

# Health & Safety Leadership

A guide for small to medium business owners and company directors



NEW ZEALAND

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## Businesses of all shapes and sizes all over New Zealand are getting smart about health and safety.

Health and safety is an essential part of running a business and it's not just for big business. Whatever your line of work, or whatever your business structure, having a health and safety plan – and putting it into practice every day – will keep your team safe, reduce your risk, could reduce costs and show your customers they can trust you.

*“As the business owner, manager or company director it's your legal obligation to make health and safety part of the day to day running of your business.”*

A positive health and safety culture is part of a broader organisational culture where there is mutual trust and respect and where everyone works together to achieve common goals. This means more productive people and your staff know you are serious about their wellbeing.

Like insurance, good health and safety practice gives you peace of mind. For smaller companies, this counts for a lot as they may find it hard to recover from serious health and safety events. This guide is for directors, owners and managers of small to medium sized businesses. It's designed to give you an overview of the most important things you need to know and do about health and safety.

For more specific and detailed advice relevant to your business it's a good idea to seek the help of a professional health and safety practitioner.

Visit [WorkSafe.govt.nz](http://WorkSafe.govt.nz) or the health and safety section on [Business.govt.nz](http://Business.govt.nz)

**WORKSAFE**  
NEW ZEALAND | MAHI HAUHARU  
AOTEAROA

  
Institute of  
Directors  
IN NEW ZEALAND (INC)



*“Having good health and safety practices in place is really important for our personal and professional reputation – it shows that we are fulfilling our legal obligations.”*

**Richard Townshend,**  
– Director and Owner, Dairy Direct Ltd



## THE LEGAL LOW-DOWN

The Health and Safety in Employment Act (1992) is the main law governing workplace health and safety in New Zealand. There is also other legislation that you need to be aware of such as the Accident Compensation Act (2001) and the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act (1996) as well as a number of regulations. WorkSafe New Zealand has principal responsibility for ensuring workplaces abide by the law.

Every New Zealand business has the same legal obligations under the Health and Safety in Employment Act (1992), regardless of its size. As a company director, business owner and/or employer you need to:

- take *all practicable steps* to provide a safe work environment for workers and other people in and around your workplace, including contractors and visitors.
- ensure everyone is responsible for workplace safety, including workers. Employers must provide opportunities for workers to get involved in improving health and safety conditions.
- know about the laws and regulations that relate to your industry and your business because the buck stops with you: directors need to ensure their business complies with all relevant laws and regulations.

If something goes wrong and you didn't meet your obligations, you may find yourself being prosecuted and fined, or possibly face imprisonment. Fortunately, there's a lot you can do to reduce the chances of something going wrong.

### Health and Safety laws are changing

A major package of changes to New Zealand's workplace health and safety system is underway, including reform of health and safety law. Information and guidance will be developed to help people understand what they need to do to comply with the new laws.

For more information, please visit the health and safety reform section of the **Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's** website.

## PROTECT YOUR PEOPLE AND YOUR BUSINESS

If you're running your own business, chances are you know it's your responsibility to keep your people safe, but what exactly does that mean?

Put simply, managing health and safety is about identifying the risks and hazards in your business – the things that touch wood won't, but could go wrong – and having a plan to manage these risks and hazards that everyone follows, to ensure a healthy workplace. You've invested too much in your business to leave anything to chance.

*Did you know that your health and safety duties extend beyond your staff and workplace? You could be liable for any action, or inaction, by you or your staff that harms any other person. For instance, you need to be sure that equipment or materials you provide, either inside or outside of your workplace, are designed to be used safely, and installed correctly.*

## GET STARTED

It's easy to get started on developing a health and safety plan for your business. Here are three steps that will help guide you.

### ASSESS

*Identify risks and hazards in your business*

### COMMIT

*Develop a health and safety plan*

### ACT

*Make your plan part of your day to day business*



## LEAD FROM THE FRONT

The highest tier of management and leadership in your business, whether it's a board or a management team, or you as an owner operator, plays a crucial role in establishing good health and safety practice in your business.

It's up to you and your leadership team, if you have one, to set the culture and to have clear procedures that help your staff to know 'how we do things around here'. For health and safety measures to be effective, they have to be known, understood, practical and measurable.

All businesses should have a workplace health and safety plan regardless of their size and structure. Whether you are a director or owner operator you are also responsible for ensuring that the plan is effectively implemented and continuously reviewed.



# ASSESS

The first step in developing your health and safety plan is to know where you are starting from. You may already have a plan, or just know the way that things are generally done, but it's time well spent to pull your team away from their work to involve them in identifying the risks and hazards in your business and how you can continuously manage them safely.

