Safety topic

Safety policies, procedures, and rules: best practices

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Establishing safety policies and work rules is a critical process in any industry. Without safety policies and procedures, would safety even be part of your company's culture? Your expectations must be clear, both verbally and in writing.

As important as it is to train and orient your employees, unless the information you provide is written into your policies and rules, you leave yourself open to legal battles, misunderstandings, and loopholes. These policies may be understandings that have evolved after working together for a period of time, but they are much easier to enforce if they are in writing. Such policies and rules, if written properly, protect you and your employees and provide your company with the flexibility to manage your business needs.

Creating a safe and healthful work environment is not only a requirement for Oregon employers; it is also a "best practice" among top performing businesses. According to author and safety professional Larry L. Hansen, "Safety excellence is all about proactively designing, aligning, and improving operational processes."

Great businesses know how to get their work done effectively, efficiently, and safely. Formalizing your expectations, including step-by-step instructions for job tasks, is a very effective way to emphasize to your employees that you are as serious about their safety and health as you are about production, quality, profitability, and customer service.

This guide provides you with some practical information and examples to help you assess, update, or create your company's safety policies, procedures, and rules.

Safety Policies

Safety policies cover broad topics and communicate company philosophy or general guidelines. Safety policies should be written as guidelines for reference and discussed with employees upon hire and during orientation. They provide both vision and inspiration to the organization and highlight what is believed, valued and expected. Examples include:

- Safety Policy Statement
- Employee Responsibility and Accountability
- Hazard Assessment and Correction
- Return-To-Work Policy
- Discipline Policy

Safety Policy Statement

An effective way to communicate your company's overall safety policy is to develop a Safety Policy Statement that includes the elements that are core to your business focus.

The Safety Policy Statement is typically the introductory statement in a written safety program, and should reflect the importance of injury prevention. Reviewing your Safety Policy Statement with potential job applicants will set expectations and help them determine if they would be a good fit for the organization.

Sample Safety Policy Statement

At **XYZ organization**, we care about the safety, health and well being of our employees. We value the contributions our employees make toward our success. We support local community interests, and value honesty, integrity, and teamwork.

We Value Our Employees

Our business operates with a goal of zero damage to people, property and product. It is our policy to provide safe working conditions. At _____, everyone shares equally in the responsibility of identifying hazards, following safety rules and operating practices. All jobs and tasks must be performed in a safe manner, as safety is crucial to the quality of our products/service.

Safety Policy

At _____, no phase of the operation is considered more important than accident prevention. It is our policy to provide and maintain safe working conditions and to follow operating practices that will safeguard all employees. No job will be considered properly completed unless it is performed in a safe manner.

_____ is concerned about the health and good work habits of its employees. In the event you are injured or unable to perform your job, we want to help you obtain the best treatment, so you can return to your regular job as soon as possible.

Zero Tolerance or Substance-Free Workplace

The company has a vital interest in maintaining a safe, healthy and efficient workplace for the benefit of its employees, clients and the public. The use of performance impairing drugs can cause avoidable injuries to employees, damage to property and productivity losses. In our efforts to provide a safe workplace, we have a substance abuse policy. Reporting for work or working under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances is prohibited. The use, possession, transfer or sale of illegal substances, alcohol, or any other substances which impair job performance or pose a hazard to the safety and welfare of the employee, the public, or other employees is strictly prohibited and may result in immediate disciplinary action as outlined in our company policies and procedures.

Return to Work

If an employee is injured on the job, our goal is to assist in obtaining medical treatment and return the employee to work as soon as possible. Our employees also have responsibilities for notifying us of their condition and providing appropriate information to assist in the Return to Work process. Through this joint effort, recoveries are faster and employees return to productive work environments sooner.

I have read _____'s Company Culture statement and understand the commitment to the safety and health of employees and customers/clients.

_____

(Applicant's/Employee's Name – Please Print)

_____ _____

(Applicant's/Employee's Signature) Today's Date

Safety Procedures

Safety procedures cover specific safety activities. These procedures outline the steps to be taken to implement a policy. Some procedures are specific to a job or task while others are general descriptions of how to implement a policy. Procedures exist for most aspects of a job whether they are formalized and written down or not. To be effective, safety procedures should be communicated in written and verbal form and emphasized by showing the employee the procedure and then having them demonstrate to assure proper understanding of the procedure.

Common safety procedures may cover:

- How to report a hazard
- Step-by-step examples of how to safely complete specific work tasks
- Basic safety rules
- Personal protective equipment
- Chemical usage
- Hazard communication
- Specific equipment use and safe operation
- Sharps use and disposal procedures
- Emergency plans

Safety Rules

Safety rules list the specific activities to do or avoid for completing the job effectively and safely.

Important things to keep in mind regarding safety rules include:

- No single list of safety rules is adequate for all types of businesses.
- Develop your own list of safety rules based upon standard industry practices and your own accident experience. Don't rely solely on generic lists or examples from other employers.
- All rules need to be completely and clearly communicated to management and staff alike.
- All rules should be strictly and consistently enforced.
- If written safety rules are not consistently and equitable enforced, the employer's actual practices outside the written rules may create a legal liability if challenged in a legal or regulatory dispute.
- Follow the manufacturer's recommendations when creating rules for the operation of equipment.

Sample Safety Rules

Here are examples of safety rules that are used by some businesses. Your rules need to be specific to your place of employment and the hazards associated with your job tasks.

1. Report to work alert, rested and in good physical condition.

2. Personal protective equipment (such as safety glasses, hearing protection, protective clothing, and footwear) must be worn when required for specific job tasks or work areas.

3. All accidents, incidents and injuries, regardless of how minor, shall be reported immediately to the supervisor in charge.

4. All work is to be performed in a safe manner according to our written policies and procedures. If you have a concern about the safety of a task, bring this to the attention of your immediate supervisor.

5. Understand your work assignments and perform only the job functions in which you are fully trained. Discuss any unfamiliar work assignments with your supervisor prior to beginning the task.

6. Possession of firearms or other weapons is prohibited on Company property, or while you are on Company business.

7. Horseplay or practical jokes are prohibited.

8. Use or being under the influence of, intoxicants or drugs while on the job is prohibited and shall be considered cause for dismissal.

9. No worker shall operate equipment unless trained and authorized for its use.

10. A worker shall not operate a machine unless the guarding mechanisms are in place and functioning properly.

11. Always use the proper tool, equipment, or process for the job.

12. Ignoring safe work practices, policies, procedures, rules or other safety instruction could be cause for disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

13. All employees shall correct an unsafe condition or practice to the extent of their authority and/or report the hazard to their supervisor.

14. Ignoring safe work practices, policies, procedures, rules, or other safety instruction is cause for disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

15. All employees are forbidden to ride on forklifts, carriers, or other mobile equipment as passengers. Drivers of such equipment are required to wear seatbelts when provided.

Additional Resources

Additional resources to help you manage your overall safety program, as well as tools to assess your organizational culture and conduct an accident/incident analysis are located in the employer safety section of SAIF's website: **www.saif.com**. Also see OR-OSHA's website: **www.orosha.org**.