

Gender checklist on occupational safety and health

Introduction

People come in all shapes and when it comes to health and safety the “one size fits all” approach just does not apply. Nowhere is that clearer than when we are looking at gender.

Considering gender in health and safety is a very real and important issue in every workplace.

The TUC gender checklist provides a prompt to encourage union representatives to pursue issues around gender in the workplace and bring together equalities work and health and safety work. By ensuring that employers take action on the issues, you can make a real difference to the health, safety and welfare of women.

There are other union techniques that will help, such as body-mapping, surveys and risk-mapping. These are successful tools that many unions have used to help address gender issues in health and safety and you can get more information on these on the TUC and Hazards Magazine websites. You should also check with your own union to get any guidance on gender issues and health and safety that they have produced.

This checklist is not intended to be a comprehensive list of specific issues relating to gender, but instead some suggestions of what union health and safety representatives should look at to make sure that the relevant issues in the workplace are identified and addressed in a gender sensitive way.

▣ USING THE CHECKLIST

The TUC checklist provides a prompt to encourage union representatives to pursue issues around gender in the workplace and bring together equalities work and health and safety work. The priority is the workplace and encouraging employers to take action on the issues that will make a real difference to the health, safety and welfare of women. Not all of the checklist will apply to every workplace, just pick those points that you think will be useful. Also, once you start thinking about the issues, you might come up with other points. However, the most important thing to remember is that the checklist is not something to just be ticked. To be effective, for every point, you also need to agree what you are going to do about it. Often that will mean working as part of a small group with other health and safety representatives, or with other unions.

Part 1 - Working with the employer

Consultation

- Is there a Joint Health and Safety Committee or other consultative structure and does it cover everyone including part-time, contracted and temporary workers?
- Are health and safety issues and priorities of concern to women regularly discussed at the Joint Health and Safety Committee or other consultative structures, and if items are identified are they dealt with?

Risk management

- Are risk assessments carried out and implemented by the employer?
- Do risk assessments take account of sex and gender differences?
- Have all people involved in risk assessment and risk management been trained to be aware of sex and gender differences affecting men's and women's health and safety at work?
- Are sex and gender differences taken into account in COSHH risk assessments, including the greater likelihood that women will be exposed to chemicals at home?
- Are sex and gender differences taken into account in manual handling risk assessments and in assessments of postural problems including prolonged standing or sitting?
- Are gender differences taken into account with all relevant types of work equipment and work stations use?
- Are sex and gender differences taken into account when dealing with staff uniform, official workwear or personal protective equipment (PPE) issues at the workplace?
- Are risk assessments relating to expectant, new and nursing mothers (and the unborn or breastfeeding child) carried out properly and in good time?
- Do employers provide an appropriate private space for breastfeeding mothers to express milk, and also provide a safe and hygienic place for the milk to be stored?
- Are any special reproductive health concerns of women and men such as work-related issues relating to fertility, menstruation (including providing female sanitary hygiene disposal facilities), menopause, breast cancer or hysterectomy adequately and sensitively addressed?
- Are risks of violence assessed, including concerns about working alone on site or away, or late into the evening, and access to safe parking or transport home?
- Are harassment (including sexual harassment) and bullying treated as health and safety issues?

- Does the employer allow for flexibility with working time, overtime and shift work to accommodate employees' life demands from outside of work, such as family, medical etc.?
- Does the employer recognise stress as a workplace issue and that it may affect different people in different ways?
- Does the employer recognise that domestic violence can become an issue at the workplace and treat the matter as a safety, health and welfare issue which needs to be dealt with sympathetically and practically?

Sickness absence management and investigation

- Does the employer have a sickness absence management policy or workplace agreement that was negotiated with the union?
- Is the policy applied fairly in practice and not used just to cut sickness absence but to fairly address any underlying issues and help recovery with an appropriate return to work?
- Is the sickness absence management policy or workplace agreement fair and non-discriminatory and does it ensure that women are not disadvantaged because of issues relating to menstruation, pregnancy, miscarriage, disability, or the menopause by ensuring that they can be treated separately from other sickness absence?
- Does the policy and practice ensure that any work-related health problems are properly investigated with a review of risk assessments where necessary?
- Do health and safety representatives get regular reports from management on sickness absence, including a gender breakdown?

Reporting and monitoring procedures

- Does the employer ensure all workers are made aware of the importance of reporting injuries, incidents, work-related ill health and health problems made worse by work, in an environment where employees feel they will not be victimised for reporting them?
- Are all injuries, incidents (including near misses) and work-related health problems reported?
- Does data on injuries and ill health include gender and does it differentiate, not only between women and men, but also between different jobs and job levels and between different shift patterns?
- Are trends in the ill-health and sickness absence statistics analysed as well as trends in injuries and near misses?
- Are all injury and ill health statistics systematically reviewed at joint safety committee meetings?
- Where any issue of concern is found from the meetings' deliberations are health concerns given the same priority as safety concerns?

Part 2 - Involving members

In addition to ensuring that your employer protects the health safety and welfare of all the workers, health and safety representatives can look at how they involve and inform members to make sure that their concerns are raised and addressed.

Here are a few ideas:

- Ask members.** You could carry out a confidential survey of members' health and safety concerns, but make sure that you can differentiate between men's and women's responses when the responses are analysed.
- Review how you communicate with members.** Do all sections of the workforce have access to a health and safety representative, including shift workers, part-time and temporary workers. Are they all consulted about their health and safety concerns?
- Make sure that there are enough women health and safety representatives.** Women may have more confidence that their issues are being addressed if there are women representatives and they are included in any joint safety committee.
- Talk about the issue.** Make sure that branch meetings or workplace meetings include specific discussions on practical issues that are of concern to women members, or even hold a special meeting on a problem that women workers are facing.
- Work with others.** You should make sure that you are reporting regularly to your branch. It is also important to work with other representatives such as stewards, equality women's and learning representatives. If there is more than one union in your workplace then it benefits everyone to work together. And where you have any successes, make sure that your union, and your members know about them.