

Systematic Work Environment Management

– guidelines

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Preface

Preventive systematic work environment management is conducive to a good work environment from which everyone stands to benefit. This is a matter of concern to employers and employees alike and everyone must play their part in reducing risks of ill-health and accidents in the workplace.

The employer is responsible for the work environment and shall see to it that work environment management forms a natural part of the operation. Most things that are done in the workplace have a bearing on the working environment, and we have compiled this guide to assist you in the task of work environment management and in devising methods which are workable at your particular workplace.

Systematic work environment management need not be awkward or complicated. What it boils down to is giving everyone the chance of a hearing and agreeing on what rules are to apply, investigating the hazards of the job and taking steps to deal with them. This way you end up with a working approach that helps to avert illnesses and injuries.

I hope this guide will encourage the development of good work environment management and through it the achievement of good working conditions.

Mikael Sjöberg

DIRECTOR-GENERAL
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Brief glossary

Work Environment policy

A policy which describes how work conditions in the employer's business ought to be in order to prevent ill-health and accidents in the operations and how to attain a satisfactory work environment.

Action plan

A written plan with measures which are not to be implemented immediately. The plan should state when the measures are to be carried out and who shall be responsible for their implementation.

Ill-health

- 1) An illness in accordance with medical, objective criteria.
- 2) A physical or mental disability which does not constitute an illness.

Example: An employee's tasks are monotonous and the employee suffers from musculoskeletal disorder affecting the neck and shoulders. Another employee may have sleeping difficulties, suffer from depression or have concentration difficulties in long-lasting work with complicated assignments under a tight time constraint. In the long-term this may result in the employee not being able to work to his/her full potential.

Risk assessment

An assessment of the risks on the chances of an individual suffering from ill-health or an accident, with the aim of determining whether measures need to be taken.

Examining the working conditions

Systematically identifying the risks involved with the work.

Allocating tasks

The employer allocates tasks in the operations in such a manner which allows one or several managers, supervisors or other employees to be responsible for working towards preventing risks in the work and attaining a satisfactory work environment.

Introduction

This guide is based on the rules on Systematic Work Environment Management issued by the Swedish Work Environment Authority. It describes the basic elements of work environment management. That management needs to be adapted to your particular operation.

What is systematic work environment management?

- Making such decisions and taking such measures in the course of everyday work so that employees are not injured, do not become ill and are not harmed in any other way.
- This means observing and considering both psychological and social conditions, as well as work environment issues of a “technical” nature.
- Work environment management also applies to work not done at a permanent workplace, e.g. transport work or work in other people’s homes.

Why should we have systematic work environment management?

- It leads to risks at work being discovered and dealt with in time
- It can prevent employees meeting with accidents, contracting illnesses or suffering other adverse consequences of conditions in the working environment.
- It gives good working conditions which can reduce sickness absence.

- It can enhance job satisfaction and commitment.
- It reduces operational disturbances and deterioration of quality.
- It leads to greater orderliness in the entire firm and improved running of operations.
- Good working conditions can help to improve the firm's finances.
- A good working environment confers a good reputation, making it easier for the firm to recruit and keep personnel.

Who does what?

- *The employer* is primarily responsible. The head of the firm needs to be familiar with the work Environment Act and the rules on the working environment applying to the firm, so that work environment management can be properly organized.
- *The employees* take part in work environment management, for example by reporting risks, illness, accidents and incidents and by suggesting measures to be taken and commenting on those which have been taken.
- *The safety delegate* is present at the planning and conduct of work, e.g. the investigation of working conditions, the planning of measures to be taken, and annual follow-ups.
- *The occupational health service* is an expert resource for work environment management. It may need to be called in, for example, for surveys and risk assessments, to suggest remedial measures and to train personnel.

The employer is primarily responsible for the work environment, but often allocates tasks pertaining to the work environment to managers and supervisors. For the sake of simplicity in this document the work environment supervisor is referred to as the manager.

