



HEALTH & SAFETY in the
RETAIL SECTOR

Health & Safety in the RETAIL SECTOR

The GMB - Britain's General Union - represents tens of thousands of retail workers. The retail industry covers a number of jobs including distribution, warehouse work and general work in retail stores.

This leaflet has been produced to highlight some of the common health and safety hazards in the retail sector. The GMB is committed to working together with responsible employers to improve health and safety standards, and to ensure that GMB members are safe at work.

The information in this leaflet will inform you of your health and safety rights. If you have any specific concerns then the GMB is always on hand to offer help and advice to our members.

If you are not yet a member of the GMB -
JOIN TODAY!!



Common Hazards in the Retail Sector

Slips and Trips

Slips, Trips and falls are the most common cause of non-fatal major injuries. Around 6,000 shop workers suffer from serious slip or trip injuries every year. In the Wholesale/Distribution sector, slips and trips account for 62% of all major injuries.

Employers should assess risks to employees and anyone else that may be affected, such as customers. The risk assessment for slips and trips should consider potential hazards such as; spills of liquids; wet floors; unsuitable footwear; rain and snow; uneven surfaces; trailing cables etc. The employer's risk assessment should then show how they plan to minimise the risk from these potential hazards.

Measures that employers might consider include:

- ensuring that floors are suitable for the work that is to be done; are in good condition
- ensure that work practises minimise the risk of spills
- when spills do occur, make sure that they are cleared up quickly or if this is not possible then fence off the area
- make sure that lighting is good enough for people to spot potential hazards
- provide appropriate footwear for the task and floor surfaces. The employer should provide this free where it is necessary to reduce the risk of injury to employees.

Manual Handling

One of the most common causes of injury at work is manual handling. The latest figures from the Health and Safety Executive suggest that over one third of all injuries at work result from manual lifting.

Manual handling injuries can be caused by carrying heavy weights such as boxes and equipment, from lifting work, and any work that involves lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving loads by hand or by bodily force. If these operations are not carried out safely, it can result in injuries to the back, hands, arms and feet.

Hazards caused by manual lifting etc. are covered by The Manual Handling (Operations) Regulations 1992. These Regulations state that:

- where possible an employer must avoid the need for manual handling as far as is reasonably practicable;
- if this is not possible, an employer must assess the risk of injury from any manual handling that cannot be avoided; and
- employers must reduce the risk of injury from manual handling as far as reasonably practicable.

Chemicals

Workers in the retail sector can come into contact with potentially hazardous substances through either directly working with them or through indirect means such as loading and delivery.

Work with any potentially hazardous substance is covered by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1994. These Regulations set out a clear method of reducing exposure to dangerous chemicals.

Your employer should:

- carry out an assessment of the possible risks of using or moving a hazardous substance
- if possible eliminate the need to use the hazardous substance;

- if this is not possible substitute the hazardous substance with another substance that is less dangerous
- if this is not possible the employer must then introduce control measures. Measures could include Ventilation or extraction machines, enclosing the process, reducing periods of exposure, and regular cleaning of the contaminated area
- provide Personal Protective Equipment. Under the COSHH Regulations this is a LAST RESORT, and cannot be used as the only method of protection against harmful substances.

You should be given information and training about handling hazardous substances before you start working with them. The training should set out the correct use of, and hazards associated with, the use of the substance. Employees should also receive training and information about the substances that they are expected to work with. This is particularly important when employees are using hazardous substances - during cleaning for example.

Hot/Cold Temperatures

The GMB receives a number of complaints each year from workers whose workplace is either too hot or too cold. The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 state that the temperature within workplaces 'must be reasonable'.

Working in workplaces which are too hot or too cold can have a number of adverse effects, including; a fall in concentration levels leading to mistakes being made, work rates going down, and accident levels rising. There are a number of simple steps that employers should follow to ensure that temperature levels are reasonable.

Work in Hot Temperatures

- Ventilation - e.g. opening windows - but if this does not produce continual fresh air then mechanical ventilation should be provided.
- Provide air cooling plant/air conditioning
- Shade windows
- Relax dress codes and allow staff to wear loose fitting, comfortable clothes.
- Provide cold drinks and allow breaks

Health and safety law does not spell out what a reasonable maximum temperature would be. However, the GMB believes that a sensible limit would be near to that which the Institute of Building Service Engineers recommends which in the retail sector is: Offices 20°C, Warehouses 16°C, Canteens and dining rooms 20°C, Shops and Showrooms 18°C

Work in Cold Temperatures

The Workplace Regulations Approved Code of Practice states that the minimum temperature should normally be 16 degrees Celsius. Where work is of a physical nature the allowable temperature is 13 degrees Celsius.

Where the workplace temperature is likely to be cold, employers should consider some of the following measures:

- enclosing or insulating the product,
- providing stand alone heating systems,
- rotating work between cold and warm areas,
- providing warm protective clothing,
- rest breaks in warm areas.

Employers should provide thermometers around the workplace and allow Safety Representatives to monitor workplace temperature.



If you are not yet a member of the GMB, join today and ensure that your workplace is safer.

REMEMBER IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER OF THE GMB WE CAN'T HELP YOU! Independent research has shown that people who are in a trade union are **50% LESS LIKELY TO HAVE AN ACCIDENT** than those who are not in a trade union.

<i>Union/non union</i>	<i>Injury Rate</i>	<i>Actual injuries in one year</i>
Trade Union Recognised	5.3	58,300
No Trade Union Recognised	10.9	181,500

Source: Reilly, Paci and Hall; British Journal of Industrial Relations, 33:2, June 1995

In other words:

YOU ARE TWICE AS SAFE IN THE GMB

The GMB is Britain's general union and health and safety is top of our agenda. The GMB is the leading union for health and safety. We have 25,000 Safety Representative's who offer advice and help on health and safety problems. To back up our Representatives, each of our 10 Regions has a specialist Health and Safety Officer. The union also has a National Health and Safety Department with 4 staff to support the Regional specialists. **JOIN THE GMB NOW!**

RETAIL STAFF ARE SAFER IN THE GMB

**HEALTH AND SAFETY PROBLEM AT WORK?
CONTACT YOUR GMB REP -**



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you're safer in **THE GMB!**