

The roles and tasks of the Health and Safety Representative



BEA
HANDEL



Introduction

This booklet gives you an insight into your function as Health and Safety Representative and how to make the work you do more visible in your workplace.

The booklet also gives you an insight into cooperation and collaboration partners, and highlights various patterns of communication and response.

As a Health and Safety Representative, you have the best opportunities to have an impact on and make a difference in the working environment at your workplace.

Your role as Health and Safety Representative also brings with it responsibility and a number of expectations from both your colleagues and management. Make sure you're aware of them.

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It's very rewarding for me to be a Health and Safety Representative. I learn a lot and I enjoy the challenges that come with the role. Sometimes, you are plunged into things you don't know anything about and that you have to learn more about, and that's so exciting.”

Hanne Larsen, Health and Safety Representative, Top Toy

Your tasks as Health and Safety Representative

As Health and Safety Representative you, along with the other representatives in the Health and Safety Organisation, have to help ensure there is a good physical and mental working environment at your workplace. That being said, it is still the responsibility of your employer to comply with the legal requirements relevant to the work environment.

As Health and Safety Representative, you look after your colleagues' interests and play a part in representing them in ongoing collaborations to do with the working environment at the company. This can be by asking them what problems and challenges they have regarding the working environment, but also asking what their wishes are, so that the workplace is a safe and healthy place to be.

You will help prevent Health and Safety issues cropping up before they occur and get out of hand. But you also offer help and support if something goes wrong.

It is important that you and your workplace figure out what tasks you have to solve, so that you can balance your expectations and so that you have the time you need to do the work that you are required by law to do. It is also important that you have the opportunity to learn the skills you need, both through the 1½ days of supplementary Health and Safety education and through other training courses.

Case study

When Jette was chosen as Health and Safety Representative, nobody told her what she was supposed to do, even though she was completely new to being a Health and Safety Representative. She did not know what was expected of her and neither did she know how to best represent her colleagues.

A new HR boss wanted the Health and Safety work to be more systematic, and one of the things he did was to work out a job description for the Health and Safety Representatives.

This meant that Jette got a set of concrete tasks and clearly defined responsibilities to work with, and she now knows what is expected of her. This also made her feel that the job of being a Health and Safety Representative has not only gained higher status with management, but also with her colleagues, who have now changed their attitude to her role. Some of them even want to become the Health and Safety Representative themselves - but not if Jette has anything to say about that. She does not want to give up her position now, since it is so rewarding to her both professionally and in her interaction with her colleagues, and because of the influence she has on creating a good workplace.

Example of an advertisement for a Health and Safety Representative from Matas:

Do you want to be a part of the Matas chain's work in Health and Safety? The election for the Health and Safety Representative in Health and Safety Group no. ____ has begun.

If you want to participate in the election and in the race to become the new Health and Safety Representative for the shops and stores that your Group covers, then read more here about how you can make a difference to your colleagues and to your shared working environment.

Tasks

Together with the Health and Safety Manager, the Health and Safety Representative has to ensure that:

- work systems and processes in the shops and stores are organised and carried out safely - and that everybody gets effective training and instruction
- employees are not exposed to the unnecessary effects of noise, dust, radiation, smell and cold in the shops and stores
- all shops and stores in the Health and Safety Group have carried out a health and safety risk assessment (APV) and have a related plan of action
- you and your Health and Safety Manager will visit the shops and stores in your group twice a year
- you and your Health and Safety Manager will potentially participate in surveys of accidents, as well as offering suggestions about potential improvements in the working environment in the shops and stores.

Conditions

- As Health and Safety Representative, you uphold the interests of your colleagues when it comes to the Health and Safety work of the shop or store.
- You will be chosen by your colleagues for a two-year period.
- You are protected by the same rules as a union representative .
- If you have not already completed the Health and Safety training course required by law, you will automatically be offered this by Matas within approximately three months.
- On a yearly basis you will be offered training courses relevant to your job as Health and Safety Representative.

Contact your shop/store or district manager for more information if this is of interest to you.

The logo for Matas, featuring the word "matas" in a lowercase, serif font with a horizontal line above the letters.

Advice

- Be aware of what expectations management has of you. If they are unclear, then be sure to discuss them and have them written down in, for example, a job description for Health and Safety Representatives.
- Be aware of what expectations your colleagues have of you - talk to them and tell them what you can do for them.
- When you are asked to “do something”, be sure to ask what the person in question expects, and whether they have any suggestions for a solution themselves. As soon as the goal is made clear to both of you, you will know if you can help.
- Speak up if the responsibility or duty to solve a specific task does not lie with you. Make sure that your colleagues know you are trying to do something about their issues, and keep them informed.
- Remember that it is not your job to solve all the issues that are brought to you. Creating the best working environment at your workplace requires collaboration with your colleagues and with management. Everybody has a responsibility.

