



GMB

LONDON
REGION

GMBLONDON.ORG.UK

HEALTH AND SAFETY TOOLKIT

@GMBLONDONREGION

GMB LONDON REGION

VERSION 1.0



MEMBERS

**GMB
UNION**

FIRST

Contents

- 1 The role of a GMB Safety Representative
- 2 Working with a Safety Committee
- 4 Organising using health & safety: a 5-step guide
- 6 Your key legal rights (SRSC Regulations 1977)
- 7 Workplace inspections
- 10 Risk assessments
- 12 Welfare facilities and inclusive workplaces
- 15 Fire safety (including home and hybrid working)
- 16 Temperature (cold and hot workplaces)
- 17 Protecting mental health at work
- 18 Legionella
- 20 Asbestos and silica dust
- 22 Personal protective equipment (PPE)
- 23 Working with regulators (HSE / Local Authority)
- 24 Investigating accidents and incidents
- 26 UnionLine
- 37 Resources

GMB London, John Cope House,
152 Brent Street, Hendon NW4 2DP

T: 020 8202 8272

E: infolondon@gmb.org.uk

Introduction

GMB is committed to the highest possible standards of health and safety in every workplace. Health and safety law exists to prevent avoidable harm and to reduce the risk of injury and occupational ill-health. No one should be harmed at work.

GMB Safety Representatives help members raise concerns, challenge poor practice and secure safer systems of work. This toolkit is designed as a practical, organising-focused guide: it helps you use your legal rights and your membership strength to deliver change.

Work should enhance life – it should never endanger health.

Health and Safety Toolkit



The role of a GMB Safety Representative

- Represent members on issues that affect their health, safety and welfare — you are not management’s ‘eyes and ears’.
- Use consultation rights to influence decisions before harm occurs (risk assessments, new processes, reorganisations, new equipment).
- Identify hazards with members, raise issues with management, and track actions to completion.
- **Work collectively:** safety improvements are won fastest when members are informed and involved.

You are not legally liable for your employer’s health and safety decisions simply because you are a Safety Rep. You do, like every worker, have a duty to take reasonable care and not put others at risk through your actions.

Working with a Safety Committee

A joint Safety Committee is a key mechanism for meaningful consultation and for keeping health and safety performance under review. In multi-site organisations, there may also be a company-wide or national committee to monitor overall policy and performance.

Safety committees should be proactive. Avoid using the committee as the place where day-to-day issues are not actioned. Most issues should be resolved between Safety Reps and managers as they arise; the committee should focus on system-level prevention.



Good standing agenda items

- Accident, incident and near-miss trends (including RIDDOR reports).
- Ill-health, stress-related absence and health surveillance (where applicable).
- Progress against agreed actions (with deadlines and owners).
- Changes in processes, equipment, staffing, buildings or contractors.
- Training needs and effectiveness (including induction and refresher training).
- Inspection findings, risk assessments and control measures.
- Regulator correspondence (HSE / Local Authority) and insurance reports.

Organising using health & safety: a 5-step guide

Health and safety is an organising tool: it gives you access, authority and a reason to talk to everyone in the workplace.

What a GMB H&S Rep does

- Talk with members about hazards and how work is actually done.
- Raise risks affecting specific groups (e.g., disabled workers, pregnant workers, night staff, lone workers) that management may have missed.
- Be consulted on risk assessments — you are not responsible for writing them.

What a GMB H&S Rep should not do

- Do the employer's risk assessment for them or agree to be the employer's 'competent person'.
- Treat health and safety as only a technical exercise — it's about power, prevention and collective voice.

The 5 steps

1

Plan an inspection/audit:

notify management, prepare a checklist and a simple survey, publicise to members and non-members.

2

Do the inspection:

walk the workplace, talk to workers privately where possible, log hazards and concerns, update your workplace map and contacts.

3

Deal with issues:

challenge serious risks immediately, agree actions and deadlines in writing, keep records.

4

Taking Action:

- Check back with management on agreed actions and escalate if not resolved (e.g. copy a GMB officer in, go up a step higher in management, raise a grievance)
- If you identify a common problem management aren't dealing with, do research on your employers' duties and get members involved in calling for action

5

Keep members engaged:

report back, show progress, and keep building membership and workplace leaders.

Your key legal rights (SRSC Regulations 1977)

The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (SRSC) provide strong legal rights for union Safety Reps.

Core rights in practice

- **Consultation:** you must be consulted in good time on risk assessments and measures that affect health and safety.
- **Inspections:** you can inspect the workplace at least every 3 months, and more often after significant change, new hazards guidance, or incidents.
- **Representations:** you can raise health and safety concerns formally with your employer and receive a response.
- **Members:** you can speak with members, investigate concerns, and publicise inspection findings.
- **Safety committee:** you can request a safety committee and participate on equal status.

Tip: legislation is leverage, but organising is power. Use rights to open doors, then use member involvement to keep them open.

Workplace inspections

Workplace inspections can be structured in different ways. Choose a method that fits the risk profile of your workplace.

Inspection types

- **Safety tour:** a general walk-through of the workplace.
- **Safety sampling:** a focused check on a high-risk activity, process or area.
- **Safety survey:** a deeper review of an activity/process with worker input.
- **Incident inspection:** after a serious injury, dangerous occurrence or near miss.

Practical inspection checklist

- What's changed since the last inspection (staffing, layout, processes, contractors, equipment)?
- **High-risk tasks:** manual handling, work at height, vehicles/traffic routes, lone working, violence and aggression.
- **Housekeeping:** slips/trips, storage, blocked exits, lighting.
- **Maintenance issues:** defective equipment, guards removed, broken ventilation.
- **Welfare:** toilets, washing, rest/eating space, drinking water, temperature and ventilation.
- **Training/briefings:** are people trained for the work they're doing?

Follow-up

- Send findings to management promptly with clear actions, owners and deadlines.
- Re-inspect to confirm fixes are in place (and record what you see).
- Keep members informed — progress reporting builds confidence and membership.



Risk assessments

Risk assessments should identify hazards, who might be harmed (including vulnerable groups), existing controls, and what further controls are needed.

What you should push for

- Worker consultation (especially those doing the job).
- Assessments that cover the real work – not just paperwork.
- Controls that follow the hierarchy: eliminate → substitute → engineer → administer → PPE (last resort).
- Clear actions, owners and review dates – and evidence that actions were completed.

Minimum content checklist

- ✓ Scope (site/area/task), date, assessor, and who was consulted.
- ✓ Hazards and who is at risk (including disabled workers, pregnant workers, young workers, agency staff).
- ✓ Risk rating method used (likelihood/severity) and assumptions.
- ✓ Control measures in place and additional controls required.
- ