1. HOW TO DRAFT A SAFETY STATEMENT

Under section 20 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 ("the Act") every employer must prepare a statement in writing which is known as a **Safety Statement**.

This statement specifies the manner in which safety, health and welfare shall be managed in the workplace. The purpose of the document is to require employers to assess the workplace over which they have control, to identify the hazards to safety, health and welfare in that place of work and to manage them so that accidents don’t occur.

**It is not possible to publish a generic safety statement as the risks in each workplace vary depending on the activity being carried out.** It is the employer's responsibility to ensure the Safety Statement it is fit for the organisation under its control. Although the general contents are specified by the Act, there is no legally required format for a policy. However, there is extensive guidance on the subject published by the Health and Safety Authority.

Where the employer has different work locations and/or activities, it may be necessary to prepare a Safety Statement that has separate sections dealing with the different locations or activities. As many employees now also work remotely, assessment of such work locations is also required.

Legally, the safety statement must be based on the risk assessment of hazards in the workplace. The measures and resources necessary to reduce the risks to an acceptable level must be specified. The employer’s duties and the responsibilities of key personnel in relation to safety, health and welfare in the workplace should be documented, as well as emergency plans.

The Safety Statement must be accessible to all employees and must be brought to the attention of all employees at least annually. All new employees must be made aware of the Safety Statement when they start work. Where specific tasks are carried out, which pose a serious risk to safety and health, the relevant contents of the Safety Statement must be brought to the attention of those affected, setting out the hazards identified, the risk assessments and the safety and health control measures.

Other people may be exposed to a specific risk dealt with in the Safety Statement and the Statement should be brought to their attention. These could include contractors, temporary workers and delivery people.

Preparing a Safety Statement is important to ensure safety and health in the workplace, but it is also required by law. In the event of an accident, Health and Safety Authority inspectors will review the risk assessment and Safety Statement, and the procedures and work practices in use. If the inspector finds that one of these is inadequate, he or she can ask the employer to revise it. Employers can also be prosecuted if they do not have a Safety Statement.

**What should be covered in a Safety Statement?**

Section 20 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 sets out what should be covered by the Safety Statement. It must:

* specify how the safety and health of all employees will be secured and managed
* specify the hazards identified, risks assessed and the control measures
* give details of how the employer is going to manage his or her safety and health responsibilities, including a commitment to comply with legal obligations, the protective and preventive measures taken, the resources provided for safety and health at the workplace and the arrangements used to fulfil these responsibilities
* include the plans and procedures to be used in the event of an emergency or serious danger
* specify the duties of employees, including the co-operation required from them on safety and health matters
* include the names and job titles of people appointed to be responsible for safety and health or for performing the tasks set out in the statement
* contain the arrangements made for appointing safety representatives, and for consulting with and the participation by employees on safety and health matters, including the names of the safety representatives and the members of the safety committee, if appointed
* be written in a form, manner and language that will be understood by all
* include a review mechanism
* have regard to the relevant safety and health legislation

**STEPS IN PREPARING A SAFETY STATEMENT**

There is no legally prescribed format for a Safety Statement, but it should include the following components:

A Health & Safety Policy

The Safety Statement should start with a declaration from the employer of its commitment to ensuring, in so far as is reasonably practicable, a safe and healthy workplace and that it will comply with its statutory obligations. This declaration should be signed by a senior member of management on the employer’s behalf. It should also be clear how health and safety matters are to be brought to the attention of employees.

Safety arrangements and information

This section should outline the management organization describing who is responsible for delivering the commitments made in the opening section and complying with various statutory obligations. It should provide information about:

* those with roles and responsibilities in relation to safety and health,
* accident reporting and investigation, and
* emergency procedures, including first aid and fire.

It is also important that safety arrangements provide for consultation with employees about workplace safety and health as there are specific legal requirements relating to employee consultation, participation and representation in sections 25 and 26 of the 2005 Act.

This section should also detail the employers ongoing commitments in areas such as staff training (i.e. manual handling), the protection of people visiting the workplace, the provision and use of personal protective equipment, the protection of pregnant employees and young people in the workplace, the promotion of dignity in the workplace and control of work-related stress.