Management of the work environment is based on co-operation

The manager should always co-operate with all the employees in the entire work environment management. Consequently, he or she should devise procedures for co-operation in consultation with the employee and safety delegate. Co-operation is particularly important when;

- the examination and risk assessment is conducted, for example during safety patrols and personnel meetings,
- a risk assessment is to be carried out prior to changes in the work, for example when work methods, schedules or the content of the work are to be changed,
- measures are planned,
- implemented measures are checked,
- an investigation of ill-health, accidents and serious incidents is carried out,
- work environment policy and procedures for the systematic work environment management are devised and when,
- instructions, induction and skills development programmes are formulated.

It is important that the safety delegate reviews the content of the documentation which will be addressed, prior to the meeting, so as to allow him/her to actively participate in the meeting.

Read more about *co-operation* on page 25. Here you will find more information about co-operation.

How do we begin?

This checklist will help you to get started on your work environment management. The different points will be dealt with one by one in the following pages.

1. Investigate working conditions
2. Carry out a risk assessment
3. Deal with risks which have been identified
4. Draw up an action plan for things not to be done immediately
5. Follow up the measures taken
6. Formulate a work environment policy
7. Draw up an allocation of tasks
8. Make sure that the people who are to take part in work environment management acquire the necessary knowledge



1. Investigate working conditions

It involves discovering the risks which the work entails, so that they can be dealt with as soon as possible. That way you can prevent employees being injured, falling ill or otherwise faring badly.

Examples of aspects which have an impact on the work environment:

- Work management
- Workload
- Work organization
- Working pace
- Working time
- Job content
- Work postures and movements
- Lighting
- Noise
- Dangerous substances
- Scope for action
- Machinery
- Opportunity of influence
- Co-operation
- Vibrations
- Heat and cold

Day-to-day work often shows signs of how the personnel are feeling. High short-term absenteeism, dissatisfaction and relational problems are warning signs of risks at work.

Risks cannot always be discovered instantly and therefore you need to investigate working conditions and identify the risks the work involves. The investigation methods include:

- Safety / work environment inspection tours
- Workplace meetings to discuss items planned
- Employee interviews / development talks
- Interviews with employees and safety delegates
- Employee questionnaires
- Measurements, e.g. of noise
- Medical checks

As a rule, several investigation methods need to be adopted in order to identify the risks.

When personnel are to work elsewhere, the employer may need to find out in advance what sort of a working environment they will be going to, e.g. by visiting the workplace or interviewing representatives of the firm in question.

INPUT DATA FOR THE INVESTIGATION

There are various kinds of input data which can be of help when carrying out investigations, e.g.:

- observations and experiences of the employees and safety delegates
- illness, accidents and incidents
- sicklisting
- rules on the working environment
- checklists
- information material from the relevant industry etc.
- knowledge possessed by the occupational health service

Risks rarely have only one cause, and so it is important to find out about all conditions which can entail risks to the individual employee.

Some tasks and work situations are especially hazardous, e.g. repair and maintenance work, or dealing with malfunctions and breakdowns in machinery. Contact with violent persons is another such example.

Pregnant women and minors are two examples of groups that may be especially vulnerable.

BEFORE THE INVESTIGATION

- What is to be investigated?
- When is the investigation to take place?
- How is the investigation to proceed?
- Has anyone had experience of previous investigations?
- Are there any data concerning incidents or injuries at work?
- Are there any data on sicklisting?
- Which work environment rules are relevant?
- Which checklists are worth using?
- Is there any suitable material from the industry?

2. Carry out a risk assessment

- Assess which conditions entail the risk of ill-health or accidents.
- Write down the risks emerging from the investigation.
- Indicate whether or not they are serious.

The risk assessment will be important supportive documentation for the ongoing task of work environment management.

3. Deal with risks which have been identified

Always tackle the gravest risks first. Try to eliminate them at source. Perhaps not all risks can be entirely averted, in which case they have to be dealt with in some other way, e.g. by giving the employees special instructions, support and guidance, or through the use of personal protective equipment.

You need to decide who shall ensure that the risks are rectified and who is to check the implemented measures. In a small company it is usually the manager who deals with the work environment issues. It may also be someone else in the company who is assigned the task of planning, rectifying and monitoring the implemented measures.

