

How to Create a Visitors Safety Policy



What's At Stake

Sure, you have an OHS program for your *own workers*. But does that program also provide protection for outside vendors, customers and other visitors (which we'll refer to collectively as 'visitors') who come to your workplace? Here's a look at this common OHS program blind spot and how to fix it. [Click here](#) for a Model Visitors Safety Policy that you can adapt.

3 Reasons You Need a Visitors Safety Policy

Several OHS directors tell the *Insider* that their upper managers and executives don't want to put a visitors safety policy because it's 'unmanageable.' If you encounter such resistance, here are 3 good arguments you can use to overcome it:

1. Visitors Are at Risk

The people who work at your site every day can be trained to recognize dangers and take appropriate precautions. This isn't true of visitors who are at your workplace for only a short time. As a result, visitors are especially vulnerable to injuries and need to be carefully protected. 'Keeping your workers safe is tough enough,' notes one Ontario OHS director. 'Protecting the visitors who walk around your workplace without having the same knowledge and appreciation of the hazards can be even trickier,' she adds.

2. Visitors May Endanger Others

Visitors can also put the health and safety of others in the workplace at risk. For example, visitors may tinker with machines or safety systems, light up cigarettes around combustible fumes or distract workers performing vital safety functions, such as traffic control. And, of course, visitors may pose security risks or threats of violence.

3. Company May Be Liable for Visitors' Injuries

Perhaps the most effective way to overcome objections is to let company executives that the company could be held liable for a visitor's injury at the

workplace under OHS and, in extreme cases, criminal law (under erstwhile Bill C-45, which requires persons in control of work to protect not only the workers but all persons suffering bodily injury as a result of the work).

The Right & Wrong Way to Implement a Visitors Safety Policy

Once you sell your C-suite on the idea of a visitors safety policy, you need to decide what kind of policy to implement.

Wrong Way: Some companies try to disclaim liability and make visitors responsible for their own safety. For example, they'll make all visitors sign and date a waiver like the following:

Visitors to the ABC Company workplace must agree to abide by all ABC safety policies and to accept responsibility for their own safety. ABC Company assumes no responsibility for the visitor's health and safety and shall in no way be liable for any injuries or accidents that occur.

Although it may sound impressive, lawyers say that a waiver or disclaimer like this isn't worth the paper it's written on. 'Simply requiring a visitor to sign a piece of paper like this won't absolve you of your legal duty to protect them against workplace hazards,' according to a Toronto OHS lawyer. 'Companies can't unilaterally disclaim their liabilities under OHS or criminal law,' adds an Alberta lawyer.

Right Way: As a legal obligation, visitors' safety is just like worker safety. You're not expected to be perfect. All you're expected to do is use due diligence, that is, take all reasonable precautions to protect your visitors. The specific steps you take depend on the kind of industry you're in, the design of your workplace, the frequency and kind of visitors you get and other variables. For example, in certain especially dangerous industries like construction or mining, you might want to assign a company representative to escort the visitor through the workplace.

5 Things to Include in Visitors Safety Policy

While there's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all, the Insider Model Policy contains the necessary elements. Like the Model, your policy should:

- Require all visitors to sign in before entering and sign out before leaving the workplace;
- Let visitors know they'll be notified of hazards and emergency procedures when they log in (or soon afterwards);
- Tell visitors that they must use appropriate personal protective equipment and list what that is;
- Require visitors to obey all posted signs; and
- List the rules of conduct visitors must follow, e.g., no touching equipment, no smoking, no horseplay, staying out of restricted areas, etc.