or comfort.

As if maintaining health, safety and sanitation isn't enough for workplaces occupied only by humans, workers may sometimes bring their pets to work with them. While pets bring out the good in most of us, they can also make life more difficult for those charged with implementing a company's OHS program. And in these times of labour shortages where getting people to actually come to work is such a challenge, increasing numbers of companies are letting workers bring their pets to work to bolster recruitment, retention and morale. As an OHS coordinator, you might have no choice but to accept this reality. However, you must get your company to consider the needs of not only the pet owner but others at the workplace whose health, safety, comfort and productivity might be affected by the presence of pets at the site. Here's how to create a [pets in the workplace policy](#) that strikes an appropriate balance among all of these considerations.

The Pros & Cons of Allowing Pets

Accepting pets is a potentially powerful amenity that can give your company a decisive edge in attracting and retaining employees, especially in the current economy where many are so reluctant to leave their homes and come to the site each day.

In addition, studies show that workers who bring their dogs to work tend to be significantly less stressed and more productive than those who have to leave their dogs at home. Helping workers save money on sitters' and walkers' fees can also go a long way.

But there are also disadvantages to allowing pets. For one thing, it may violate building, health or other codes, e.g., if you're a restaurant, grocery store or other establishment that sells food and beverages. In addition, letting workers bring their pets to work may create major problems with other workers, such as those with dog allergies or phobias.

1. Exempt Bona Fide Service Animals

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To start, specify that the pet policy doesn't apply to assistance and service animals workers may require to deal directly with a disability-related need. Such animals don't count as pets and you must accommodate them under human rights laws to the point of undue hardship.

2. Require Prior Approval of Each Pet

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Providing blanket permission for worker pets is a recipe for chaos. You need to maintain tight control by requiring workers to get prior written permission for each pet they propose to bring to the workplace. Specifically, there should be a pets permission process. You might even want to charge workers a fee for processing pet permission requests.

3. Limit Number of Permissible Pets

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Establish criteria for acceptance, starting with the number of pets permitted at any particular time. You might also want to impose size and weight limits.

4. Ban Wild and Exotic Animals

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Don't let your workplace become a zoo or menagerie for wild and exotic animals. Exclude birds, snakes and other reptiles, chinchillas, ferrets, iguanas, monkeys, pot-bellied pigs, rabbits, raccoons, rodents, weasels, skunks, tarantulas, scorpions, spiders and basically any other undomesticated animal other than a dog or cat.

5. Ban Dangerous Dog Breeds

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While dogs may be man's best friend, certain breeds pose risks of violent, aggressive and dangerous behaviour, and may even be banned under local laws for your type of property. Breeds you should consider banning include Pit Bulls (aka American Staffordshire Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, or American Pit Bull Terriers), Bull Terriers, Bull Mastiffs, German Shepherds, Huskies, Malamutes, Doberman Pinschers, Rottweilers, Chow Chows and Rhodesian Ridgebacks.

6. Require Evidence of Good Behaviour

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Require workers that apply for permission to keep a pet to provide evidence that the animal is:

- Properly vaccinated against all diseases and conditions that can threaten human health;
- Potty-trained;
- Spayed or neutered; and
- Not violent, aggressive, unduly noisy or smelly and generally well-behaved.

7. Require Workers to Register Accepted Pets

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Specify that any and all accepted pets must be properly registered. Keep records listing the name, species, breed and location of each pet you accept, along with a photograph and records of current vaccinations.

8. Reserve Right to Charge Pet Deposits

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Specify that workers are responsible for any and all damage done by their pets. You might also want to require workers to

pay a refundable deposit to defray the costs of pet damage.

9. Require Workers to Ensure Pet Obeys House Rules

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It's critically important for workers to accept responsibility for their pets' behaviour. Among other things, pets should be kept on a leash at all times, have appropriate identification and not engage in excessive barking or other conduct that might create a nuisance or disturb others. Workers should also agree not to let their pets relieve themselves except in specifically designated areas, clean up after their pets and immediately and properly dispose of droppings.

10. Establish Pet-Free Areas

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You need to designate certain elevators and common areas no-pet zones where individuals with allergies, phobias or dislikes of animals can find refuge. Require workers to be aware of and keep their pets out of these no-pet zones.

11. Reserve Right to Revoke Permission to Keep Pets

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Make it clear that house rules will be strictly enforced and that violations are grounds for revoking permission to keep a particular pet. In addition, reserve the right to revoke all permissions at any time and for any reason if you determine that your pet-friendly policy isn't working and you want to go back to banning pets from the workplace.

12. Require Workers to Indemnify You Against Liability

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Lawyers say that you shouldn't let workers keep pets unless and until they accept strict liability for any resulting bodily injury and property damage their pets may inflict, along with a certificate of insurance demonstrating adequate coverage under their general liability policy. In addition, get workers to indemnify you for all lawyers' fees, litigation costs and other losses and expenses you incur as a result of their pets.