



# Managing Occupational Safety and Health in Schools



This Guide is prepared by the  
Occupational Safety and Health Branch,  
Labour Department.

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# **Managing Occupational Safety and Health in Schools**

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## **Introduction**

The Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Chapter 509) enacted in May 1997 extends the safety and health protection of employees at work to majority of economic activities. The safety and health matters associated with teaching activities and support services in schools are brought under the control of the Ordinance.

High standards of safety should be a school management objective pursued in the same way as other management objectives. An effective safety management system in a school relies largely on its ability to co-ordinate the activities of teachers, supporting staffs and students towards a common objective.

This guidebook is intended to stimulate school management to develop and implement a safe system to co-ordinate efforts in managing safe and healthy environment.

To start with, this guidebook sets out the commitment for safety. It follows by a concept of shared safety responsibilities and practical steps to translate safety policy into actions.

Different types of schools may modify the system to cater for their own culture and requirements.



## **Who is Responsible for the Safety and Health**

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, the person responsible for a workplace is the employer of the employees who are employed to carry out work there, or if the employer does not exercise any degree of control over the relevant part or aspect of the workplace, means the occupier of the workplace.

### ***What must employers/occupiers do***

The employer of a school must safeguard the safety and health at work of the teachers, technicians and support staff, etc. When the employees of other employers work in a school in which their employers do not have any control over the relevant part or aspect of the school, the occupier of the school has to assume the responsibility of ensuring the school premises, the means of access to and egress from the school premises and any plant or substance kept at the premises is safe and without risks to health.

### ***What must employees do***

All staff of a school must take reasonable care for their own safety and health and for that of others working in the school. They must co-operate with their employer (and anyone else who has legal duties under the safety and health law) to enable safety and health requirements to be complied with.

### ***What about students***

Students like everyone else, must not intentionally or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything required by law to be provided in the interests of safety and health.



## **Why Managing Safety and Health in School**

Other than the mandatory obligations on the responsible person of a school to ensure the safety and health of the employees, there are some beneficial reasons for the school to set up a safety and health management system:

- (a) Both the community and the parents expect the school to nurture the students in a safe and healthy environment. Any incident arising from poor safety and health management will inevitably damage the reputation of the school.
- (b) An effective safety and health management in school can enable students to foster a correct perception of safety and health at work. It also benefits the community at large.
- (c) Teacher and staff are confident to carry out their duties under a well-planned safety and health management system.
- (d) Resources can be put on proper priorities in accordance with the risk assessment.
- (e) Cost incurred as a result of any accident/incident or ill health at work will be minimised.



## **Top Management Commitment**

An effective safety and health management system starts with the commitment of school management. A written safety and health policy is the best intent to reflect the determination, organisation and arrangements for safety and health. It forms the basis on how to co-ordinate activities in achieving the goal set by the school on the safety and health issues.

For sponsoring body operating a number of schools, there should be a central safety and health policy, usually written in general terms, that covers the entire organisational structure. Each school should have a copy of the central policy. An effective way to ensure continuity of control is for each school to draw up a local policy that builds on the central policy and takes account of local conditions.

A good safety and health policy should:

- (a) consist of a general statement reflecting the commitment of the management in improving the safety and health in school.
- (b) identify the organisation for implementing the policy.
- (c) describe how the policy be implemented.
- (d) be reviewed and updated in the light of experience.



As the policy is the safety and health foundation of the school, there should be an arrangement for telling employees about its contents. Circulation amongst staff, posting on bulletin boards and publicising in school journals are practical means to achieve the purposes.

A safety and health policy statement must be developed out of the identified needs and culture of each school.

### ***Suggested Checklist for Safety and Health Policy***

1. Does the policy have the management's commitment and objectives to safety and health?
2. Is the policy statement written in clear and unambiguous term?
3. Has it been prepared after consultation with staff?
4. Is the policy statement signed by the senior management of the school?
5. Is it dated?
6. Is the policy made known to all staff and students?
7. Is the policy statement prominently displayed?
8. Is the policy reviewed periodically and revised as necessary?



## **Organising for Safety and Health**

Organising is a continuous process. In organising safety and health, it is necessary to involve staff and students to promote a positive safety culture for the purpose of managing risks, and to meet the objectives of the safety and health policy. There should be established in school a structure of functional roles among staff and students to be accountable on safety and health, but the ultimate responsibility rests with the school management. In practice, the following essential elements should be included:

### ***Communication***

Effective safety communication creates a positive safety culture in school and promotes general safety awareness. Regular discussion on safety as a standing agenda item in unit/departmental meetings can improve staff communication. The school safety rules and regulations, the safety and health policy, meeting minutes, etc. are required to be passed to relevant staff for their information, action and compliance.