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Now they say, *“Oh, that’s what I’m supposed to do!”*
Before, they weren’t sure what authority they had - now their expectations have been clarified, and that makes it easier.”

Ditte Gullach, Health and Safety Training Coordinator, Matas

Your roles as Health and Safety Representative

As Health and Safety Representative, you have been chosen by your colleagues to represent them in ongoing collaborations/discussions to do with the working environment at your workplace.

As Health and Safety Representative, you can come up with suggestions for management about new initiatives, offer suggestions about solutions to Health and Safety challenges and contribute to action plans.

You will notice that you have different roles depending on the situation you are in:

- Sometimes you will be the **employee representative**, where it is your job to voice what your colleagues think about the working environment at your workplace.
- In that role you will also be the **sparring partner**, where you discuss working conditions and possible solutions with your colleagues or with management.
- Sometimes you will be the **link** between employees and management. In this role you will realise that you have to speak up about circumstances that you agree with, but also circumstances that you may disagree with.
- Sometimes you will enter into a dialogue with management where you will be the **negotiator**, and where you will argue for the opinions and wishes that you and your colleagues have about the working environment or about strategies, action plans and policies in that area.
- Sometimes you will be the **representative**, for example if you are part of the Health and Safety Committee, or if you are a part of other committees and groups where you discuss conditions and solutions that need to work for the whole workplace/company.



Something will be done when you give the Health and Safety Representative responsibility for an issue, and it's important to address the fact that the role of the Health and Safety Representative is about counselling and guidance, and that it's not a form of control where you are waving a "police badge" around."

Tina Thomsen, HR Director, Synoptik

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It takes at least a year for them to feel comfortable in the role. And that's a bit of a shame when they're only elected for two years, but we hope that they'll still be interested in continuing in the role.”

Solveig Petersen, HR assistant and secretary to the Health and Safety Committee at jem & fix

Advice

The different roles require different things from you, so:

- be aware of what role you have in different situations
- be aware of what roles you feel comfortable in and what roles you want to be better at. Seek out the opportunity to learn
- make your role visible in your work environment. For example, make sure that your colleagues know that when you pass on information to them, you are the link between them and management
- if, for example, you experience situations where management and your colleagues want to go in different directions - then stop, take a break, and think about what is needed from you in this moment. Become aware of what role would be the most appropriate in the situation and think about the best way to handle the situation.



You're in a position where you need to be able to see it from both sides. Of course you need to be there for your colleagues, but what you bring to the table also needs to be fair."

Hanne Larsen, Health and Safety Representative, Top Toy

Advice

- Explain to your colleagues what you can do for them and how.
- Be available, open and welcoming to your colleagues.
- Look at issues from both sides. Show an interest in all opinions, listen with an open mind, and ask if you need clarification.
- Think about who you can discuss different issues with - seek them out and create your network.
- Get a good understanding of the issue before you present requests and opinions to management.
- Be aware of what tasks are meant for the Health and Safety Representative, and pass things on to your manager if the tasks are meant for (staff) management, e.g. if colleagues do not follow security guidelines.

Get started with your work as Health as Safety Representative

Be welcoming and honest

- Have a positive attitude so everyone feels welcome to ask you questions.
- Be open about the fact that not all issues can be solved in the moment.

Go for the small, safe and visible successes

- Firstly, solve the problems that do not adhere to Health and Safety regulations.
- Secondly, focus on the problems that can be solved quickly, to show that something is happening.

Find the root of the problems

- The solutions will be more robust if you examine the cause of the problem well.
- Be aware that there can be more than one reason for a problem.

Use your common sense

- Use your own experiences from your day-to-day work.
- Draw on solutions from former Health and Safety Representatives.

Gather knowledge about Health and Safety as you go

- Update your knowledge using, for example, the internet, books and journals.

Hold constructive meetings

- Send out an agenda before the meeting.
- Write a report about what needs to be done, who needs to do it and by when.
- Check to make sure that what was decided at the last meeting has been done.

Be clear about your role, work and results

- Explain that you are the company's Health and Safety Representatives and counsellors, not police officers.
- Be clear about how everyone in the shop or store can use your knowledge.
- Make it clear how a problem can be solved, by whom and by when.
- Draw attention to the tasks you have solved.

Pass on your knowledge

- Speak up and pass on information, e.g. during the health and safety risk assessment (APV).
- Hand out written material about Health and Safety.

Lead by good example

- Show through your actions that you take Health and Safety seriously.

Include employees and managers

- Be aware that the people who have a problem are often also the people who have ideas about how it can be solved.

Reflection

Think about what kind of relationships and collaborations you have with the other people in your workplace, e.g. your own group/department/team, the Management Representative in your Health and Safety Group, other Health and Safety Representatives and the Union representative, if you have one.

