

Training Guide

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) considers training one of the most important aspects in providing a safe and healthy workplace for employees. More than 100 current OSHA standards contain some form of training requirement. Many OSHA standards explicitly require the employer to train their employees in the safety and health aspects of their jobs. Other OSHA standards require the employer to limit certain job tasks to qualified, certified or competent employees (indicating previous or special training was provided). Training should be an essential part of every company's safety and health programs.

OSHA has developed voluntary training guidelines to assist employers in providing the safety and health information and instruction needed for their employees to work at minimal risk to themselves, to fellow employees, and to the public.

All employees want to avoid accidents and go home at the end of a workshift injury-free and feeling healthy. Without proper training though, that might not always be the case. Employees need to understand why there are safety rules and also how to follow the rules. When employees are knowledgeable in all aspects of safety and health training issues then everyone benefits. The results of a good training program include:

- safe and healthy employees;
- good moral;
- fewer lost workdays;
- higher employee retention;
- more qualified applicants for job openings; and
- greater productivity, greater profits

The following guidelines are based on OSHA's seven-step training outline. By using the guide, employers will be able to analyze current training methods, design or redesign training programs, and make progressive strides in meeting the training requirements of various OSHA standards.

Step 1. Determine if training is needed.

Determining if training is needed is the first step in the process. As stated earlier, OSHA requires training in a vast number of areas. Even if OSHA does not require training for a certain issue, training usually benefits everyone. Safety and health training should be provided before an employee begins work on certain machinery or before performing certain tasks. Training should cover general safety and health rules along with job-specific rules. Training should be repeated if an accident occurs or other issues arise that point out the need for retraining.

It is generally assumed training is needed when an employee is not performing their jobs properly. It is possible administrative or engineering controls could enable employees to perform their jobs without additional training.

Problems that can be addressed effectively by training include those that arise from lack of knowledge of a work process, unfamiliarity with equipment, or incorrect execution of a task. Training is less effective for problems arising from an employee's lack of motivation or lack of attention to the job. Whatever its purpose, training is most effective when designed in relation to the goals of the employer's total safety and health program.

Step 2. Identifying employee's training needs

If training is needed, the next step in the process is determining what training is needed. Now you must identify what the employee is expected to do and in what ways, if any, the employee's performance is deficient. Obtaining this information is possible by conducting a job analysis, which pinpoints what an employee needs to know in order to perform their job. When creating a new training program, the job analysis can be developed by using engineering data on new equipment or the safety data sheets on unfamiliar substances. OSHA standards are also a valuable tool in developing training content.

Another option is to conduct a job hazard analysis by studying and recording each step of a job, identifying existing or potential hazards, and determining the best way to perform the job in order to reduce or eliminate the risks. Information obtained from a job hazard analysis can be used as the content for training. Information from the following sources can be helpful:

- Your company's accident and injury records to identify how accidents occurred.
- Employee descriptions of their jobs in their own words including tasks performed and the tools, materials, and equipment used.
- Observing employees at their worksites and taking notes on work performed.
- Examining similar training programs offered by other companies in the same industry or obtaining information from organizations such as OSHA, The National Safety Council, Bureau of Labor Statistics, etc.
- Employees. Safety and health hazards can be identified through the employees' responses to such questions as whether anything about their jobs frightens them, if they have had any near-miss incidents, if they feel they are taking risks, or if they believe their jobs involve hazardous operations or substances.

Step 3. Identifying goals and objectives of training

Once the kind of training needed has been determined, it is important to recognize what training is not needed. Employees should be made aware of all steps involved in a job task but training should focus on those steps in which improved performance is required. This eliminates unnecessary training and tailors the training to meet the needs of the employees.

For training to be as successful as possible, clear and measurable objectives should be thought out before training begins. Objectives should identify as precisely as possible what the employees will do to demonstrate they have learned, or the objective has been reached. Objectives should also state what constitutes acceptable performance. Training objectives are most effective when stated in such a way that other qualified persons can recognize when the desired behavior is achieved.

Step 4. Developing learning activities

Once you have decided upon the training objectives, you can focus on what learning activities you want to utilize for the purpose of reaching those objectives. Learning activities enable employees to demonstrate they have acquired the desired skills and knowledge necessary to perform their job tasks safely. Various types of learning activities/materials can be used such as videos, manuals, slides and audiotapes. In many cases the learning activities should simulate the actual job tasks as closely as possible to ensure accurate training for the job required. Some questions to consider which might help determine the type of learning activity to incorporate into your training include:

- What resources are available?
- Can group training using a trainer and training program (video) be used?
- Is one-on-one training necessary?
- Does the job task require special skills or knowledge?
- Does the task require physical or mental skills? Or Both?

The methods and materials used for training purposes can be as varied as your imagination and resources will allow. In many cases, a multi-faceted approach is usually the most effective. Whatever the method of instruction, the learning activities should be developed in such a way the employees can clearly demonstrate they have acquired the desired skills or knowledge.

Step 5. Conduct the training

After completing the above steps, you are ready to start conducting the training. Training should be presented in such a way its organization and meaning are clear to the employees. This will help to motivate the employees to pay attention and learn what is being presented. You should:

- provide overviews of the material to be learned, explaining the goals and objectives of instruction;
- relate the new information or skills, whenever possible, to the employee's goals, interests and/or experience;
- point out the benefits of training (better informed, more skilled, more valuable, increased safety and health, etc); and
- reinforce what they have learned by summarizing the programs objectives and key points of information.

An effective training program allows employees to participate in the training process and to practice their skills or knowledge. This will help to ensure they are learning the required knowledge or skills and permit correction if necessary. Employees can become involved in the training process by participating in discussions, asking questions, contributing their knowledge and expertise, learning through hands-on experiences, and through role-playing exercises.

Step 6. Evaluation of the training program

The training program should have a method to measure its effectiveness. The method for evaluating the program should be formulated before training begins. Evaluation will help employers determine the amount of learning achieved and whether an employee's performance has improved on the job. Some different methods of evaluating are:

- questionnaires, quizzes and discussions with the “students”;
- observations by supervisors and managers; and
- safety improvements throughout the workplace that result in fewer injuries or accidents.

Step 7. Improving the program

Regardless of how the training program is evaluated, the results will help determine if the employees achieved the desired results and if additional training is required. If the evaluation makes it clear the objectives were not met, revisions in the training program may be necessary. Questioning the employees and those who conducted the training might help determine why it was ineffective. Ask questions such as:

- Was the training confusing or distracting?
- Was something missing from the material presented?
- What did you learn?
- What did you fail to understand?

A review of the training process from start to finish may be necessary to identify any changes needed to make the training more effective. After making necessary changes to the training program, you should administer the training again and then make another evaluation. Each time you conduct training; you should evaluate and then make improvements. This will ensure a training program that will ultimately help your company achieve its training goals.