This section can also detail the employees’ statutory responsibilities in relation to health and safety.

Forms and records

It is useful to keep all the relevant forms and registers in one place within your safety statement. This may include: a responsible person register, emergency contact information and emergency service contact details, induction register and topic checklist, a training register, a personal protective equipment register, accident investigation forms, and any relevant chemical safety data sheets.

Risk assessments and actions

Section 19 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 requires that employers must identify the hazards in the workplaces under their control and assess the risks to safety and health at work presented by these hazards.

Where the employer has different work locations and/or activities, it may be necessary to prepare a safety statement that has separate sections dealing with the different locations or activities. As many employees now also work remotely, assessment of such work locations is also required.

There are a number of steps to carrying out a Risk Assessment:

* + - * 1. Identify the hazards.
				2. Assess the risks.
				3. Put control measures in place.
				4. Record the findings

A hazard is anything which can cause harm in terms of human injury or ill health, such as work materials, equipment, work methods or practices, poor work design or exposure to harmful agents such as chemicals, noise or vibration. A risk is the likelihood that somebody will be harmed by the hazard and how serious the harm might be. Control measures (or controls) are the precautions taken to ensure that a hazard will not injure anyone.

**Identify the hazards**

In some workplaces, the hazards may be few and simple, and the employer may be able to do this task itself. In other workplaces a responsible experienced employee or a competent safety and health adviser may need to be used to identify all hazards and conduct the risk assessment. This person must be familiar with the hazards which are relevant to the workplace under review. Employees should be involved in the process as much as possible.

Each hazard is identified and where such a hazard can potentially cause a significant danger to a person's health or safety, the degree of risk is quantified.

**Risk Assessment**

Once the hazards in the workplace have bene identified, the employer must assess the risks to safety and health at work presented by these hazards. Employers must examine and write down these workplace risks and what to do about them. Ultimately, assessing risk means that anything in the workplace that could cause harm to the employer’s employees, other employees and other people (including customers, visitors and members of the public) must be carefully examined. The magnitude of risk should be assessed, and the employer then must decide whether the risk is acceptable or whether more precautions need to be taken to prevent harm.

**Control measures/ precautions**

Once a hazard is identified, employers need to consider if the hazard can be eliminated or if the job can be changed in any way so as to make it safer and, if not, what safety arrangements and/or precautions are necessary to control this risk?

Employers must ensure that arrangements, precautions, procedures etc. are developed to eliminate or reduce the level of risk to an acceptable level. They must ensure that they meet all legal requirements in relation to health and safety relevant to the particular workplace, such as the laws in relation to specific machinery, processes, etc. and all generally accepted industry standards should be complied with. The expectation is that employers do what is reasonably practicable to keep the workplace safe.

Arrangements and procedures can involve any combination of design, specification, inspection, maintenance, operating procedures, training, supervision or monitoring procedures, which are needed to control an identified risk. This part of the Safety Statement will give actual procedures to manage risks and hazards.

**Record the findings**

The significant findings of the risk assessment should be recorded in the Safety Statement so that all hazards identified and assessed are listed together with the relevant control measures. Employees should also be informed about these findings**.**

1. **REVIEW AND REVISE**

The Safety Statement needs to be relevant at all times so it may be necessary to revise it whenever there are changes, or when risk assessments are carried out and improvements made that have an impact on safety and health. Workplaces constantly change, and the Safety Statement needs to be updated when new risks or procedures are introduced.

It is recommended that employers review the safety statement at least annually and inform employees of any changes.

The Safety Statement must be revised, if significant changes have occurred, such as:

* the creation of a new department, which may introduce new hazards.
* the introduction of a new process, which may introduce new hazards.
* take-overs or mergers or sale of part of a business.
* change of premises (which will alter arrangements such as fire safety procedures, evacuation and assembly or alarm testing);
* changes in legislation or codes of practice, etc;
* changes in technology that may affect the interpretation of "reasonably practicable"

It is important that the information and practices contained in the Safety Statement are being followed and are effective. The measures implemented to protect employees should be monitored to ensure that they are working, and changes should be made if they are not.