Sketch out your network and make a note of what you and the people in your network use each other for.

Are there any areas where you need a sparring partner - and how can you fill that gap?



Case study

Peter has been Health and Safety Representative for several years. Management has now asked Peter, again, to tell his colleagues that they MUST follow instructions. The last time Peter passed on this message, he experienced his colleagues calling him degrading and hurtful things - something that also affected their collaboration in their day-to-day work.

Peter knows that Health and Safety work is a collaboration between employees and management. This is why Peter has decided to talk to the warehouse manager about how to get a grip on this, using their experiences from the last time he passed on the message about following instructions.

The warehouse manager and Peter agree that Peter should not have to solve tasks that actually lie with management, which is why the warehouse manager agrees to take on the task and talk to the employees who did not follow instructions.

The work environment

The work involved in creating a good working environment can be carried out in many different ways, depending on how your Health and Safety Organisation is structured, the size of the shops and stores, how many shops and stores are in the Health and Safety Group, and whether or not there is a central unit/work environment manager or coordinator in a supportive role.

Some places have scheduled inspections several times a year, where you and possibly the Management Representative from your Health and Safety Group look at your workplace and speak with your colleagues about their own working environment. But it is still important that you, in your day-to-day work, reach out and try to monitor your workplace/the area that you cover by talking to your colleagues and by being available and open.

To make sure that the Health and Safety of your workplace gets the attention it needs, it is also your job to be aware of the bigger picture and the long-term perspective.

This means that it is important, especially at the yearly risk assessment (APV), for members of the Health and Safety Group and the Health and Safety Committee to discuss the progress you have made and to use the tools made available by the Health and Safety Organisation, such as risk assessments and statistics relating to work accident reports, as well as analyses and assessments of job satisfaction and absence due to illness.

This makes it possible for you to be on top of the physical and mental working environment and implement any necessary measures - measures that are relevant to and rewarding for both management and your colleagues with respect to the working environment, wellbeing and hence productivity and service levels.

Advice

- **Be curious, observe, ask your colleagues questions and stay on top of developments in your workplace.**
- **Get a good understanding of the scope of the problems. For example, how many people are involved, how many have marked this as a problem, etc.**
- **Get the small tasks done quickly to show your colleagues that you are doing something about the challenges and issues they bring you - even the small everyday things that can mean a lot to your colleagues.**
- **Learn how and to whom you should bring the bigger problems, so that they are included in decisions about the management of the shop or store.**
- **Use the yearly risk assessment to discuss future initiatives. Be realistic and make sure that there are enough resources - and time - available to keep the Health and Safety work going.**
- **Be clear about who does what and when.**

Reflection

What Health and Safety problems and challenges do you have at the moment?

Think about whether there are any Health and Safety issues that are currently not being handled, and how you will present those issues to the Health and Safety Group/the Health and Safety Organisation. Also think about what kind of knowledge about the issues and what kind of preparation this requires?

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You need to keep things light and be more human, then it feels less formal.”

Mie Rosendahl Bærtelsen, former Health and Safety Representative, now Store Manager in Matas

Visibility

Not everyone at your workplace knows what kind of work you do as Health and Safety Representative, nor what the Health and Safety Organisation does. It is important that everyone at your workplace knows and sees the kind of difference it makes to have a Health and Safety Representative, and that there is a Health and Safety Organisation.

Visibility is about you personally as well as the results that you and the Health and Safety Organisation create.

It is important that your colleagues know that you are their Health and Safety Representative and that they see you as visible, available and as someone on their level, not a representative for management.

There are many ways to make tasks, priorities and results visible, depending on the workplace culture and the ways in which you inform and communicate with each other in the workplace. In some places, messages need to be communicated with a smile and a wink and in other places they should be short and to the point - the most important thing is that you figure out what works for you.



The person who stands out
is also the person who gets
elected.”

Birgitte Oredson, Health and Safety Consultant, Netto

Advice

- Make yourself visible and explain what you do and what you can do for your colleagues. Find your own style, for example use a specific clue or indicator that will easily let your colleagues know when information is coming from you directly.
- It is OK to highlight your successes and relay good stories.
- Tell your colleagues about the different goals and priorities you have for Health and Safety at your workplace, for example by telling them about the yearly risk assessment. Keep them up to date about progress and results as you go.
- Use newsletters, posts or Facebook groups to tell your colleagues about good experiences, the collective work of Health and Safety, or to highlight an employee who has done something concrete to take better care of themselves and their colleagues.
- Make the Health and Safety Organisation easier to understand with pictures and contact information e.g. on bulletin boards in the lunchroom, on intranet or in the Health and Safety folder.

The dialogue with management and your colleagues

The ability to communicate and be part of a dialogue with everybody is an important part of being able to function and thrive in a workplace. Communication can be everything - from the spoken or written word to a visual impression, or to internal culture or body language.

