This information sheet provides basic information and guidance on the management of health and safety for people involved in port and dock operations, including port authorities, stevedoring companies, terminal operators (such as container, Roll-on Roll-off [Ro-Ro], Lift-on Lift-off [Lo-Lo] and passenger ferry companies), transport and logistics companies and shipping agents.

Docks can be particularly hazardous environments, especially if health and safety is not managed appropriately and effectively. Over the ten year period 2004 – 2013, eleven people were killed whilst working in Irish ports and docks. The main causes of the fatalities were falls from height, being crushed or run over by a vehicle and being hit or struck by an object. In addition, numerous non-fatal accidents and injuries are reported to the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) every year. The most common causes of non-fatal injuries in the sector are slips, trips and falls, loss of control of a machine, people being hit by objects and manual handling.

Employers should address the management of health and safety in ports and docks in the following manner:

1. **Work should be planned and organised**

Due to the complexity and dynamic nature of dock work, management of health and safety may not always be straightforward. However, failure to manage health and safety may result in an accident or injury to you, your employees, other organisations’ employees or to members of the public. It is essential, therefore, that all work is properly planned and managed.

Planning the work enables you to anticipate and deal with unforeseen events. Supervisors and employees/workers should know what their responsibilities are. Such plans should also detail how you will liaise with other employers/operators. Although the ship’s master has primary responsibility for the safety of the ship and its crew, he or she cannot work in isolation. Employers must ensure that employees are not allowed to work in unsafe areas on a ship.

2. **Relevant risk assessments must be conducted**

Every employer and any person who has control of a place of work must carry out a written risk assessment and take appropriate steps to eliminate or reduce any risks found.
A risk assessment is a careful examination of what could cause harm to people as a result of a work activity. It allows you to evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether further action needs to be taken. Risk assessments must be put in writing and form part of the safety statement. The port authority may have a safety statement that covers the port activities in general, but each employer operating within the port must also have a safety statement and a risk assessment that covers their work activities.

Further information on typical hazards can be found in the 'Hazards in Port and Dock Operations' Information Sheet.

3. Effective coordination and cooperation is essential

Dock work can involve many different employers, including contractors and self-employed persons. Port authorities, stevedoring companies, transport and logistics companies, customs officials, terminal operators, shipping agents and ships’ crews carrying out work simultaneously may affect one another’s activities. Members of the public may also access docks if there are passenger ferries or cruise liners operating out of the port or there are public right of ways. As a result the management of health and safety requires good cooperation and coordination between all employers and employees who operate within the port. Employers who share a place of work must cooperate in complying with and implementing health and safety provisions. They must coordinate their preventive activities and keep each other and their respective employees and safety representatives (if any) informed about the risks to safety, health and welfare arising from the work. This includes the exchange of safety statements or relevant extracts of the statement relating to hazards and risks to employees.

4. Communication and consultation mechanisms should be in place

A consultation mechanism should be in place to ensure communication of all relevant safety matters between port users, operators and administrators. Safety rules for the port should be circulated to all port users. In order to foster cooperation between all employers within the port, a central port-wide health and safety committee should be set up to discuss common health and safety issues and to implement common safe systems of work within the port. Good liaison and communication will be required between ship and shore activities to control risks and to ensure that safe practices are followed and that crews are aware of the port rules and safe systems of work. Procedures should also be in place to ensure adequate control of contractors.

Each individual employer should also have an appropriate consultation mechanism in place. Managers, particularly directors and other senior personnel, can communicate a powerful message about the importance and significance of safety and health objectives when they lead by example. Equally, they can undermine the development of a positive safety and health culture through negative behaviour. All employees must cooperate with their employer to ensure compliance with health and safety legislation and must also report any defect in the place of work or systems of work which they are aware of and which might endanger a person’s health and safety. It is an offence for anyone to intentionally or recklessly interfere, misuse or damage anything provided under health and safety legislation.
5. Instruction, information and training should be provided

All employees must receive adequate instruction, information and training to enable them to carry out their assigned duties safely. Adequate supervision should be in place to ensure that all operations are carried out safely. Relevant information on health and safety must be available to all port workers, including casual staff. The information should include safe routes around the port, safe systems of work and emergency plans. It must be provided in a manner, format and language that is clearly understood. Arrangements should also be in place to provide each ship’s crew with adequate health and safety information.

6. Emergency plans should be in place

Employers are required to prepare and, where necessary, revise adequate plans and procedures to be followed and measures to be taken in the case of an emergency or the presence of serious or imminent danger. Due to the nature of dock work, particular consideration needs to be given to ensuring that adequate arrangements are in place outside normal working hours. All reasonably foreseeable emergency types should be covered by the plan. Individual operators within the port should have their own emergency plans and these should be harmonised with the overall port emergency plan. Mutual consultation is essential when preparing the plans. Each individual emergency plan must be brought to the attention of all parties who may be affected by it. The overall emergency plan must be brought to the attention of all operators within the port.

Emergency plans may cover incidents such as flooding, high winds, fires, explosions, chemical/solid bulk spillages, leaking containers, cargo incidents, stranded or sinking ships, injuries on board ships, fractured pipes, transport accidents and rescue of people from the water or from a crane cab. Any equipment needed to implement the plan must be readily available and well maintained. Where special rescue equipment is required, it should be stored in an appropriate and readily accessible place. Training in the use of the equipment must be provided to those who may need to use it. Regular practising of the plan, as far as reasonably practicable, should ensure that it is effective.

7. Comply with relevant health and safety legislation

Docks (Safety, Health and Welfare) Regulations 1960. These regulations have been in part revoked.


Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 as amended.


This is not an exhaustive list of the legislation that is applicable to docks and ports. Other relevant legislation, such as the Safety Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013, may also be applicable.

Further Information

Further information on occupational safety and health is available on the HSA website at www.hsa.ie or by calling the Workplace Contact Unit at 1890 289 389 or email wcu@hsa.ie.