4. Draw up an action plan for things not to be done immediately

Whatever cannot be done immediately, i.e. on the same day or in the very next day or two, you write down in an action plan. Write down also:

- Which measures you have decided
- When the measures are to be taken
- Who is to see to it that they are taken

Bear in mind that the action plan should be easily accessible for everyone, as it contains important information.

5. Follow up the measures taken

When the measures have been implemented, the manager shall, as soon as possible, check that they have had the desired effect. Sometimes the measures may need to be supplemented with additional efforts which are included in the action plan.

6. Formulate a work environment policy

After the first steps of work environment management have been taken, you as a manager need to discuss together with the safety delegate what you want working conditions to be like in the slightly longer term. In doing so, it is natural to begin with the results of the investigations which have been carried out. An action plan often shows what needs to be done in order to improve working conditions.

In a work environment policy you describe what you want working conditions to be like. In order to be of any help in work environment management, this policy needs to be clear and concrete. In a small undertaking the action plan can serve as a work environment policy.

7. Draw up an allocation of tasks

A company with a large number of employees may need to allocate tasks pertaining to the work environment management in such a manner that there is always someone to monitor that everyone is a part of a good work environment. It is inevitable that managers and supervisors are assigned the responsibility of work environment management. They communicate with the employees on an ongoing basis and can notice signs of stress, provide support and feedback and assist with the prioritisation of work tasks.

The senior manager allocates tasks downward in the organization. In a limited company the Board of Directors allocates tasks to the MD, who then allocates them further. In municipalities and county councils the town councillor allocates the tasks and so on.

The information shall be described concretely and in detail so that allocation of tasks is clear. That the allocation of tasks is clear is particularly important when work is carried out in another location than a permanent work site. The allocation of tasks should be in writing in companies with ten or more employees and there should always be a deputy for the person who has tasks relating to the work environment.

Every manager who has allocated tasks is responsible for monitoring that the individual who has been assigned such responsibilities executes them in an efficient manner.

POINTS TO REMEMBER IN THE ALLOCATION OF TASKS

- Decide which tasks in the work environment management need to be allocated
- Make the firm's organization your starting point
- Assign the tasks to the person best suited to carry out the tasks
- Entrust each task to a single person or position
- Do not excluded any tasks
- Ensure that the individual who is assigned the tasks also receives the requisite powers, resources and knowledge
- Make sure that a person allotted a task understands it properly
- Decide what applies in the event of an illness, holidays or other absence
- Inform the rest of the personnel about the allocation of tasks

EXAMPLES OF TASKS FOR THE WORK ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT

- Devise concrete objectives for the work environment management
- Have private meetings with the personnel
- Hold personnel meetings
- Conduct safety patrols
- Devise procedures for the work environment management

8. Make sure that the people who are to take part in work environment management acquire the necessary knowledge

A person tasked with helping to manage the working environment may need training on the subject of work environment issues. Sometimes the experience gained from dealing with work environment issues in the course of one's regular work may be sufficient.

Managers and supervisors require sound knowledge of the work, the risks the work involves and measures to prevent injuries. It may for instance involve how individuals react in different situations. They need to be aware of the effects of a heavy workload, overtime, discrimination, abuse as well as violence and threats.

All employees need to know what risks they may be exposed to at work, so that illness and accidents can be prevented.

Knowledge, once acquired, needs to be constantly updated.

What do we do next?

In order for work environment management to function well, you as a manager, along with the safety delegate and employees need to consider your work processes for the future and which procedures are required to ensure good work environment management.

How can we take the work environment into consideration in our daily work?

Managers and supervisors need to address work environment management issues on an ongoing basis. It is then good to have your “work environment cap” on in your daily work. Thus, managers should consider how work environment management is impacted in various situations, for example:

- If an employee is assigned additional work tasks this may involve mental strain. In such an event it is incumbent on the manager or supervisor to provide assistance with prioritising the work tasks.
- An individual who has been absent from work for a long period of time usually requires support and information upon return to work.

What action are we to take if there is a change in the firm?

When changes to the work are planned the employer shall carry out a risk assessment in order to assess whether the changes entail the risk of ill-health or accidents. In such a case the risks should be rectified. This applies when for instance personnel cuts, other reorganization, reconstruction, changes in production or new manufacturing methods are to be introduced.

