

Guide to improving the work environment



**How do you find your workplace?
What contributes to your comfort there?
How can it be improved?**

Begin by answering the questions in the box. The answers will probably provide some examples of what is important to create a good work environment at your workplace.

The information in this brochure is based on the Provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management (AFS 2001:1). You can find the provisions in English at www.av.se. The figures in the margin refer to the corresponding section.

The content provides support when developing systematic processes for managing the work environment, making this an everyday aspect of your work. The answers to the questions in the box above are a good place to start.

1 §

Remember that managing the work environment has to encompass all employees, including rented manpower.

Make a plan to improve the work environment

2 §

Every activity involved in work, every attitude conveyed in the workplace and all impressions of the working day can affect our health. Systematic management of the work environment can help you structure your organisation in a way that prevents many causes of ill-health and promotes good health. In order to achieve this, it needs to be an everyday aspect of work.

3 §

Ensure that questions concerning the work environment are included when you have meetings that involve planning and problem solving in your organisation. Consider whether it is possible to execute the work in a way that contributes to improving the work environment. The physical, psychological and social working conditions are included in the work environment.

Create good conditions

How do managers and employees currently interact in the workplace? What procedures do you use for work assignments and for managing the work? What does your organisation do to acquire, and develop, the right expertise? How do you know who is responsible for what?

The answers to these questions describe some of the conditions under which you conduct your daily work. You should manage the work environment in the same way you manage the organisation as a whole.

Participation at all levels – The employer has to provide safety delegates, pupil safety delegates and other employees with the opportunity to be involved in managing the work environment.

4 §

Routines – There have to be routines in place for all activities involved in the management of the work environment, describing what has to be done, how it is to be done, when it is to be done and who will be involved. A routine can also make reference to a form or check-list.

5 §



Diagram 1. Check-list for introduction.

Allocation of tasks – Tasks involved in management of the work environment can be allocated to managers, supervisors or other employees. If your organisation has a delegation plan, you can add information about tasks involved in management of the work

environment to this. Legal responsibility for the work environment cannot be delegated; it is always the senior management that have this responsibility. Those who have allocated tasks involved in the management of the work environment must have sufficient knowledge, authority and resources in terms of money and time.

6, 7, 12 §§

Sufficient knowledge – All employees have to know how to reduce the risks involved in their work and contribute to creating a good work environment. Employers and managers, or other employees with duties involving management of the work environment, need to have basic knowledge of the legislation they are covered by, for example the Work Environment Act, Systematic Work Environment Management (AFS 2001:1) and the provisions that apply to the organisation itself.

Examples of other types of required knowledge:

- knowledge of the risks involved in the organisation's activities,
- knowledge of how to reduce the risk of suffering an accident or other form of ill-health, and
- familiarity with the procedures involved in managing the work environment itself.

If managers do not have sufficient knowledge to systematically manage the work environment, the employer has to get help from occupational health services or other experts in the field.

Undertake activities

Systematic management of the work environment allows you to detect risks before something happens, instead of taking action after an incident or accident. A systematic approach can help you detect more of the factors that are important to the health of your employees and can reveal the measures that help.



Diagram 2. Core activities involved in systematic management of the work environment

Look at the diagram and see whether there is something that you are already doing.

- In what context do you address issues relating to the work environment?
- Do you conduct risk assessments? Do the risk assessment reveal whether the risks are different for women and men?
- Do you take action to resolve the risks that you become aware of?
- Do you follow up that the action you take is effective?



8 §

Investigate the working conditions – What risks are there in the work environment of your organisation that you are already aware of? Use this knowledge to determine how the physical, psychological and social working conditions are to be investigated. Examples of investigative methods are employee discussions, surveys about the working climate, safety inspection tours and noise measurement.

9 §

Investigate accidents, ill-health and incidents – The aim of investigations is to prevent the same thing happening again. By reporting incidents, you can spot previously unknown risks and this allows more opportunities to deal with the risks before accidents occur.

Accident – unwanted sudden event that leads to physical or mental harm to a person. The harm may be mild or very serious, as in a fatal accident.

Incident – unwanted event or situation that could lead to health problems, disease or an accident.

Ill-health – disease in accordance with medical, objective criteria or disruption of physical and mental function. The intensity of the experience, their duration and the ability to function as before determine whether the condition constitutes ill-health or not.



Conduct a risk assessment – It is possible, based on the investigations, to assess where risks occur. The next step is to assess how serious each risk is.

8 §

Risk assessment also have to be conducted in advance of something changing in the organisation. For example, reorganisation or rebuilding work.



Carry out measures – Measures need to be carried out in different ways, depending on the risks that have been detected. This may involve changes to the organisation, training or new safety devices. Our various provisions set out the requirements that need to be met. You can find them at www.av.se.

10 §

Make an action plan – Deal with risks immediately if possible and write down what has been done. If that is not possible, make an action plan describing the risks, how they will be dealt with, who will do this work and when it will be finished. You can use the form “Example of an action plan for systemic management of the work environment”, which is found at the back of this brochure.

10 §



10 §

Follow up measures that have been implemented – Follow up all types of measures you implemented to see whether they have had the desired effect. If the measures have not helped, or have created new risks, you need to conduct a new investigation and decide on new measures. If the planned measures have not been implemented, you need to think about why this is, and about what risks this entails. You also need to update the action plan.

Evaluate how the work environment is managed

Are you satisfied with the way the work environment is managed in your workplace? Does it fit into your organisation's management style? Use your experience as a basis for shaping work environment policy and monitoring the management of the work environment.

5 §

Work environment policy – The work environment policy should describe the employer's overarching objective, the intended focus and the means for long-term management of the organisation's work environment. The existing risks in the organisation are an important starting point when writing the work environment policy.

Questions to answer when shaping a work environment policy include:

- What kind of work environment do we want?
- What is the employer looking to achieve?
- Why is management of the work environment important in our organisation?

- What do we want to focus on in order to create a good work environment in our organisation?
- What work environment regulations are particularly important to our organisation?

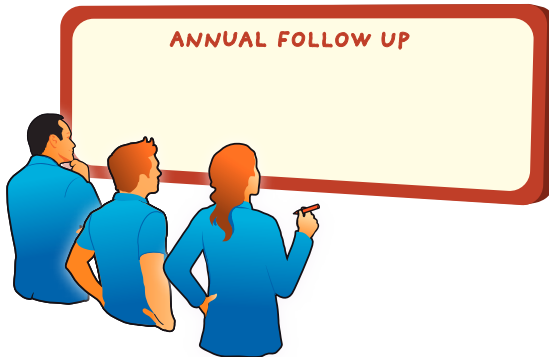


Diagram 3. Monitoring management of the work environment.

Follow up the management of the work environment – The employer has to follow up on the management of the work environment once a year. The annual follow-up exercise involves the responsible manager checking that:



- the requirements stipulated in the regulations governing management of the work environment have been met, and
- the measures are having an effect (fewer risks, better work environment).

The annual follow-up exercise can be compared to an internal audit of the management of the work environment.

More frequent follow-ups may be necessary, for example after a move, a serious incident or a serious accident.

What needs to be put in writing?

All employers must have a risk assessment and an action plan in writing. Employers with ten or more employees also must have a work environment policy, routines, a delegation plan and details of the monitoring of the management of the work environment in writing.

Additional copies of this publication can be ordered from:
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Our vision: Everyone can and want to contribute to a positive work environment

