

Workplace Safety Preserves and Protects



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Workplace safety is about preventing injury and illness to employees and volunteers in the workplace. Thus, it's about protecting the nonprofit's most valuable asset: its staff members.

By protecting the staff's well-being, you can reduce the amount of money paid out in health insurance benefits, workers' compensation benefits and the cost of wages for temporary help. Also factor in saving the cost of lost-work hours, time spent orienting temporary help, and the programs and services that may suffer due to fewer service providers, stress on those providers who are picking up the absent workers' share or, worse case, having to suspend or shut down a program due to lack of providers.

Addressing Safety and Health Hazards

To make the workplace safer, the organization has to acknowledge which potential health and safety hazards are present. This involves determining *where*, *what* and *how* a worker is likely to become injured or ill on the job. Start by analyzing individual workstations and program areas for hazards — the potential for harm — be it a frayed electrical cord, repetitive motion, toxic chemicals, mold, lead paint or lifting heavy objects.

Job hazard analysis

OSHA describes job hazard analysis as a technique that focuses on job tasks to identify hazards before they occur. The Nonprofit Risk Management Center thinks of hazard analysis as looking at the parts to strengthen the whole. From either viewpoint, the analysis examines the relationship between the worker, the task, the tools and the work environment.

Depending on the nature of the nonprofit's mission and programs, senior management may have to help workers manage specific hazards associated with their tasks. Examples can be found on OSHA's Web site, www.osha.org. Some universal examples are:

- ergonomics
- falls
- fire/heat
- noise
- struck by or against
- temperature extremes
- visibility

- weather conditions that increase or create a hazard

Workplace safety program

Any policy, procedure or training used by the organization to further the safety of personnel while working for the nonprofit is considered part of a workplace safety program.

Workplace safety programs to reduce work-related injury and illness are concerned with:

- promoting and rewarding safe practices at work;
- reducing injuries and illnesses at work;
- eliminating fatalities at work.

Injury and illness prevention

According to OSHA, work-related injury and illness prevention falls into three categories in order of priority: engineering controls, administrative controls, and personal protective equipment controls. We have adapted this list to make it more applicable to most nonprofit organizations:

- administrative controls
- written procedures and safe work practices,
- exposure-time limitations (temperature and ergonomic hazards),
- hazardous materials use monitoring,
- alarms, signs and warnings,
- buddy system, and
- training.

Workplace safety initiatives can be as simple as closing and locking the front door; replacing burned out lights inside and out; closing drawers before walking away from a desk or a file cabinet; knowing and using proper lifting techniques; providing adjustable workstations; and using the proper tool in an appropriate fashion for the task. These and other basics should be universally adopted safety procedures in any workplace.

Size does not matter

Workplace safety programs are important to all nonprofit organizations. Remember: employees and volunteers are a nonprofit's most important asset. One might argue that a nonprofit run by one employee or one volunteer is at greater risk than a nonprofit with hundreds of staff members. The argument would be: If that one person is out of commission, the nonprofit's mission is nonfunctioning. For all intents and purposes that nonprofit is defunct. That is not to say the nonprofit with thousands of paid and volunteer employees is at less risk, just that there's more of a chance that someone can step into the void and perform the tasks of the injured or ill person.

Create program ownership

Paid and volunteer staff members' health and safety are affected not only by their own actions but by those of their co-workers. Senior management must help staff members manage hazards associated with their work (tasks or responsibilities). They also need to make certain employees and volunteers are fit for work. Fitness for work involves drug and alcohol issues, physical and emotional wellbeing, and fatigue and stress.

For a workplace safety program to succeed, people need to be engaged with the creation and implementation of the program. For example, the nonprofit is responsible for supplying employees and volunteers with appropriate safety equipment, but individual staff members are responsible for wearing the safety equipment at the right times and in the right places. The nonprofit should provide all staff with training to help them carry out their assignments, but these staff members are responsible for attending this training, asking questions and telling supervisors if they don't understand what is being explained. This may require staff members to act assertively — to speak up for themselves. For instance, instead of nodding in agreement when asked if they understand, it's the responsibility of those who don't to say: "I don't understand how to use these. Could you please show me?"

Measure performance

Continuous improvement in safety and health involves seeking better ways to work, measuring performance and reporting against set targets. It's also about systematically evaluating compliance with procedures, standards and regulations; understanding the causes of incidents and injuries; and openly acknowledging and promptly correcting any deficiencies.

Performance can be measured by:

- reduction in lost-time injury frequency
- reduction in medical treatment injury frequency (beyond first aid)
- reduction in sick days used
- lower workers' compensation costs
- lower medical benefits payments (doctor's visits, prescription drugs)

Workplace Safety Policy Statement

It's up to the management of a nonprofit to vigilantly protect staff safety. Implementing a safety policy for your organization should be a top priority.

Sample Workplace Safety Policy

It is the intent of [organization name] to provide a safe environment for employees, and volunteers. It is also our intent to properly manage any incidents that occur so as to minimize injury and other forms of loss. A well-managed workplace safety program can benefit our organization and its people in countless ways.