The Labour Department has prepared a variety of safety and health publications to help the school to comply with legal requirements and to assist them in the control of risk at work. Some of them are listed in the Reference Materials. There are also safety and health publications prepared by other organisations, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Council. School management can make use of them in promulgating the safety message in school to arouse safety awareness, and to enrich safety information.



Safety tours by school management to observe the practice and behaviour of employees at work provide the opportunities of face-to-face discussion with them on safety and health matters.

### ***Co-operation***

Participation of all levels of staff in school is an effective way in controlling risk at work. The one who carries out the work knows best the risk involved in the work. The involvement of staff in the hazard identification and the establishment of suitable control measures are essential for the success of safety management. Very often, they are the ones who carry out the control measures. Their co-operation is crucial to the success of the safety and health policy. All levels of staff should be encouraged to report hazardous situations and to propose methods in eliminating the risk. In the legal framework, they are required to co-operate with the school management in safety and health matters.

### ***Control***

A safety and health management system demonstrates commitment, identifies objectives and allocates responsibilities. Like all management system, effective control helps achieve all these targets. Effective control can be secured by:

- a) allocating clear safety responsibilities among staff and students to ensure that they recognise their roles on safety and health;
- b) defining safety performance standards by specifying who is responsible and what is to be done and explaining how and when the work is to be carried out, and with what expected result;



- c) providing adequate supervision, instruction and guidance. The degree of supervision depends on the nature of risk involved and the competence of the employees who carry out the work. Sometimes, supervision on fully competent individuals may still be required to ensure that safety standards are being consistently met; and
- d) motivating staff to maintain the momentum in improving the standards of safety and health.

### ***Competence***

All staff must have adequate safety and health knowledge to do their job. Safety and health training equips the staff with adequate skill and ability to finish the job in safe and healthy condition. The school management should identify safety and health training needs to enable them to plan ahead. Some examples of training aspects include manual handling operations, use of personal protective equipment and work at height. Safety and health training opportunities are available in the Occupational Safety and Health Council and the Labour Department.

### ***School Safety and Health Committee***

Successful safety performers usually demonstrate the importance of an in-house safety and health committee. Successful safety management system can be well accomplished through the establishment of an efficient school safety and health committee.



The main functions of the school safety and health committee include:

- (a) monitoring the safety policy;
- (b) assistance in the development of safe work procedures and safe system of work;
- (c) on-going evaluation of hazards and arrangements to implement safety measures;
- (d) study of accident/incident statistics and trends together with recommendations for corrective actions;
- (e) a watch on the adequacy and effectiveness of employee safety training;
- (f) a watch on the adequacy of safety and health communication in school; and
- (g) the organisation of safety promotion activities such as safety competitions, exhibitions, film shows, safety incentive schemes and safety suggestions.

The membership of the committee should include the school head, teachers' and staff representatives.

There should be regular meetings of the committee. Written records should be kept so that outstanding matters can be effectively followed up. They also serve a purpose to keep track of the progress on the decisions made, recommendations put forward and the actions taken.

Sometimes, a periodic change of members of the committee can generate an influx of new ideas. It can also train up more staff to participate actively in the safety and health matters.



## **Planning and Implementing**

The legal framework requires the school management to ensure safety and health at work for the employees. To fulfill the requirement, it is the duty of the school management to identify the hazards, assess the risks and decide on the proper control measures.

### ***Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment***

To start with, hazards can be identified by going around the school to check the environment, work practices, substances, plant and equipment that may pose potential risk to cause danger. Sometimes, hazards can be identified by common sense and experience. In practice, the school staff may check their workplace regularly. Their knowledge, experience and common sense are valuable in formulating the risk control measures. When carrying out hazard identification and risk assessment, keeping record of findings may help in future to review the assessment.

When a hazard is identified, it is necessary to decide whether the risk is high, medium or low. The taking into consideration of the probability and severity may help to rate the risk. Decision can be made on how urgent the problem needs to be resolved and what priority and resources can be allocated. The next step is to work out the precautionary measures for the hazards identified.



### ***School Safety Rules and Regulations***

In some cases, especially those high risk ones, safety rules and regulations are required as precautionary measures to eliminate the risk. In formulating the precautionary measures, the school management should seek views from those who work with the hazards. It is important to have their co-operation in implementing the precautionary measures.

### ***Accident/incident Reporting***

An accident/incident reporting procedure should be developed to collect information in planning for safety and health in schools. The information can provide valuable assistance for the school management to allocate resources, devise preventive measures at an early stage and identify the safety training needs.

### ***Emergency Preparedness***

Though a very good safety and health programme is in place, emergency situations may still arise. In order to keep losses to a minimum, proper procedures should be developed before an emergency occurs. For school environment, emergency plans include fire evacuation, typhoon and rainstorm procedures, and the handling of chemical spillage, etc.



