

Getting specialist help with health and safety



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In many cases, businesses can manage health and safety themselves or with the help of in-house advisors. However, there are times when businesses will need to get external help, particularly on more detailed or technical issues. This is often referred to as specialist help.

Deciding exactly what help you need is very important. Unless you are clear at this stage, you probably won't get the help you really need.

If you are looking for specialist help for health and safety, you should ask yourself the following questions.

What should I do first?

Visit HSE's website www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/index and find out what help is available for your business. You may also find it helpful to discuss matters with your trade association.

Am I able to deal with it myself? Should I be?

You probably already deal with most issues yourself, with the help of your staff, and develop the necessary expertise in-house. You should try to do the same for health and safety.

If I call on specialist help, what exactly do I need it to do for me?

Some things you may not be able to do for yourself. A clear understanding and explanation to the specialist help is essential. It will help you to achieve what you really need.

Will the specialist help be good enough to solve my particular problem?

There are some key things to consider.

- Do they have evidence of relevant training/knowledge, such as formal qualifications?
- Do they have practical experience within your industry/activities?
- Can they explain to you why they are competent to advise you on this particular problem?
- Are they a member of a professional body?

If you are in any doubt, you can check with their professional body (if they belong to one) what training/knowledge and qualifications are relevant, and the specialist help's membership.

A good sign is if they are a member of the Occupational Safety and Health Consultants Register.

What is the Occupational Safety and Health Consultants Register (OSHCR)?

This is a register of consultants who have met set standards within their professional body. All those on the register have a minimum of two years' experience, a degree level qualification, are committed to continuing professional development, and give sensible and proportionate advice on general health and safety matters. You can search the register by topic, industry, location and keywords. The register is available at www.oshcr.org.

How do I make it clear to the specialist help exactly what I want from them?

Ensure that they understand. Ask them to explain what you have asked them to do, by when and at what it will cost.

Should I shop around to find the right help at the right price?

If you were buying new computers you wouldn't just accept the first offer you saw, so why do it with health and safety advice? You also need to check that the help is adequately insured.

How do I make sure I have received the help I needed?

Do you have a practical, sensible solution to your problem? Or do you think you have ended up with something completely 'over the top', or a mountain of useless paperwork? Ask the specialist help to explain, and to consider whether there may be a simpler alternative.

Have I received good follow-up support from the specialist help?

Make sure you understand their recommendations and that they've dealt with any questions you had about implementing them.

Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk/. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

A web version can be found at: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg420.pdf.

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