You can start by asking these types of questions:

- Could we be injured or become ill if something goes wrong?
- What hazards could seriously harm our staff, suppliers, customers or other persons?
- Do we have any workplace risks that have low probability of occurring but would do serious harm to our people and business if they did occur?
- What processes do we currently have to eliminate, isolate or minimise these risks and hazards? Do we monitor how effective our processes are?
- Are we good at recording and investigating workplace injuries and near misses, to find out how they were caused and fix them?
- Have we contacted our industry body or union for advice about health and safety legislation, regulations and best practice that relates to our business?
- Have we considered what types of emergencies could affect our workplace and developed plans for how to manage in an emergency?

## EXAMPLE WORKPLACE HAZARDS

### Physical hazards

Things that can cause physical harm, like moving machinery, falls from heights or lifting heavy objects

### Environmental hazards

Things in the environment that could cause injury or illness, like hot or cold temperatures, exhaust fumes, or uneven ground

### Hazardous substances

Things such as asbestos or chemicals that could cause health issues such as cancer, fertility problems and even death

### Social hazards

Such as work-related stress, overwork, long hours, inadequate breaks, or bullying

"As directors and managers within our business, we try to spend time discussing bigger picture issues but we often end up gravitating to more pressing day-to-day operational issues. We recognise that we need to make time to plan for health and safety – we know that this has to be led by us."

**Hilary Weller – Managing Director,  
Pure Trails New Zealand**

# COMMIT

Your health and safety plan is just a piece of paper unless you and your team personally commit to it. That means demonstrating your commitment to it in a compelling way and with a sense of urgency so that your people also know and care about it. If you employ staff, involving them in managing health and safety will help to embed it in your company culture. The effectiveness of your plan rests with you and the people in your business who are out there doing the work on the front line.

## How to commit to best practice health and safety:

- Develop a health and safety plan – something that's easy to understand and remember.
- If you already have a plan ask your staff what they think of it. Is it still relevant? Is it meaningful to them? Does it support your company culture? If not, take it back to the drawing board.
- Identify how your plan will be monitored and measured – how will you know you're on track?
- Share your plan with all new staff and contractors. As a person in charge at work, you're also responsible for the safety of contractors working there, and for visitors to your workplace.

## A HEALTH AND SAFETY PLAN SHOULD HAVE THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS:

- Procedures for identifying workplace hazards, plans for eliminating, isolating or minimising them
- Procedures for monitoring your people's exposure to hazards that can't be eliminated
- Records of training that show that everyone knows what hazards they might be exposed to, and how they can keep themselves safe
- What to do in an emergency, including workplace accidents and natural disasters
- Procedures for recording and investigating workplace accidents and near-misses
- A process for reporting serious accidents to WorkSafe New Zealand
- Health and safety inductions for contractors when they are at your workplace
- A process to review the health and safety plan at least once a year or if a major safety-related event happens.

*"Our health and safety stance sets us apart from our competitors."*

Our company directors set the overarching health and safety expectations for our business. We do this in conjunction with our lawyer and accountant, and we also employ the services of an external health and safety consultant to help us to develop our plan and implement it too.

We have employees who represent the rest of our staff on our Health and Safety Committee – they have received specific health and safety training. It's really important to get the team to be part of creating the plan – otherwise there's no commitment at a day to day level. It means that every individual here takes our health and safety values to every job they do. That's a benefit to every customer.

Our plan is black and white – there can be no grey areas in health and safety. Our mission is to have an accident-free record – so we think about health and safety when we make choices about buying equipment, maintaining equipment and managing people on-site. We're known for our health and safety stance – it definitely sets us apart from our competitors. Our excellent safety record speaks for itself.

**Scott McLeod – Director, McLeod Cranes**

## HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF A HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITMENT STATEMENT TO HELP GET YOU STARTED

We are committed to providing and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace and to providing the information, training and supervision needed to achieve this.

We will take responsibility for health and safety procedures.  
We all need to be aware of our responsibilities and comply with our health and safety policy.

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All staff are encouraged to play a vital and responsible role in maintaining a safe and healthy workplace through:

- being involved in the workplace health and safety plan
- sticking to correct procedures and using the right equipment for the job
- wearing protective clothing and equipment as required to minimise your exposure to workplace hazards
- reporting any injury, pain or discomfort as soon as possible
- ensuring all accidents and incidents are reported as soon as possible
- helping new employees, trainees, contractors and visitors to the workplace understand the health and safety plan
- telling your manager immediately about any health and safety concerns

The participation of all staff is appreciated



# ACT

There's no point having a health and safety plan unless you give it life through your actions. It needs to become a part of your every day business practice and be adopted by everyone in the business. It helps to have achievable and measurable health and safety targets that will help you and your staff to stay on track.

