



Health and Safety Is Everyone's Responsibility

A plain-language guide for New Zealand workplaces



About this guide

Health and safety is about more than paperwork. It is about understanding the risks created by work and making sure those risks are managed in a practical, effective and ongoing way.

In New Zealand, the **Health and Safety at Work Act 2015** sets out duties for organisations and people who influence, carry out, or are affected by work.

This guide explains the key responsibilities in plain language for:

- Small businesses
- Contractors
- Education providers
- Laboratories

- Offices
- Trades
- Mixed workplaces

PLEASE NOTE

This is a general guide only. Some workplaces will need more detailed advice depending on the nature of the work, the hazards involved and the level of risk.



Key health and safety terms

The Health and Safety at Work Act uses specific terms to describe who has health and safety responsibilities.

Person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU)

In most cases, a PCBU will be an organisation or business, such as a company, partnership, school or education provider, charity or trust, public sector organisation, contractor business, or sole trader.

A PCBU has the **primary duty of care** for health and safety — it must ensure, **so far as is reasonably practicable**, the health and safety of workers while they are at work, and other people whose health and safety may be put at risk by the work being carried out.

Officer

An **officer** is a person in a senior governance or leadership role who has significant influence over how the organisation is managed — this may include directors, board members, chief executives and senior leaders with significant decision-making influence.

Officers have their own duty to exercise **due diligence** to make sure the PCBU is meeting its health and safety duties. Good due diligence means asking for evidence, not just reassurance.

Worker

A **worker** is a person who carries out work for a PCBU — including employees, contractors, subcontractors, labour-hire workers, apprentices, trainees, students gaining work experience, and some volunteer workers.

Workers must take reasonable care of their own health and safety, and take reasonable care that their actions, or things they fail to do, do not adversely affect the health and safety of other people.

Other person at the workplace

An **other person at the workplace** is someone who is not carrying out work for the PCBU but may still be affected by the work — such as visitors, customers, clients, students and members of the public.

They must take reasonable care of their own health and safety and follow reasonable health and safety instructions given by the PCBU, so far as they are reasonably able.

PCBU responsibilities

A PCBU has the **primary duty of care**. This means the PCBU must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that workers and other people are not put at risk from work carried out as part of the business or undertaking.

A PCBU must, so far as is reasonably practicable:

- Provide and maintain a work environment that is without risks to health and safety
- Provide and maintain safe plant and structures
- Provide and maintain safe systems of work
- Ensure the safe use, handling and storage of plant, substances and structures
- Provide adequate facilities for the welfare of workers at work
- Provide the information, training, instruction or supervision needed to protect people from work-related health and safety risks
- Monitor workplace conditions and worker health where this is needed to prevent injury or illness

A PCBU must manage work-related risks by eliminating risks to health and safety so far as is reasonably practicable. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate a risk, the PCBU must minimise that risk so far as is reasonably practicable.

IN PRACTICAL TERMS, THIS MEANS ASKING

- What work do we do?
- What could harm people?
- Who could be affected?
- What controls are needed?
- Are those controls actually working?
- What needs to change when the work, people, equipment, substances or environment changes?

Officer responsibilities

Officers do not need to personally carry out every health and safety task. Their role is to exercise **due diligence**.

This means officers must take reasonable steps to:

- Keep up to date with health and safety matters
- Understand the nature of the organisation's work
- Understand the hazards and risks associated with that work
- Make sure the organisation has appropriate resources and processes to eliminate or minimise health and safety risks
- Make sure the organisation has processes for receiving and considering information about incidents, hazards and risks
- Make sure the organisation responds to that information in a timely way
- Make sure the organisation has processes for complying with its health and safety duties
- Verify that health and safety resources and processes are in place and being used

OFFICERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND

- What the key health and safety risks are
- What controls are in place
- How the organisation knows those controls are working
- What is being done when controls are weak, missing or not followed
- Whether health and safety information is reaching decision-makers in time to act

Worker & visitor responsibilities

Worker responsibilities

Workers must take reasonable care of their own health and safety, and take reasonable care that their actions, or things they fail to do, do not adversely affect the health and safety of other people.

Workers must:

- Follow reasonable health and safety instructions from the PCBU, so far as they are reasonably able
- Cooperate with reasonable health and safety policies and procedures that have been notified to them
- Use equipment, protective equipment and safety controls properly
- Report hazards, incidents, near misses and health and safety concerns through the organisation's reporting process

RIGHT TO REFUSE UNSAFE WORK

Workers have the right to stop or refuse work if they believe the work would expose them, or another person, to a serious risk to health or safety from immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard.