The risk assessment shall be documented in writing and cover:

- What the changes are
- Where the changes are to be made
- Which employee groups are impacted
- What risks in terms of ill-health and accidents the changes are likely to involve
- How personnel has participated in the work involving the risk assessment.

Measures to eliminate or reduce the risks and which are to be implemented at a later stage are to be addressed in a written action plan.

What are we to do about illness, accidents or incidents at work?

The employer shall report all work injuries to the Social Insurance Office in accordance with the Work Injury Insurance Act. If a serious accident or incident takes place at work, the employer shall notify the Work Environment Authority without delay (Section 2 of the Work Environment Ordinance). You can easily submit a report on the Swedish Work Environment Authority's website by logging onto: www.av.se/blanketter

Illness, overstrain, accidents and incidents can suggest that there are risks present in the working environment. It is important to investigate the aspect of the job which has caused the occurrence, and to take steps to prevent a repetition.

A summary of the illnesses, accidents and serious incidents which have taken place at work serves as an overview and can be useful for work environment management.

CHECKLIST FOR THE INVESTIGATION

- Describe what has happened
- When, where and how did the occurrence take place?
- What were or may have been the contributory causes?
- How could the occurrence have been prevented?
- What measures need to be taken directly?
- Are there other jobs within the firm where similar occurrences are possible?

How are we to follow up work environment management?

You need to find out how effective work environment management has been during the past year. This review may show that improvements are needed, e.g. to routines.

Some questions to raise in the follow-up:

- How does the allocation of tasks function in the work environment management?
- Have the employee and safety delegate been provided with the opportunity to participate in the work environment management?
- Has there been an investigation of the work environment conditions on a regular basis?
- Has a risk assessment been carried out prior to the changes?
- Have the measures in the action plans been implemented in accordance with the schedule?
- Do the procedures function well?

Do we need any special documents?

You always need to document the risk assessments in writing following regular investigations and prior to the changes. You also need to devise action plans. In addition, written instructions should be available if there are serious risks.

In a small firm with fewer than ten employees, no other documents are required for work environment management. No special file or handbook is stipulated.

If the operation employs ten or more people, the work environment policy, routines, allocation of tasks and annual follow-up have to be put down in writing. This documentation needs to be lucid and clearly understandable.

How often do investigations have to be carried out?

- Assessing the risks associated with work should be carried out regularly as a part of the ongoing work.
- There is no set time interval for how often investigations and risk assessments should be carried out. The investigation should be conducted in all instances in which you establish what risks are associated with the work in terms of illnesses and accidents and how the risks are to be combated.
- A specific risk assessment of the work environment should be carried out when planning for changes takes place.

Co-operation

What is meant by co-operation, participation and collaboration?

Co-operation between managers and employees is a pre-requisite to attaining good working conditions. It is essential that the employee and safety delegate have genuine opportunities to participate in the work which will lead to a decision on, for instance, procedures and instructions, induction and skills development programmes. They must also receive real opportunities to take part in the process of investigation and risk assessment, planning of measures and checks of implemented measures. Thus it is not acceptable to receive information after a decision has been taken or after completion of an activity.

The employees and safety delegate must be allowed to submit views on different proposals and take initiatives. However, it is always the manager who makes the final decision.

Different roles in the work environment management

Employer

The employer is often a legal entity, for example a company, a municipality or an association. The employer bears the main responsibility of the work environment. In order for the management of a firm to be able to fulfil its responsibility, the practical work environment management needs to be assigned to managers and supervisors of the employer's organization. This applies to, for instance, investigation, risk assessment, measures and checks. Thus, in practice work environment management is run by managers and supervisors.

Employees

Every one employed in the operations represents an employee, whether they are temporary employees, recruited on a project employment or permanently employed. Managers and supervisors also represent employees, for example the MD in a limited company and the director of administration in a municipality.

Pupils, individuals receiving care and those liable to carry out military service are primarily equated with employees. We will not address individuals receiving care and those liable to carry out military service in the current text with regard to issues concerning co-operation.

