

HEALTHY WORKPLACES FOR ALL AGES

Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) Aim:

Its simple — to ensure we reduce the number of injuries and episodes of ill-health for all our employees. Better **prevention** and **risk assessments** will assist us all to stay healthier through our working life. This will allow employees to continue to work if they wish or avail of their retirement.

Changing Workplace:

The working age of our employees is increasing and we all have to take account of these changes, which may result in;

- longer employee exposure to risks
- increased risk of chronic health problems for employees
- increased vulnerability to certain hazards.

Bearing this in mind disability prevention, rehabilitation and return to work are of increased importance.



The risks that occur in our workplace have changed significantly with the onset of technology and the way in which people work. More people are carrying out sedentary work and prolonged sitting and inactivity increase the risk for many health problems, such as musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular diseases, types of cancer and stress. A recent research project has identified that the average EU worker spends 5 hours sitting at work, Irish workers sit for 5.3 hours per working day, whilst an internal HSE survey found that staff are sitting in excess of 6 hours per working day and 52% were not meeting the recommended physical activity levels (*ref Geraldine Quinn & Yvonne Gilsean, Health Promotion & Improvement Dept, Health and Wellbeing Division, HSE*). These changes, combined with an ageing workforce, create additional safety and health challenges for us all.

Changing Expectations:

Workers are expected to work longer; there are no fixed retirement ages within Ireland other than those set in the contract of employment. Workers in public service have seen retirement ages raised to 66 years for those joining since 2014 and 68 years from 2028. In 2016, discrimination on the basis of age was reviewed via the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015, where an employer can set a mandatory retirement age as long as it can be objectively justified.





Current Legal Position:

The Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 requires employers to provide a safe and healthy working environment as far as is reasonably practicable for its employees. It also requires employers to treat workers equally and prohibits discrimination based on age or disability.

Managing OSH in the context of an Ageing Workforce:

Prevention of work-related accidents, health problems and occupational diseases must be the main objective of any OSH management programme. In the context of an ageing workforce, prevention throughout the working life is key, as people's health in later life is affected by, among other things, working conditions in earlier life. The young workers of today are the older workers of tomorrow.

It is also essential to take a **holistic approach** to OSH management, looking at the workplace as a whole and taking account of and dealing with all factors that could influence workplace safety and health. These can include work–life balance, training, career development, motivation and leadership.

Work content, workload, work organisation, working environment and community influence **demands** in the workplace. Functional capacities, competence, values, attitudes and motivation influence the individual's **ability** to work.

Leadership plays an important role in balancing work demands and individual resources through motivation and fostering a positive attitude and strong values.

Risk Assessment:

Risk assessment is the cornerstone of the HSE's approach to the prevention of occupational accidents and ill-health. Health and Safety legislation requires employers to carry out risk assessments and emphasises the need to 'adapt the work to the individual'.

Risk assessment should take into account differences between individuals when assessing risks, including potential differences in functional capacity and health, as well as disabilities and gender issues.

In the case of **young workers**, their physical and intellectual development, immaturity and lack of experience need to be taken into account.

In the case of **older workers**, more consideration should be given to older workers in situations that may be considered higher risk, such as

- shift work
- jobs with a high physical workload and



- work in hot and cold conditions.

However, older workers are not a homogeneous group and the differences in both functional capacity and health between individuals increase with age.

Diversity needs to be taken into account in the risk assessment process by focusing on work demands in relation to individual capacities and health. By doing this, the emphasis is shifted from specific (age) groups within the workplace to improving working conditions for everyone.

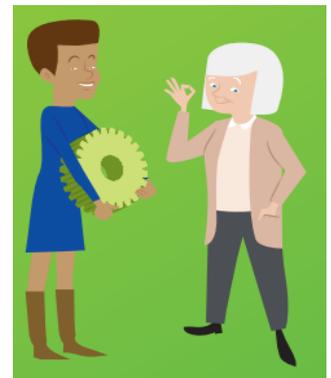
This must be documented as part of the general risk assessment process by utilising the risk assessment [template](http://www.hse.ie/safetyandwellbeing) at www.hse.ie/safetyandwellbeing.

Adapting the Workplace:

Adapting work to individual abilities, skills and health status — as well as other aspects of diversity among workers, such as gender, age, disabilities, migrant status, etc. — should be a dynamic and continuous process based on risk assessment throughout the working life. This involves considering age-related characteristics of different age groups, including potential changes in functional capacity and health.

Changes in functional capacities can be addressed through:

- use of equipment and other assistive technologies to reduce physical workload
- good ergonomic design of tools, equipment and furniture
- training in appropriate lifting and carrying techniques
- restrictions on heavy lifting and physically demanding tasks
- good workplace design to minimise the likelihood of falls
- allowance for recovery, for example through shorter and more frequent breaks
- job re-design
- job rotation
- organisation of shift work



Good **workplace design** and **work organisation** benefits all age groups. Rehabilitation and policies for supporting **return to work after illness** are also increasingly important in the context of an ageing workforce.

The development of a holistic approach to occupational safety and health and the integration with other HSE initiatives will help to ensure that the wellbeing of employees from recruitment to retirement continues and improves the overall health of the population.

This campaign focuses on emphasizing prevention rather than reactive problem solving, insuring that the whole working life and all age groups are considered and a holistic approach encompassing all dimensions is implemented. This will assist in creating a safer, longer more productive working life for us all.