Responsibilities of visitors and other people

Visitors, customers, clients, students and members of the public also have responsibilities when they are at a workplace. They must:

- Take reasonable care of their own health and safety
- Take reasonable care that their actions or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of others
- Follow reasonable health and safety instructions given by the PCBU, so far as they are reasonably able

This might include following sign-in processes, wearing required protective equipment, staying within authorised areas, following site rules, and reporting hazards or concerns.

Health and safety plans and procedures

Every organisation should have health and safety arrangements that match the nature of its work and the risks involved.

For some businesses, this may be a simple set of practical processes. For higher-risk workplaces — such as laboratories, workshops, construction activities, plant operations, fieldwork, or workplaces using hazardous substances — more detailed systems and specialist advice may be needed.

Useful health and safety documents may include:

- A health and safety policy
- Risk or hazard registers
- Safe work procedures
- Emergency plans
- Training and induction records
- Inspection and maintenance records
- Contractor management records
- Incident and near-miss reporting processes
- Corrective action records

These documents should not just sit in a folder. They should be communicated, understood, used and reviewed.

A GOOD SYSTEM SHOULD HELP YOU ANSWER

- What could harm people?
- What are we doing to control the risk?
- How do we know those controls are working?
- What do we do when something changes or goes wrong?

Worker engagement and participation

PCBUs must engage with workers on health and safety matters that affect them.

Worker engagement should be ongoing and meaningful. It should give workers a real opportunity to contribute to decisions that affect their health and safety.

This may include:

- Involving workers in identifying hazards
- Asking workers whether controls are practical and effective
- Consulting workers before making changes that affect health and safety
- Holding regular health and safety meetings
- Running toolbox talks
- Supporting health and safety representatives where applicable
- Establishing a health and safety committee where applicable
- Encouraging workers to raise concerns early
- Feeding back what has been done in response to concerns

WHY IT MATTERS

Worker engagement is not only a legal requirement. Workers often know how work is actually done and can identify risks, pressures and practical improvements that are not obvious from documents alone.

Risk management

As a PCBU, you are usually in the best position to influence or control the risks created by your work.

A practical risk management process should:

1. Identify hazards
2. Assess the risks arising from those hazards
3. Eliminate risks so far as is reasonably practicable
4. Minimise risks where elimination is not reasonably practicable
5. Check that controls are being used
6. Review controls to make sure they remain effective

Common documents used to support risk management may include risk or hazard registers, task analyses, safe work method statements, safe operating procedures, site-specific safety plans, plant and equipment procedures, inspection and maintenance checklists, and emergency response plans.

REVIEW YOUR RISK CONTROLS WHEN

- Work, equipment, substances, people or staffing levels change
- A new hazard is introduced
- An incident or near miss occurs
- Workers raise concerns
- Monitoring shows a control may not be working
- Legal requirements, guidance or industry practice changes

The goal is not just to complete paperwork. The goal is to make sure controls are suitable, understood, used and effective in real work.

Training, induction and supervision

PCBUs must provide workers with the information, training, instruction or supervision they need to work safely.

Training and induction should cover:

- The work being done
- The hazards and risks involved
- The controls that must be used
- Emergency procedures
- Reporting requirements
- The worker's role and responsibilities
- Any equipment, plant, substances or protective equipment used in the work

ASK YOURSELF

- Do workers know what risks they may face?
- Do they know how to control those risks?
- Do they know what to do if something changes?
- Do they know how to report a hazard, incident or near miss?
- Are new or inexperienced workers properly supervised?

If a worker does not yet have the knowledge or experience to work safely, they should be trained, instructed or supervised until they can do the work safely.

Training records should be kept and reviewed. Records should show not only that training happened, but that workers have the knowledge and capability needed for the work they are expected to do.

Incidents, near misses and emergencies

PCBUs should have a clear process for reporting, recording, investigating and learning from incidents, injuries, illnesses, near misses, hazards, unsafe conditions and emergencies.

Near misses matter because they can show where controls are weak before someone is harmed.

Incident reporting should focus on learning, not blame. The purpose is to understand what happened, what people were trying to do at the time, what conditions shaped the event, what controls were expected to work, whether those controls were present and effective, and what needs to change to prevent harm.