Employees are liable to report deficiencies in the workplace. They shall participate in the work environment management and the implementation of measures with regard to the work environment. Employees should adhere to the provisions of the Swedish Work Environment Authority and use the requisite safety devices for specific tasks.

Employees shall also:

- report incidents and accidents to the employer,
- provide viewpoints during investigations and risk assessments,
- provide viewpoints when the work environment policy and procedures are being devised,
- provide viewpoints when planning of measures is being conducted as well as when checks of implemented measures are underway.

In this way managers and supervisors receive the requisite information for carrying out necessary work environment improvements.

Pupils

In accordance with the Work Environment Act (AML) persons undergoing education are referred to as pupils (Chapter 1, Section 3 of AML). The Work Environment Act essentially equates pupils with employees. The exceptions primarily apply to rules on working hours in Chapter 5 of AML. This means that from grade 1 in compulsory school, children are considered to be pupils, in the same manner as adults who are studying. When we refer to employees in the book this also included pupils.

Safety delegate

A safety delegate should be appointed among the employees if there are a minimum of five employees at the work site. If more than one individual is appointed as a safety delegate one of them should be the main safety delegate. A regional safety delegate can be operational on a work site which does not have a Safety Committee. The regional safety delegate should not be employed at the worksite and thus does not belong to the employees at the site (Chapter 6, Sections 2 and 3 of AML).

The safety delegate represents the employees in work environment issues. This particularly applies to participation in the systematic work environment management. The safety delegate should be participate in all stages of the work environment management, but participation is particularly important for regular activities, namely:

- investigation,
- risk assessment,
- planning of measures,
- devising action plans and
- checking implemented measures.

The safety delegate is entitled to receive the requisite documentation and information for his/her role as a safety delegate. The safety delegate is also entitled to leave of absence required for the performance of his/her duties. (Chapter 6, Sections 5 and 6 of AML).

Pupil safety delegate

As of grade 7 in compulsory school, pupils may appoint a pupil safety delegate (Chapter 6 Section 17 of AML). The pupil safety delegates represent pupils in work environment issues but do not have the same rights as other safety delegates. For instance the pupil safety delegate is not entitled to terminate schoolwork. In contrast to the safety delegate who is entitled to vote in the Safety Committee, the pupil safety delegate only has the right to present his/her opinion to the Safety Committee. Another difference between the two positions includes the pupil safety delegate not being permitted to have access to confidential material, while the safety delegate is entitled to such information. With the exception of these differences, for the sake of simplicity we are also referring to the pupil safety delegate when we mention the safety delegate in this text.

The pupil safety delegate's participation in the school's work environment management is also regulated by the Swedish National Agency for Education's provisions on co-operation of pupils (SKOLFÖ 2004:13).

Safety delegate for adult students

Adult students are represented by the student safety delegates. They are to be part of the Safety Committee as members and are entitled to receive information to the same extent as the other safety delegates and members of the Safety Committee. They also have the right to process matters in accordance with Chapter 6, Section 6a of AML. The student safety delegate has the same entitlement to damages as other safety delegates if they experience hindrances in fulfilling their responsibilities.

For the sake of simplicity when we refer to safety delegate in this text this also covers student safety delegates.

Safety Committee

A Safety Committee comprises of representatives for the employer and employees and is a consultation committee for work environment issues. A Safety Committee should be in place at work sites with a minimum of 50 employees (Chapter 6, Sections 8 and 9 of AML). The safety delegate should always be a part of the Committee.

Provisions on co-operation

As we have established, managers and employees have different roles in terms of the work environment management. However, co-operation between them is a premise. The fundamental provision with regard to this is included in Chapter 3, Section 1a of AML which states that the employer and employees should co-operate in order to attain a good work environment.

Section 4 of our rules on Systematic Work Environment Management (SAM), AFS 2001:1 states that managers are generally obliged to give the employees and safety delegates the possibility of participating in systematic work environment management. This obligation is based on the manager's responsibility to plan, manage and control the operations in a manner which ensures a good work environment (Chapter 3, Section 2a of AML). This goal may be difficult for the manager to attain if the employees and the safety delegate fail to participate in the work environment management.