## How to put your health and safety plan into action:

- Lead by example – demonstrate your plan's actions
- Have clear targets that everyone understands, such as reducing the number of injuries or near-misses
- Run regular activities to keep health and safety top of mind - think safety training courses or having a practice emergency drill
- Keep accurate health and safety records, such as **hazard registers**, accident reports and training records
- Act quickly if there are signs of safety issues
- Involve your team – give people health and safety responsibilities
- Include health and safety in regular meetings
- Review and update your plan regularly.

## KEEP ON TOP OF THINGS

Monitoring health and safety goals and reporting issues will help you know you are on top of hazards and risks. Directors, managers and owners in your business should receive regular reports on:

- Accidents and near misses
- Newly-identified hazards
- Absence rates due to general sickness (often an indication of stress or fatigue)
- Injury-related leave
- Measurements relating to noise levels or chemical exposure.

It is important to identify any root causes and put an effective response in place. This is particularly important from a legal perspective. When looking for root causes, look closely at systemic factors such as training, workload or performance stress. Involve your team in this process.

## *"If our staff know we act on issues, they know we care"*

We started with an assessment of our farms – identifying hazards, eliminating them, isolating them, and minimising them. For example, we identified all sumps – we isolated them by fencing them all off, and made sure our operating procedures had rules about them, like you're not allowed to grease the pumps on your own.

We identified the different types of people that come on to our farms, so regular contractors coming on site have to acknowledge relevant sections of our health and safety manual that apply to them.

To be honest, our manual sat on a shelf in the cowshed for about two years. Suddenly we realised that just because we had a manual, that didn't mean we were absolved of any responsibility if something went wrong. That was reinforced by the fact that we know someone who had a near miss – it helped us realise how serious health and safety is.

So now we get in a health and safety specialist regularly to present to staff. We have a monthly reporting template for our farm managers to use, and we look at the number of issues that are reported. We take action immediately. We send our staff on courses (Tractor Operating, ATV Operating, Chainsaw Operating, Handling Chemicals). This isn't just about compliance – it's about caring for people. If our staff know we act on issues, then they know we care.

In my mind, we have to accept that humans are human. Sometime, somewhere, someone will have an incident. We just want to make sure we've done everything we can to avoid that happening.

**Richard Townshend**  
– Director and Owner, Dairy Direct Ltd

## A HELPING HAND

Some businesses choose to get help from health and safety experts. An external audit or system review can bring an independent perspective and fresh thinking as well as identifying any weaknesses in your processes and systems. To get the most out of reviews, document the key findings and use them to guide improvements.

The government can provide help, too. WorkSafe New Zealand and the Accident Compensation Corporation have a lot of free workplace health and safety resources that you can access through the internet. Visit the health and safety section of [Business.govt.nz](https://www.business.govt.nz), [WorkSafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz) and [www.acc.co.nz](https://www.acc.co.nz)

## GOOD HEALTH & SAFETY SYSTEMS HAVE...

### ☑ GOOD LEADERS

Clearly communicate your health and safety goals so everyone's in the loop and lead by example

### ☑ HAZARD SMARTS

Identify all the workplace hazards in your business, and work out how to control these hazards by eliminating, isolating and minimising them.

### ☑ EMERGENCIES SORTED

Identify all potential emergencies and work out how you would manage them. Share the plan with your team and test it regularly.

### ☑ REPORTING PROCESSES

Have clear processes for reporting and investigating injuries, incidents, near misses and hazards to work out what caused them, so you can stop them happening again.

### ☑ CARE FOR PEOPLE

Ensure your staff receive proper treatment and rehabilitation if they have an injury at work. Remember their families.

### ☑ ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Get your team actively involved in all aspects of your health and safety plan, including identifying hazards, investigating accidents, and taking part in training and ongoing planning.

### ☑ CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT

Your business will change each year and so should your health and safety plan. Set time aside each year to continually look for ways to improve and adapt your health and safety plan to your changing needs.

### ☑ RESOURCES AND TRAINING

Like anything, to do it properly you need the right resources (think equipment, plant, budget, time, people, training). It's your responsibility as a director, owner or manager to have people trained safely in how to do their job. Don't be tempted to skimp here – it's just not worth the risk.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Business.govt.nz](https://www.business.govt.nz)

[ACC – Preventing injuries at work](#)

[Workplace emergency planning](#)

[Hazardous Substances toolbox](#)

[Institute of Safety Management](#)

[Institute of Directors in New Zealand \(IoD\)](#)

[WorkSafe New Zealand](#)

[Good Governance Practices Guideline for Directors](#)

[Health and Safety Workplace Kit](#)

[Training for Health and Safety Representatives](#)

[Safety Culture Snapshot tool](#)

[Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992](#)