As Health and Safety Representative you will experience resistance from time to time. It can be from both colleagues and management. You will also learn that your colleagues and management can react differently to the same circumstances or issues. This is why you need to know that people react and behave in different ways, and that you will need to change the way you communicate depending on who you speak with.

Your own reactions will also be different depending on the kind of pressure you are under in a situation. This is why you also need to be aware of your own reactions and especially how you feel or react in stressful situations where you feel uncomfortable or under pressure.

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I've hit a dead end many times. You learn from it and you need to take those experiences with you as you go. That's how it is with everything.”

Hanne Larsen, Health and Safety Representative, Top Toy

Reflection

Think about situations where you feel that communication has been good or has gone awry.

Try to see if there are specific situations where you feel more successful or less successful than others.

Also try to see if this happens with specific people.

How could you have handled the situations better by communicating in a different way?

Try to think more specifically about how you react in situations where you feel pressured or where you find the situation uncomfortable, and consider if there is anything you can do to change the way you react.

Advice

- **Be sure to stay focused on the individual case or issue when you communicate, and shift your focus back to the issue if the communication becomes too personal.**
- **Remember that we are all different. We carry different experiences and knowledge with us, just as we react differently to the same situations. Do not judge others if they react in a different way than you would have done.**
- **Be aware of your feedback culture. Is it open and trusting, so that you can speak about things? If not, bring this up with the Health and Safety Organisation and help create a feedback culture that is built on mutual trust and respect.**
- **Be aware of your own reactions - especially in stressful situations. Try to understand the way you react in different situations.**

About you

Be aware of how others see you and what the best ways are for you to help and contribute to collaborative work in Health and Safety at your workplace.

This does not only mean professionally, but also refers to your communication and your ability to represent your colleagues and work well with management.

Consider whether there are any skills you need to work on, both professionally and personally, so that you can do the job of Health and Safety Representative in the best possible way. Find out what options there are internally, in your trade union or with different providers of Health and Safety training courses.



You need to do it because you want to do something good for your colleagues and because you want to help create a good working environment.”

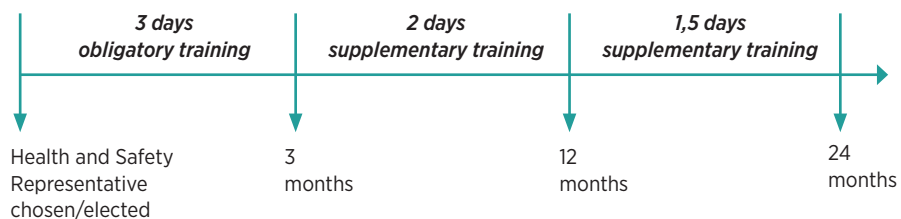
Tina Thomsen, HR director, Synoptik

Training and skills development

Consider if there are any skills you need to work on both professionally and personally so that you can do the job of Health and Safety Representative in the best possible way.

Obligatory and supplementary Health and Safety training courses

Every year as Health and Safety Representative, besides the obligatory Health and Safety education, you need to be offered supplementary training amounting to 2 days during your first year in the role (the year you were chosen) and 1½ days in the following years. If you make an arrangement with your employer, you can choose to complete these at the same time, but you cannot have more than 3 days of supplementary education in a row.



The supplementary training is meant to give you new knowledge and skills that are relevant to the needs of the company and the kind of Health and Safety tasks that need to be done. For example, the starting point for this training can be the special focus areas agreed on at the yearly risk assessment. This could be learning about correct working practices or areas covering mental Health and Safety, but also more process-oriented training courses such as conflict management, strategic planning, negotiation techniques and communication. Your work in the Health and Safety Organisation is not a substitute for supplementary training.

Since all members of the Health and Safety Organisation must be offered supplementary training, it can be a good idea to go together.

If there is any disagreement about what kind of training or education needs to be offered, then the employer has the final word and can decide what is included in the offering.

Contact your trade union about possible training opportunities, or have your employer look into their union's offerings. You can find a list of possible options on the website below (in Danish only):

www.at.dk/arbejdsmiljoearbejdet/arbejdsmiljoeddannelser/

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A good Health and Safety Representative is someone who is objective and can enter into a dialogue, who does not pick a side, neither for the employee nor management, but who listens.”

Regitze Gerlach, HR Partner, Synoptik

Luk op!

Find more inspiration for your Health and Safety work at www.lukop.nu, where BFA Handel has pulled together good experiences from different shops, stores and chains.

On the site you will also find examples of tools and other useful things that shops, stores and chains use in their Health and Safety work (in Danish only).

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In this committee employers and employees work together to provide guides, pamphlets, training materials etc. to support the co-operation for a better work environment in the retail industry in Denmark.

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