## **Measuring Performance**

Measuring performance is an essential part of maintaining and improving safety and health performance. It is an indicator reflecting the effectiveness in the implementation of the safety and health plans and the maintenance of safety standards. It can help identifying the needs for appropriate remedial action. Therefore, there is a need to establish, operate and maintain a system that could measure the safety performance objectively. The system comprises active and reactive monitoring.

### ***Active Monitoring System***

Active monitoring provides information on safety performance before anything goes wrong. It includes the safety inspection of school premises to check the existence of any hazardous condition. An inspection checklist should be developed so that attention could be focused. It should be regularly reviewed to provide a sufficient coverage of all hazardous situations.

Any hazardous situation found during inspection should be recorded. Remedial action should be taken promptly to improve the safety and health conditions. An analysis of the inspection results could help identify problems and devise programme for enhancement of the safety standards.

### ***Reactive Monitoring System***

Reactive monitoring is the study of safety and health events, which include an accident/incident, an ill health issue and a complaint on work situation. It is a good opportunity to collect information for further improvement. The study should include the finding of the causes and the making of recommendations to prevent recurrence.



## **System Reviewing**

Regular review of the safety management system in school is required to ensure that the system maintains its efficiency and meets the overall safety and health objectives. The task is best to be carried out by the school management who is in a position to set policies, make judgements about the adequacy of safety and health performance and decide on the nature and timing of any actions needed.

The main sources of information for review can be obtained from the management system. The review can focus on the following:

- (a) the degree of compliance with performance standards;
- (b) accidents, ill health and incident data accompanied by analysis of both the immediate and underlying causes, trends and common features;
- (c) the progress in implementing remedial actions identified through active and reactive monitoring;
- (d) the comparison of safety and health performance with counterparts.

Good safety and health performance of staff should be recognised. Bad performance needs to be discussed with the staff concerned and a plan for improvement has to be agreed. Successful safety and health management system ensures that serious problems are put right quickly before any formal review.



## **Conclusion**

The implementation of a safety and health management system is an effective means to achieve the goal of eliminating accident and ill health at work. The system is best integrated into the daily school business. When this is achieved, there will be a continued improvement of the system aiming at reducing injuries and ill health. The school will be a safer and healthier workplace for everyone.



## **Reference Materials**

The following reference materials can be obtained from the Occupational Safety and Health Branch, Labour Department free of charge.

1. A Brief Guide to the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance
2. A Brief Guide to the Occupational Safety and Health Regulation
3. A Guide on Employer's Safety Policy
4. Safe Systems of Work
5. Safety Committees - a Guide to Their Establishment & Operation
6. Guidance Notes on Fire Safety at Workplaces
7. Five Steps to Risk Assessment
8. Guide for Safety at Work - Safe Use of Electric Plugs
9. Guidance Notes on Classification and Use of Safety Belts and Their Anchorage Systems
10. A Simple Guide to Health Risk Assessment ( Office Environment Series ) - Introduction & Housekeeping
11. A Simple Guide to Health Risk Assessment ( Office Environment Series ) - Lighting in Offices



12. A Simple Guide to Health Risk Assessment ( Office Environment Series ) - Photocopying
13. A Simple Guide to Health Risk Assessment ( Office Environment Series ) - Ventilation
14. A Simple Guide to Health Risk Assessment ( Office Environment Series ) - Office Workstation Design
15. A Simple Guide to Health Risk Assessment ( Office Environment Series ) - Use of Chemicals
16. A Simple Guide to Health Risk Assessment ( Office Environment Series ) - Manual Handling
17. Guidance Notes on Manual Handling Operations
18. Guidelines for Good Occupational Hygiene Practice in a Workplace
19. Hints on First Aid
20. Five Steps to Information, Instruction and Training ( Chinese version only )
21. Guide to Chemical Safety in Laboratories
22. Occupational Safety and Health Guide - Occupational Safety and Health in Schools



## **Useful Information**

If you wish to enquire about this guidebook or require advice on occupational safety and health matters, you can contact the Occupational Safety and Health Branch through:

Telephone : 2559 2297 (auto-recording after office hour)

Fax : 2915 1410

E-mail : [enquiry@labour.gov.hk](mailto:enquiry@labour.gov.hk)

Information on the services offered by the Labour Department and on major labour legislation can also be found by visiting our Home Page on the Internet. Address of our Home Page is <http://www.labour.gov.hk>.

Information on safety training services can be obtained from:

Occupational Safety and Health Training Centre,  
Labour Department  
Telephone : 2940 7057

Occupational Safety and Health Council  
Telephone : 2739 9377

## **Complaints**

If you have any complaints about unsafe workplaces and practices, please call the Labour Department's occupational safety and health complaint hotline at 2542 2172. All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence.









**Occupational Safety and Health Branch**  
**Labour Department**