PCBUs should also have emergency plans that are suitable for the workplace and the work being carried out. Emergency plans should be documented, communicated, practised where appropriate, and reviewed after drills, changes or real emergencies.

NOTIFIABLE EVENTS

Some events must be notified to WorkSafe New Zealand — these are called **notifiable events**, and can include a death, a notifiable illness or injury, or a notifiable incident. If a notifiable event occurs, the PCBU must notify WorkSafe New Zealand as required. The incident site may also need to be preserved unless an exception applies, such as helping an injured person, making the site safe, or preventing further harm. If you are unsure whether an event is notifiable, treat it seriously and seek competent advice promptly.

Different workplaces need different controls

This guide is general. The right health and safety arrangements depend on the work being done.

Small businesses

- Knowing your main risks
- Training people properly
- Keeping records simple but useful
- Checking controls in real work
- Reviewing risks when work changes

Contractors and trades

- Site induction
- Coordination with other PCBUs
- Clear work planning
- Plant and equipment safety
- Trade-specific risks (height, electrical, excavation, vehicles)
- Emergency arrangements for each site

Education providers

- Supervision
- Student activities
- Laboratories, workshops, fieldwork or practical areas
- Contractor management
- Emergency planning
- Clear reporting processes

Laboratories and technical areas

- Substance inventories
- Safety data sheets
- Labelling and storage
- Segregation of incompatible substances
- Emergency controls
- Training and supervision
- Waste management
- Specialist advice where required

Offices

- Workstation setup
- Manual handling
- Stress and workload risks
- Emergency procedures
- Slips, trips and falls
- Contractor and visitor management
- Reporting concerns early

Mixed workplaces

- Understanding how work areas interact
- Making sure risk controls fit the actual work
- Coordinating overlapping duties
- Keeping communication clear
- Reviewing controls when work changes

Practical health and safety checklist

Use this checklist as a starting point.

Leadership and responsibilities

- ☐ Do we know who the PCBU is?
- ☐ Do officers understand their due diligence role?
- ☐ Do workers know their responsibilities?
- ☐ Do visitors and contractors receive clear instructions?

Risk management

- ☐ Have we identified the hazards in our work?
- ☐ Have we assessed the risks?
- ☐ Have we eliminated risks where reasonably practicable?
- ☐ Where risks cannot be eliminated, have we minimised them?
- ☐ Are controls checked in practice?

Worker engagement

- ☐ Do workers have a real opportunity to raise health and safety matters?
- ☐ Are workers involved before changes are made?
- ☐ Do we listen to people who understand the work?
- ☐ Do we feed back what has changed after concerns are raised?

Training and supervision

- ☐ Are workers trained for the work they do?
- ☐ Are new or inexperienced workers supervised?
- ☐ Are training records kept?
- ☐ Is refresher training provided when needed?

Incidents and emergencies

- ☐ Do workers know how to report incidents and near misses?
- ☐ Do we investigate to learn, not blame?
- ☐ Do we have an emergency plan?
- ☐ Has the emergency plan been communicated and practised?
- ☐ Do we know when WorkSafe New Zealand must be notified?

Review

- ☐ Do we review health and safety documents regularly?
- ☐ Do we review controls after incidents, near misses or changes?
- ☐ Do we check whether actions have changed conditions, not just paperwork?



How we can help

Safemetrics can help you understand your health and safety responsibilities and put practical systems in place.

This may include support with:

- Health and safety system reviews
- Risk management
- Worker engagement and participation
- Health and safety policies and procedures
- Contractor management
- Incident and near-miss reporting
- Emergency planning
- Officer due diligence and governance support
- Training, induction and supervision processes
- Checking whether controls are working in practice

Whether you are building your health and safety system from the beginning or improving what you already have, practical support can help you move from paperwork to safer work.

Contact: enquiry@safemetrics.co.nz

Website: www.safemetrics.co.nz

Further resources & important note

Further resources

Further information on the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, related regulations and WorkSafe New Zealand guidance is available from WorkSafe New Zealand.

Important note

This guide provides general information only. It does not replace New Zealand health and safety legislation, regulations, WorkSafe New Zealand guidance, or professional advice for your specific circumstances.

If you are unsure about your duties, or if your work involves higher-risk activities, seek advice from a competent health and safety practitioner or legal adviser.



Need help reviewing your health and safety system?

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