

Guide to making your workplace smoke free

A written policy

Your organisation may already have a written policy on smoking in the workplace, so you will need to review this or develop a policy if one doesn't exist. A formal smoke free policy clearly sets out for all employees the conditions where smoking is and is not permitted. Properly constructed, it will ensure that both employers' and employees' legal rights and obligations are upheld and benefit the health of all employees. Properly negotiated, it will raise awareness about an important public health issue, and reduce friction in the workplace between smokers and non-smokers.

Basic steps to make your organisation smoke free

1. Set up a working party
2. Inform the workforce about the issues
3. Consult and negotiate with the workforce
4. Prepare the policy
5. Implement and publicise the policy
6. Provide help for smokers who want to stop smoking

Each of these steps may need adapting to suit the circumstances of your workplace.

1. Set up a working party

The formation of a working party is central to the process of developing, implementing and monitoring a smoke free policy. The working party must represent all elements of the workforce, including: smokers and non-smokers; representatives of unions, safety reps and professional bodies; health and safety staff. The working party must have direct lines of accountability and communication to senior management.

2. Inform the workforce

It is important that everyone in the workplace is informed about the health hazards and other problems associated with second hand smoke. The better informed the workforce, the more receptive they are likely to be to a smoke free policy. Possible ways to raise awareness of the issues are:

- as part of other work-based health promotion programmes
- distribution and display of educational literature
- other promotional materials
- via in-house publications
- by inviting an outside expert to speak to employees. It is also important that employees understand their own personal responsibility in relation to the forthcoming legislation, and are made aware of the process which will be used to arrive at the policy.

3. Consult the workforce

Before making the changes required for the introduction of a smoke free policy, it is recommended that employers consult the workforce. This is best practice and also, technically, this could constitute a change in terms and conditions of employment. The process of consultation, which should include unions and safety reps, is also important in identifying the needs of employees, and establishing and resolving difficulties and conflicts of interest, should they arise. One way of allowing employees to express their views is by conducting an in-house questionnaire. Other ways are through meetings, group discussions, interviews, in-house newsletters, suggestion boxes or Intranet polls. An important component of consultation is offering feedback to staff. Consultation is vital, but it should not become a cause of unnecessary delay, nor be used to justify a decision to take no action.

4. Prepare the policy

The information collected from consulting with the workforce, and discussions between the working group and senior management regarding the organisation's aims, will provide a baseline from which to begin formulating a policy. The areas that a policy could cover are:

- The places and times that smoking is permitted. The smoke free legislation will cover all workplaces and does not make provision for smoking in rest areas, communal areas, such as corridors and vending areas, canteens, personal offices or meeting rooms. The policy could be extended to cover communal outdoor areas, exits and entrances to the workplace and entire outdoor sites.
- It is up to the employer in consultation to decide on provision for smokers, including policy regarding smoking outside the office and whether to provide facilities such as litter bins and street sweeping.
- The arrangements for notifying visitors or members of the public that enter the workplace.
- Contractual obligations or conditions for smokers – such as time allowed for smoking breaks, clocking on/off, additions to the working day to equalise working time with non-smokers, or removing smoking breaks and allowing employees to smoke only during lunch breaks.
- A complaints procedure.

- Consequences of failure to comply with the policy, such as for other breaches of policy.
- Support for smokers who wish to stop, such as smoking cessation services, on-site counselling and subsidised smoking cessation aids.
- The approach to be adopted for employees with higher health risk – such as people with asthma or pregnant women. This need not involve identifying people at risk, but knowing what to do if an employee identifies themselves as at increased risk.
- The policy needs to be regularly reviewed, so a review date is important. The policy could become more restrictive after an initial adjustment period. As such it is necessary to devise procedures for reviewing the policy, ensuring compliance and resolving disputes – including naming the persons and posts responsible.

5. Implement and publicise the policy

The final step involves announcing the final policy to the workforce. Give three months' notice between announcing what the new measures will be and the implementation date of the new policy. Employees who smoke and managers will need this notice period to prepare for the new restrictions. Employees should be officially informed of the policy and appropriate notice be given to effect a change in their contract of employment if required.

Check that all necessary arrangements and adjustments have been made, such as 'no smoking' signs, and ensure that a mechanism is in place to monitor the policy in the months following implementation. Managers, union officials and other key personnel should clearly understand the background to the policy and how it has been developed. Copies of the policy should be displayed in key locations. All new employees should be given a copy of the policy and it should be mentioned in job advertisements and at interviews.

Any adjustments to the policy following introduction should comply with future changes to the smoke free legislation in the workplace and must not compromise the goal of protecting non-smokers from second hand smoke.

6. Provide help for smokers who want to stop

It is important to recognise that smokers may find the new restrictions on smoking difficult, particularly if your organisation has removed smoking breaks. Ongoing information regarding access to free NHS Stop Smoking Services, organising on-site stop smoking support and offering reduced priced smoking cessation aids (such as nicotine patches or gum) is an important part of supporting introduction of the smoke free policy.