



Health and safety briefing

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Information for newly appointed health and safety reps

Your functions:

1. **representing** staff on health and safety
2. **inspecting** the workplace for health and safety risks
3. **investigating** work-related accidents and concerns
4. **communicating** health and safety **consultations**
5. **promoting** health and safety, for instance with campaigns
6. **supporting your employer**: for instance, by joint analysis of accident and ill health data to inform health and safety priorities and strategy
7. **meeting health and safety inspectors** if they visit the workplace.

Health and safety representatives are entitled to as much paid time off as is necessary in order to fulfil their functions. Prospect expects employers to take account of this when planning your work.

1. Representing

Proactive: Be visible. Give advice. Demonstrate Prospect makes a difference.

Responsive: ensure your employer consults you, for instance on new technologies, new risk control measures, organisational change or restructuring. Make sure you know enough about the proposals and your members to assess the impacts and work out risk controls. Engage with staff to ensure you are representative.

2. Inspecting

Joint inspections with management are ideal. This adds value, builds consensus and ensures action plans are agreed. But if employment relations are strained, go ahead and inspect independently once you have informed management in sufficient time. Talk to staff, explain your role and listen to concerns. How often you inspect depends how hazardous your workplace is.

3. Investigating

Your employer must tell you about workplace accidents, incidents and ill health that are covered by the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR), even if they are not reportable. Such incidents can be vital signs that precautions to control risks are not working. Investigation can reveal weaknesses which can then be corrected to prevent a recurrence.

Agree arrangements with your employer to facilitate prompt involvement of you and/or other health and safety reps. Subject to safe access to the incident site and whether the scene is being preserved for legal reasons, you should be able to join your employer's investigating team. An investigation should aim to determine a root cause, and your role is to help with this, so your employer should share relevant documents.

Make sure your colleagues are Prospect members – they can join at www.prospect.org.uk/joinus

Prospect research department

Latest revision of this document: <https://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2016/01206>

This revision: <https://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2016/01206/2022-11-09>

You may be asked by a constituent to investigate a health and safety complaint. Try to resolve a problem that could hurt someone, regardless of whether they are a member; but non-members seeking personal representation must first join Prospect.

4. Consultation and committee work

Your employer must consult you on:

- information they must give staff on risks at work and the precautions that are provided
- risk assessments and emergency plans;
- any change that may substantially affect employee health and safety, such as:
 - new procedures
 - plant and equipment
 - premises
 - ways of working (e.g. new shift patterns);
- the health and safety consequences of new technologies;
- the arrangements for getting competent people to help them comply with health and safety laws (a competent person is someone who has the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to help an employer meet the requirements of health and safety law);
- occupational health, including the service arrangements, how effective they are and trends; and
- accident and investigation reports.

It is best when employers consult representatives through a proper forum, such as a health and safety committee which has a clear purpose, membership and arrangements for reporting the outcome of meetings to employees. Your employer must create a culture for health and safety cooperation.

To avoid confusion and duplicating effort, we recommend reps represent all staff, regardless of union membership. This avoids the temptation to your employer to appoint non-union 'champions'.

5. Contact with regulatory inspectors

Health and safety inspectors are employed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Office of Nuclear Regulation (ONR), Office of Rail and Road (ORR), Environment Agency (EA) and local authorities and operate within their specific jurisdictions, as do fire safety officers employed by local or Crown fire authorities.

Health and safety inspectors have the right to enter any workplace without warning. However sometimes advance notice is given and in these cases the inspector should ask whether the business has any health and safety reps and obtain their contact details. This is so they can also arrange to meet a rep during their visit and share their findings. Any correspondence with the employer after a visit should be copied and addressed independently to the agreed union point of contact and never sent via the employer. You are entitled to:

- represent employees when inspectors visit or investigate
- receive health and safety information inspectors are obliged to share such as their findings,
- recommendations and any enforcement action.