In order for [name of nonprofit] to achieve our goals, we have developed a workplace safety program outlining the policies and procedures regarding employee and volunteer health and safety. Each and every individual must become familiar with the program, follow and enforce the procedures, and become an active participant in this workplace safety program.

While management [the workplace safety officer and workplace safety committee] will be responsible for developing and organizing this program, its success will depend on the involvement of each employee and volunteer. We look forward to your cooperation and participation.

Staff — paid employees and unpaid volunteers — should be encouraged to report any unsafe conditions right away and should be educated how to react in an emergency involving potential violence at the workplace.

Goals of policy

1. A primary goal of a workplace safety policy is to establish the expectation that it's the responsibility of all personnel to create and maintain a safe work environment.
2. The organization's safety policy should also address the organization's obligations under the Occupational Safety and Health Act to maintain a safe workplace.
 - The federal government, through the Occupational Safety and Health Act, regulates all workplaces to ensure that certain safety standards are met.
 - OSHA regulations require that all workplaces train their staff annually concerning workplace hazards, such as hazardous chemical substances and blood borne pathogens.
 - Most workers' compensation insurance policies require the organization to report a workrelated injury or illness within a certain number of days, or risk loss of coverage.
 - To ensure proper coverage, it's wise for the organization's policy to require employees to report any incidents resulting in workrelated illness or injury immediately or within 24-hours.
 - If your organization's activities include taking care of children, the elderly or other vulnerable populations, employees run the risk of being exposed to diseases while taking care of their clients.
3. The organization's workplace safety policy should require employees to use universal precautions when applying firstaid or providing personal care to clients or each other. Exposure at the workplace to diseases that are transmitted by body fluids, such as Hepatitis and AIDS, is regulated by OSHA.

It's a basic tenant of employment law that the employer is responsible for the safety of employees while they're at work. Federal and state laws require employers to maintain a safe work environment and to report unsafe conditions and educate employees about hazards and dangerous substances that they might encounter at the workplace. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (OSH Act) requires all employers to report workplace accidents and deaths to the local or regional office of OSHA and to provide safety training to employees (notably on hazardous substances, bloodborne pathogens and communicable diseases) and engage in safe practices in all aspects of the employer's work. An overview of the OSH Act and compliance assistance, as well as a notice that is required to be posted in the workplace, are available from the [U.S. Department of Labor's Web site](#).

OSHA-Approved State Plans

Section 18 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 encourages states to develop and operate their own job safety and health programs. OSHA approves and monitors state plans. The following states have approved plans as of June 2022. To link to individual state plans and/or to check if there has been a change in the list of states, go to www.osha.gov.

Alaska	New Jersey*
Arizona	New Mexico
California	New York*
Connecticut*	North Carolina
Hawaii	Oregon
Illinois*	Puerto Rico
Indiana	South Carolina
Iowa	Tennessee
Kentucky	Utah
Maine*	Vermont
Maryland	Virgin Islands*
Michigan	Virginia
Minnesota	Washington
Nevada	Wyoming

* The state plans in Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, New Jersey, New York and Virgin Islands apply to public sector (state and local government) employment only.

Many state laws mirror the OSH Act's requirements. Twenty-six states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have OSHA-approved state plans and have adopted their own standards and enforcement policies. For the most part, these states adopt standards that are identical to federal OSHA. However, a few states have requirements that go beyond or are different from the federal requirements or that may have different enforcement policies. All states that have their own version of the OSH Act prohibit retaliation against employees for filing a grievance or otherwise blowing the whistle on their employers for unsafe working conditions. Some of the states provide authority to the state department of labor for inspections and monetary penalties for safety code violations.

Of course, many municipalities also have fire and health codes and general safety codes, and many nonprofits are regulated by their own accreditation or certification requirements for safe work conditions to ensure employee or client safety. Nonprofits with kitchens or where food is prepared generally have specific health codes to meet.

Summary

Safety is a highly regulated area. A nonprofit's legal obligations will depend on the type of workplace/ industry, as well as the particular state law(s) that may impose compliance with safety standard obligations.

Policies on workplace injuries and illnesses should require employees to bring injuries or illnesses or unsafe conditions to a supervisor's attention immediately so that the employer can address dangerous situations in a timely fashion and also so that the employee can file a claim for workers' compensation insurance. Most workers' compensation policies require a claim to be filed promptly, and some specify within 24 hours.

Consequently, most nonprofits have a policy that requires employees to report work-related health concerns or injuries immediately.

The best practice safety standard for all nonprofits is best summed up by The Safe Place Act of Wisconsin (Chapter 101, Subchapter 1, Section 101.11 — www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/Statutes.html), which provides that employers must furnish a safe workplace and must do “every...thing reasonably necessary to protect the life, health, safety and welfare of employees and others who frequent the workplace.”

For more information, explore [OSHA's Recommended Practices for Safety and Health Programs](#). Find help with a particular area, such as ladders, transportation or food service. Set up a workplace safety program. Print out sample forms. Follow lots of links to detailed information on special topics, such as bloodborne pathogens, AEDs, and workplace stress.