

# Workplace facilities



## What facilities do I have to provide for my staff?

Legally employers must provide a range of facilities to ensure the wellbeing of their workers. If you employ anyone, even for a short period, you must make sure that he or she has ready access to clean toilet, hand-washing, and first aid facilities, a comfortable, sheltered area in which to eat, an adequate supply of drinking water, and a place to rest if unwell. In some circumstances other guidelines may also apply, such as the OSH *Guidelines for Safe use of Chemicals in Electroplating*, which require the provision of eyewash facilities.

## Do all workplaces have to provide these things?

These basic requirements, as set out in the Health and Safety in Employment (HSE) Regulations, apply to every workplace, including forests, farms, construction sites, and other remote or short-term places of employment.

In some situations, however, there are extra requirements associated with certain types of activity. If, for instance, some or all of your workers are reasonably likely to get dirty in the course of their work, a shower or other "facilities for washing the body" must be provided. If the floor in a work area is likely to become wet, drainage or other measures are needed, to ensure workers remain dry. If clothing becomes wet or contaminated, a changing room must be provided. If workers need to bring a change of clothes with them, clean, dry storage space must be available.

Suitable seating must also be provided, not only for sedentary workers but also for those who have to stand to work, so they can "take any reasonable opportunity for rest that may occur".

## Are there any other requirements?

The HSE Regulations also set out some general rules for employers. All facilities they provide must be:

- suitable for their intended use;
- sufficient to cater for the number of users;
- maintained in good order and condition, and;
- conveniently accessible by all employees.

In addition, the whole workplace – including toilets and washing areas – must be kept clean and in an hygienic state, adequately lit and ventilated, and provided with some means of controlling atmospheric conditions, including air velocity, radiant heat and temperature. Work areas should also be designed and maintained so people can easily evacuate the site in an emergency

## What is meant by "suitable" facilities?

This will depend, to some extent, on the nature and location of the workplace. Obviously a construction site or a forest lot would not be expected to have the same level of facilities as an office or factory, but guidelines produced by the Department of Labour's Occupational Safety and Health service (OSH) indicate that a reasonable standard of amenities is expected, regardless of the situation.

## LEGISLATIVE OVERLAP

The Building Act 1991 also includes requirements relating to workplace facilities. This act is administered by local authorities, so it would be wise to check with the council in your area to see if there are any differences in the legislative requirements and, if so, ensure you comply with the higher standard.

All facilities need to be well constructed, weatherproof and easy to clean, with good lighting and ventilation. Toilets should have hinged seats and lids, locking doors and a plentiful supply of toilet paper, wash basins should have hot water, towels, a door or curtain, and an appropriate cleansing agent. All wash rooms and toilet areas should be provided with rubbish bins and non-slip floor surfaces.

Rooms for meal breaks, which may also serve as wet weather shelters for outdoor workers, need to be finished and furnished so that users will be comfortable. A means of boiling water and a covered rubbish bin should be provided, and the bin emptied frequently. Running water and a sink should also be provided if possible, and provision of a fridge and means of heating food is desirable, especially if long hours of work are involved. Tools and materials must never be stored in the room, and it should

be located away from areas where there is noise, odours, dust or other contamination that may infiltrate the room.

Drinking water should be clean and, if possible, cool. Where clean tap water is not available, water should be brought to the site in clearly labelled containers. This water must be kept away from toilet or washing areas, and be replenished daily. Clean cups should also be provided.

In some workplaces it may not be possible to provide a quiet, secluded area where sick employees can lie down, in which case arrangements should be made to send or take workers home if they become ill.

OSH does not encourage workers to use public toilets, or facilities in private homes and cafes, unless they are involved in work projects of very short duration (hours rather than days) and alternative arrangements cannot reasonably be made. If, however, it is necessary to use such facilities, toilets and wash

## LINKS

## Want to know more?

- For the HSE Regulations that set the ground rules for employers, go to [www.legislation.govt.nz/browse\\_vw.asp?content-set=pal\\_regs](http://www.legislation.govt.nz/browse_vw.asp?content-set=pal_regs) Click on 'H' in the alphabetic menu, then on Health and Safety in Employment Regulations in the drop-down list. Click on Part 1 (General duties of employers) and you will be able to go directly to sections 4-9, all of which concern the provision of facilities.
- Industry-specific guidelines for construction, forestry, health care and commercial and industrial workplaces are available on the Department of Labour website at [www.osh.dol.govt.nz/order/catalogue](http://www.osh.dol.govt.nz/order/catalogue).
- Check local authority requirements.

areas need to be checked, to ensure they are clean and adequate for the intended use.

At worksites involving multiple employers, OSH is happy for facilities to be shared, provided it is done by agreement, and the facilities can cope with the number of people using them.

### ***How do I know the facilities are adequate for the people on site?***

A good starting point is to think about the number of employees, and any particular needs they may have. Do they, for instance, deal with substances that can cause poisoning, infection or irritation, or that cannot be easily

washed away in cold water? Do they work in cold, hot or wet conditions? In such circumstances you would need at least one shower for every seven workers who are stopping work at the same time. If both male and female workers need access to shower or change rooms, and there are more than 15 people on site, separate facilities should be provided. Unisex toilets and wash areas are permitted if there are fewer than 15 workers.

Generally one toilet cubicle will cater for up to 15 female workers and up to 20 men. Two cubicles will be needed for 20 women and two cubicles and two urinals for up to 30 men. One extra toilet is needed for every 20

additional female employees, and an additional toilet and urinal for every 30 men. Facilities for the disposal of sanitary towels should also be provided in female toilets.

Special facilities may also be needed for disabled workers. Not only will they need suitable toilet and washing facilities, but also easy access to drinking water and to any kitchen facilities on site. ■

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**This article is intended to provide only a broad overview of its topic. Our thanks to Patrick Seaman of Patrick Seaman Workplace Safety Ltd. Any errors, however, are Safeguard's.**