There are several provisions which contain regulations on the co-operation liability stipulated in Chapter 3, Section 1a of AML and the responsibilities of employees stated in Chapter 3, Section 4 of AML. These regulations are included in the following provisions:

- Pregnant and Breast-feeding Employees (Section 3, AFS 2007:5)
- Job adaptation and Rehabilitation (Section 7, AFS 1994:1)
- Ergonomics for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders (Section 5, AFS 1998:1)
- Chemical Hazards in the Working Environment (Section 7, AFS 2000:4)
- Microbiological Work Environment Risks (Section 16, AFS 2005:1)
- Cytostatika [cytostatics] (Section 4, AFS 2005:5)
- Noise (Section 15, AFS 2005:16)

Most of the provisions entail that the employees should report ill-health and accidents. In accordance with other rules the manager should give the employees the opportunity to participate in the choice of measures.

Co-operation in practice

Till What is meant by Section 4 of AFS 2001:1 (SAM) which stipulates “the possibility of participating”?

As a starting point there should be a forum for managers and employees to meet. The employees and safety delegate must be aware that a meeting should be held and they must be scheduled time to participate and, in addition, such meetings should not interfere with the work of the employees, who should have the opportunity to set aside their work tasks in order to participate. The employees should also have knowledge of the areas which will be addressed so that their participation is purposeful.

Meeting venues for co-operation

Co-operation should take place at an early stage when it comes to deciding which issues, when, in which forms and between which persons the co-operation is to take place. Usually the points to be discussed during the co-operation between managers and employees are ascertained and may also include work environment issues. It may for example include;

- induction meetings/ training,
- personnel meetings, for example work place meetings,
- project meetings,
- planning meetings,
- follow-up meetings and
- personnel meetings.

Managers should devise procedures for co-operation. The manager should provide employees and the safety delegate with the opportunity to participate at this stage.

It may be useful to have the work environment listed as an independent point on the agenda for regular meetings. It may also be useful to take minutes during the meetings.

Information about the meetings

It is important that those who are to participate in a meeting are informed about the meeting in advance so as to allow them to schedule time for the meeting and carry out the necessary preparation. It is also important that the supervisors and managers are informed about the participation of an employee in a meeting. This will enable supervisors and managers to appoint a deputy for the employee or to re-allocate the work.

Time for participation

It is essential that employees and the safety delegate are entitled to set aside their work tasks in order to participate in the work environment management and that they receive approval from managers, supervisors and colleagues. In accordance with the Work Environment Act the safety delegate is entitled to leave of absence required for the performance of his/her duties.

The formulation in Section 4 of AFS 2001:1 on the possibility to participate means that employees must be entitled to set aside their standard work tasks in order to participate in for instance investigations and risk assessments of the work environment management.

Several different reasons contribute to practical restrictions for the safety delegate to participate in all the investigations and risk assessments which are conducted on an ongoing basis. Furthermore the safety delegate is also restricted from participating in all the meetings with employees. However, the safety delegate should always participate when procedures are to be devised on the organization of the investigations and personnel meetings which are carried out on an ongoing basis.

Knowledge for effective participation

It is important that the safety delegate receives the content of the documentation which will be addressed in a meeting in advance and the safety delegate should also receive any other necessary information so as to allow him/her to actively participate in the meeting.

In accordance with the Work Environment Act safety delegates have an explicit right to receive the documentation and other necessary information for their commission. In accordance with the law, the safety delegate has an obligation of secrecy with regard to confidential material. Other employees should also have the right to receive the necessary documentation and information for their participation in the systematic work environment management. However, managers should bear in mind that individual employees are not bound by an obligation of secrecy in the same manner as safety delegates.

The employees and safety delegate may sometimes require specific knowledge on areas which will be addressed during a meeting. For instance, it may be useful to have knowledge of the statistics on sick-listing, incidents and injuries, research findings and various investigative methods when examining work conditions, risk assessments and inquiries on injuries and incidents. With regard to planning for measures and checks of implemented measures, information on alternative solutions and previous inspection results may be required. Consequently, the manager needs to provide employees and the safety delegate with the requisite knowledge which allows them to participate in the systematic work environment management in a useful manner.

When should a manager offer the opportunity of participation?

