

Safety Plan Basics
for
Montana Small Businesses

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Safety Plan Basics for Montana Small Businesses

One of the little-known requirements for businesses is a safety plan. The Montana Safety Culture Act requires all employers, even with only one part-time employee, to have a safety plan. So far, the state is educating and encouraging rather than punishing companies without them, and there are plenty of good resources to help you develop a written plan.

Employers are required to develop a safety plan that includes:

1. A safety orientation before employees start work, including emergency and reporting procedures, fire safety, first aid, personal protective equipment (PPE), and work-site hazards.
2. Job-specific safety training before new tasks are undertaken.
3. Regular refresher training, at least annually.
4. Safety-awareness tools such as safety meetings, newsletters, and posters.
5. Periodic inspection for new or evolving hazards.
6. Documentation of all of the above.

For companies with more than five employees, the safety plans must assign accountability for safety by:

1. Assigning specific safety responsibilities to employees.
2. Including safety in job descriptions.
3. Communicating safety policies to all employees
4. Implementing corrective actions for work-related accidents, injuries, etc.
5. Having a safety committee in place.

A safety committee isn't inflicted on employees from above; it must contain both management and line employees and be large enough to be a fair representation of the workplace. It must meet at least once every four months and (of course) document its activities. The committee investigates incidents and unsafe work conditions, and reports to the employer about hazard identification and reduction, employee engagement with safety, and training.

Topics that should be covered in a safety plan and in committee meetings include a wide range of topics, not all of which are appropriate for every business:

- Housekeeping
- Slips, Trips and Falls
- Proper Lifting Techniques
- Toxic Gases and Poisons
- Combustible Dust
- Confined Spaces
- Defensive Driving, including phone use and texting
- Emergency Procedures



- Ergonomics
- Fire Hazards and Fire Safety
- First Aid
- Floors, Aisles and Storage of Materials
- Horseplay
- Industrial Vehicles
- Ladders, Stairs and Ramps
- Lighting and Ventilation
- Lockout/Tagout
- Machine Care, Maintenance and Guarding
- Machine Hazards
- Materials Handling
- Occupational Disease
- Sanitation
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Unsafe Work Practices
- Accident and Hazard Reporting

For detailed information on safety plans and the text of the Montana Safety Culture Act, visit www.worksafemt.com/uploads/PDFs/WSMT-MTSafetyBrochure.pdf. For additional information on maintaining a safe workplace, visit erd.dli.mt.gov/safety-and-health-bureau.html.

Luckily, Montana makes it pretty easy to develop a safety plan. The Montana Department of Labor and Industry has set up a site dedicated to helping small businesses develop safety plans and cultures at www.worksafemt.com. The site contains information on and links to a wide variety of resources and materials, including SafetyFest and Safety Writer.

SafetyWriter is a free program that develops a first draft of a safety plan for your company, by industry. You can find it on the worksafemt site under Safety > Build Your Safety Program. Once you enter your company info, including the SIC/NAIC code, it will generate a document with all the topics and text that are generally applicable to your industry. You will still need to edit it so that it actually applies to your company, but the basics are there and it gets you thinking about the subject.

When you edit the plan, think about what fits your company. Take out things that don't apply and add anything the program missed. Make sure it includes phone numbers for who to call in an emergency, from supervisors and safety officers to the local utility companies.

The state also helps with the recurrent safety training that the law requires. SafetyFest is free safety training offered several times a year around the state; it includes OSHA 10-hour classes and special topics like HAZWOPR training, confined spaces, and writing a safety plan. Montana State Fund puts on quarterly safety classes in cities around the state, covering three different safety topics in a morning. For more information, visit <http://www.safemt.com>.



In addition to following the laws, having (and following) a safety plan can help protect your employees from injury, reduce Worker's Comp rates, and make life easier if OSHA ever comes calling. It is worth taking the time to ensure that your employees have the safest workplace that you can provide.

