

Health & Safety

A guide for temporary and contract staff



Induction

On arriving at an assignment, the hirer should explain the layout of the premises, identifying the toilets, kitchen facilities (if any) or other drink making facilities, and coat storage. Attention should also be drawn to the fire alarm mechanisms, fire exits and assembly point arrangements. Ideally the hirer will also refer to the accident recording, first aid provision and smoking rules, see below.

Machinery, equipment and chemicals

If you are required to operate any machinery or equipment, you should first be shown the correct operational controls by the hirer or another experienced employee. Ideally there should be a written operating statement to which you can subsequently refer, if in doubt.

The hirer should also draw your attention to any special arrangements required or risks arising from the use of chemical agents and substances. In an office environment, there are unlikely to be such chemicals in use.

Manual handling

You should not be asked to lift or carry items without proper instruction on the correct way to do this. If you are required to move heavy or bulky items that cannot be split down, or carry items across or through awkward areas like steep winding staircases, ask the hirer for assistance and instruction on how best to move the items.

Computer screens

Hirers have a duty to ensure that computer workstations are well designed. If you find the working arrangement uncomfortable, ask the hirer if it can be modified or rearranged. You should not work permanently in front of a VDU without regular breaks, 5 minutes in every hour is advised. As a temporary worker, most hirers will expect you to have had regular eyesight tests and if necessary use glasses where prescribed, prior to accepting the assignment.

Pregnancy

If you are pregnant, tell the hirer. Both you and the hirer have a responsibility to conduct a risk assessment, to avoid risks to yourself and your unborn child.

Accidents and first aid

Larger hirers, with over 50 employees, are encouraged to appoint and organise the training of First Aiders. The requirements are more stringent on factory and warehouse premises than offices. It is wise to enquire about the first aid provision on your first day during induction. Hirers are also required to maintain an accident record book. If you are involved in an accident involving any injury, however minor, report it to the appropriate person and ensure it is recorded in the accident book. In the case of more serious accidents resulting in time off work the hirer has a duty to report the accident. You should therefore notify your agency and/or the hirer if you are off work due to a work related injury for more than 3 days.

Smoking

New legislation came into force in England on 1 July 2007, introducing a ban on smoking in public places. The relevant legislation is the Health Act 2006 and a number of regulations made under that Act.

This took effect in Scotland on 26 March 2006, in Northern Ireland, on 30 April 2007 and in Wales, on 2 April 2007.

It has now become unlawful to smoke in most indoor public places other than private homes. This includes restaurants, bars, clubs, cafes, hotels, theatres, cinemas, shops, leisure centres, libraries, public toilets, on public transport, in care homes and in hospitals.

The law also covers almost all workplaces (offices, factories and other premises which are being used wholly or mainly as a place of work) and the ban generally applies to work vehicles such as light and heavy goods vehicles. A work vehicle must be smoke-free if it is used for work by more than one person, even if the persons who use the vehicle do so at different times or on different days or only intermittently. A vehicle must also be smoke-free if it is used by members of the public or a section of the public, whether or not for reward or hire.

However, the smoking ban does not apply to a vehicle that is used primarily for the private purposes of a person who owns it or who has a right to use it which is not restricted to a particular journey. It does not matter that the vehicle is used occasionally for work by more than one employee, provided it is primarily for private use.

The ban applies equally to customers and visitors as it does to staff.

Smoking indoors at work is therefore no longer permitted, not even in designated smoking rooms or smoking areas. Even workplaces that are already smoke-free have a duty to comply with the law. This includes putting up 'no smoking' signs.

For further information on this subject please visit www.smokefreeengland.co.uk or contact the Smoke free compliance line on **0800 587 1667**.

Working Time Regulations

Controls on working time, including a maximum working week of 48 hours, night work restrictions, prescribed minimum rest breaks and rest periods and minimum paid holiday entitlements were introduced in October 1998. If you are unsure of your rights, ask your agency to provide you with the details which are available in another leaflet from this series.

Employee responsibilities

The health and safety legislation places obligations and responsibilities on employees and on persons who undertake to do work personally other than under a contract of employment. This includes you as a temporary worker. In extreme cases, employees and others can now be personally prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive for failure to co-operate with their employer's instructions or misuse of anything provided for their health and safety.

Whilst at work, all workers have a duty to:

- Take reasonable care of their own health and safety at work and of other persons who may be affected by their acts or omissions;
- Co-operate with the hirer, or any other person with responsibility for work place health and safety;
- Not intentionally or recklessly misuse any equipment provided for their health and safety.

The health and safety of workers is of paramount importance, reflected in the increasing range and scope of legislation. Your employment agency will want to ensure that their temporary and contract staff benefit from the protection offered by the legislation. Obviously this is a brief summary of your entitlements and the main obligations imposed on you but if you have any further queries, ask integrity plus.