The premise of the regulation in Section 4 of AFS 2001:1 (SAM) is that the manager and employees should co-operate in terms of the entire work environment management. Co-operation is particularly important when;

- the examination and risk assessment is conducted, for example during safety patrols and personnel meetings,
- a risk assessment is to be carried out prior to changes in the work, for example when work methods, schedules or the content of the work are to be changed,
- measures are planned,
- implemented measures are checked,
- an investigation of ill-health, accidents and serious incidents is carried out,
- work environment policy and procedures for the systematic work environment management are devised and when,
- instructions, induction and skills development programmes are formulated.

What if co-operation does not work?

An employee who is of the opinion that he/she does not have adequate opportunities to participate in the work environment management should contact his/her supervisor or manager in the first instance and request changes to be made. If this attempt is unsuccessful then the employee should turn to the safety delegate.

In the same manner the safety delegate should contact the manager in the first instance. In the event that the manager does not issue a reply within the correct time frame or does not take the request into consideration within a reasonable period of time, based on the regulations in Chapter 6, Section 6a of AML, the safety delegate is entitled to contact the Swedish Work Environment Authority. The Swedish Work Environment Authority is entitled to impose requirements on the employer to provide the employees, pupils, the safety delegate and the pupil safety delegate with the opportunity to participate in the systematic work environment management (Section 4 of AFS 2001:1, SAM). Such a requirement may be accompanied by a penalty.

The differences between the Work Environment Act and Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act

Both the Work Environment Act and the Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act address issues concerning co-operation, but in part they have different premises and approach on the matter.

- The Work Environment Act is obligatory and cannot be breached. In contrast, the Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act is partially optional and can be replaced with collective agreements if the Act is disadvantageous for the employees.
- The employees, safety delegate and pupil safety delegate are co-operation partners in accordance with the Work Environment Act. The Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act regulates the co-operation between the employer and an employee organization.
- Pursuant to the Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act, the employer should negotiate with an employee organization prior to the employer taking decisions on important changes to the operations. This also applies prior to decisions on key changes to the work or employment conditions. The Work Environment Act does not provide any opportunities for negotiation as the Act contains obligatory regulations. Work conditions may be the subject of negotiations but in such a case this takes place in accordance with the rules of the Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act.

- Pursuant to the Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act, the employer shall provide information on how its operations are developing in terms of production and from a financial perspective, as well as on guidelines for personnel policies. The Work Environment Act does not contain any explicit obligation for the employer to provide information in an equivalent manner. However, in accordance with Chapter 3, Section 3 of AML and Section 7 of AFS 2001:1, the employer is liable to provide an induction and instructions so as to prevent ill-health and accidents and to attain a good work environment in general.
- The Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act entitles an employee organization to carry out negotiations prior to an employer making certain decisions. The Work Environment Act does not stipulate any entitlement for employees or the safety delegate to participate in conjunction with decision-making. Pursuant to the Work Environment Act, the entitlement of participation is linked to the practical work environment management, both on an ongoing basis and prior to planning changes in the operations.

Co-operation Agreement

The first main stipulation between the parties on occupational safety was reached in 1942 between LO and SAF (now known as the Swedish Trade Union Confederation). In the 1970s there were central, extensive work environment agreements for the majority of the private and public work life. At present there are mainly association agreements. There are co-operation agreements for the government, municipalities and county councils.

The website of the work environment organization Prevent contains information on applicable work environment agreements. Among other things they cover the work environment, co-operation, rehabilitation, occupational health service, equality, co-determination and development. The agreements apply to both the private and public sector. The majority of the agreements relate to how the work environment management should be run.

Co-operation issues are addressed in many agreements. Some refer directly to the regulations in the Work Environment Act and the provisions of the Swedish Work Environment Authority. Other agreements stipulate that activities concerning the work environment should be organized and adapted to the conditions in an individual firm. Some agreements refer to the safety delegate as the work environment representative and to the Safety Committee as the Work Environment Committee.

Several agreements state that work environment issues should be administered in the line organization by the managers and co-operation groups should be formed on all levels in the line organization.

The influence of the employees is described in many agreements as the base of the co-operation system. Work place meetings are referred to as a forum of decisive significance for co-operation.