

NQA, one of the world's largest accredited certification bodies, provides third party assessment and registration to international standards.

Factsheet

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY MANAGEMENT:OHSAS 18001

Introduction

Effective management of health and safety responsibilities can reap benefits for an organisation in terms of reduced accident risk and employee absence through injury or illness, as well as ensuring compliance with legislation. These benefits could result in significant cost savings.

Good health and safety management also improves awareness of responsibilities amongst employees. This alone, prevents many accidents. Most accidents involve two or more people, even though they may be unaware that their actions or neglect are the cause.

Accidents and Ill Health

Official figures for occupational accidents and reported illness do not give an accurate representation of the extent of pain and suffering experienced. This is because most accidents and injuries still go unreported, so the figures are just the tip of the iceberg.

Also, statistics do not take into account the cost to the individual, the organisation and the overall cost to society in general. Accidents and occupational ill health cost society through support of the injured party and their dependants and use of emergency services and hospital facilities.

Accident frequency, within particular industries, has a major effect on insurance premiums for that type of activity. Surveys have established that losses incurred through an accident at an uninsured organisation are between 8 and 36 times more than the cost of its appropriate insurance premium.

All these elements need to be considered if organisations are to provide a safe environment for employees. When a risk is identified, good health and safety management aims to remove the risk and prevent an incident, rather than combating its effects.

OHSAS 18001 - a standard for occupational health and safety

For a number of years, there has been demand for a certification scheme for

occupational health and safety, and this intensified with the publication of BS 8800 in 1997. However, while BS 8800 offers guidance on implementing an OH&S management system, it is not and never was intended for certification purposes. Certification offers independent verification that an organisation has taken all reasonable measures to minimise risks and prevent accidents.

This situation prompted many certification bodies to develop their own schemes, based on BS 8800. The inevitable irregularities between the schemes made this an undesirable way forward. In response, a committee was formed in November 1998, consisting of the British Standards Institution, the major UK certification bodies and other national standards organisations known to be active in health and safety, with the remit of creating a single standard.

The Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series 18001 unifies existing schemes, and creates an auditable standard. It also provides a vehicle to pressurise CEN and ISO into developing an international standard.

The new standard is broken into two sections. OHSAS 18001 is the specification against which certification is awarded. OHSAS 18002 provides guidance on implementing an occupational health and safety management system and corresponds directly to the specification. The standards are likely to be supplemented by a guide for auditors and an auditor training scheme.

Requirements of the Standard

The structure of OHSAS 18001 is in line with the current models for management systems and consists of six sections:

1. General Requirements

This section stipulates that the organisation must establish and maintain an OH&S management system.

2. OH&S Policy

An OH&S policy statement must be produced. It must be appropriate to the organisation and specify a commitment to health and safety.

3. Planning

The organisation must formulate an action plan, with clearly documented procedures to fulfil its OH&S policy.

4. Implementation and Operation

Necessary capabilities and support mechanisms must be developed to achieve the objectives and targets within the organisation's OH&S policy.

5. Checking and Corrective Action

OH&S performance must be measured, monitored and evaluated.

6. Management Review

The standard requires the organisation to review and continually improve its OH&S management system, with the objective of improving its overall safety performance.

The Benefits of Certification

Certification to OHSAS 18001 provides the following benefits:

- A planned and documented approach to health and safety
- A clear OH&S management structure defining areas of responsibility
- Increased awareness and knowledge of health and safety
- Provision of a healthier and safer working environment
- A reduced risk of accidents and occupational ill health
- A reduction in lost time through employee illness and injury
- Compliance with legislation which reduces the likelihood of paying legal costs and compensation

Gaining Certification

The process of gaining certification to OHSAS 18001 is similar to other schemes. Once the client has accepted NQA's quotation and decided to pursue registration, an initial visit is carried out to review the documented system. If problems are discovered, the client needs to address them through corrective action plans.

This process is followed by the main assessment, where assessors will be looking for objective evidence of compliance with the requirements and, in particular, improvement targets. If problems are discovered at the main assessment, then a corrective action plan will be issued raising points for the client to address before re-assessment. Once successful, a certificate of registration to OHSAS 18001 will be issued.

A programme of periodical surveillance visits will be scheduled following registration, during which the client will be expected to show adherence to their management system and commitment to continuous improvement.

NQA Training Courses

NQA's Training and Development Division offers two training courses relating to OHSAS 18001:

- Health and Safety Awareness
- Health and Safety Implementation

For a course itinerary, schedule and booking form, contact Lesley O'Connor on 01582 865929 or enquiries@nqa.com

Further Information

For further information on certification against OHSAS 18001, contact
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