

What is a Policy?

A safety and health management system policy is a statement that is intended to provide information about the management system, the system's goals and how the system operates at the company. It should clearly state the objectives of the system (i.e. reducing or eliminating safety and health risk) and provide for a commitment to improving performance.

Inside a Policy Statement

Indicate the Nature of the Business

Part of the policy should indicate the nature of the risks involved at the company. This is normally done by indicating the type of company it is, or what the company does.

- Example 1: ABC Manufacturing would need to state that they make high quality widgets. In this case, the safety risks presented to employees are those that any widget manufacturer would have.
- Example 2: XYZ Dental Office would not need to state what they do, as it is inherent to their company name, and the risks would be those for any dental office.
- Example 3: A-to-Z Construction Company may need to state what type of construction they do, as the risks for residential construction may be different than those for a construction company focused in the industrial sector.

Commit to Improving Performance

A management system is worthless if it has no goals or becomes stagnant. A continual commitment to improving the performance of the system is a good idea. But, stating that you are committed to continual improvement is not enough. Your policy statement should indicate how you are continually improving. These statements should be fairly broad based, rather than too specific. For example: ABC Dental Office is committed to continually improving the safety in our office, by involving employees in safety issues and discussions of safety concerns, and through the evaluation of current technologies and tools to improve our services and the safety of our employees.

Compliance with Applicable Regulations

The wording of your policy should include a statement about regulatory compliance. Over commitment is the most common error found in policy statements. Comply with applicable laws, instead of all laws. A statement such as: ABC Company strives to comply with all applicable laws and regulations that govern our industry.

What Else Is Needed?

Communicated to All Employees

Employees must be aware of the policy. They must also know what their responsibilities are with regard to both their safety and the safety management system. Employees at all levels of the company should know where to access a copy of the policy and understand what it means.

Available to Interested Parties

Contractors, visitors, neighbors, OSHA and local authorities may be interested in what your policy says. Display it prominently. Safety should be visible not only in the actions of your employees and managers, but in words as well. Some companies post their policy statement in the lobby, others place it on their website. Some companies even include it in a neighborhood newsletter.

Larger companies may request a copy of your policy statement as part of a contract bid. If you want to be considered for the contract, you may be required to have a safety and health management system in place. Including a copy of your policy statement with your contracts is a proactive method to prove that your company is committed to the safety of your employees and the quality of your work.

Up-to-Date and Relevant

If your company hasn't reviewed its policy statement in over a year, it is time to do it again. Businesses change, goals change, and sometimes they can make a vast change in a short amount of time. Keep the policy statement up-to-date, and review it to make sure it still meets the needs of the business and the management system. If you have achieved one of the commitments you made, replace it with another. But be sure that the information gets translated into the planning and implementation of the management system, so they are going in the same direction and driving one another toward the same goals. Make sure employees are aware of the changes, as well as updates for any posted copies of the policy statement.

Don't Commit Unless You Can Deliver

The commitments in your policy must be worded carefully. Don't say you will be the best in the industry, unless you can reasonably achieve that goal. Don't state that you will have no injuries or a zero incident rate. Your company can more easily "strive to have no injuries", or you are "committed to achieving an incident rate that is consistently below the industry average".

Technology is also a wonderful thing, but don't commit your resources to using "the best tools in the industry that are available". You probably can't afford them. State instead that you will "provide safety and protective equipment and tools to your employees that increase their level of safety and decrease their risk of injury".

The Simpler the Better

What you mean and what you say can be very different from one another. But try not to word-smith the poor thing to death. Keep it simple and you will be better off. The techno-babble and buzz words may sound good now, but will everyone understand them and what their intent and meaning is?

Examples of Policy Statements

Statement for XYZ Construction

XYZ Construction Company is committed to the safety of our employees. We strive to achieve compliance with all applicable laws and regulations that govern the home-construction industry. Our goal is to achieve an injury rate well below the average for our industry. To assist us in achieving this goal, we provide training, tools and information to our employees that enable them to work in a safe and healthful manner, and continually evaluate safety issues and issues. Our employees are encouraged to discuss any safety or health issues or concerns and are involved in implementing improvement opportunities that resolve or reduce safety and health risks.

Safety and Health Policy at ABC Paper

At ABC Paper we believe that integrating safety and health into every operation at our company is of the utmost importance. The health and safety of our employees continues to be the first consideration in our operations.

To this extent, ABC Paper strives to comply with all applicable laws and regulations that govern our operations. In so doing, we conduct our processes and operations in a manner that reduces or eliminates the conditions that are unhealthful or could cause injury to our employees. Employees are consistently urged to report unsafe conditions in their workplace, and work with ABC Paper management to alleviate these conditions where they may exist.

Production and Quality goals do not supercede the safety of our employees. With this in mind, ABC Paper management and staff have implemented a Safety Management Program. This program provides for:

- The continual commitment of improving safety at our workplace;
- Employee awareness and training with regard to safety issues; and
- A commitment to visitors, neighbors, and our community to lessen or eliminate any safety-related issues from our company that could impact them. This commitment is equal to our level of commitment to our employees.

Within the scope and applicability of our Safety Management Program, ABC Paper has established a goal to have injury and illness incident rates below the industry average. To accomplish this goal, we ask each of our employees to commit, not only to their own safety, but to the safety of their co-workers and their community as well.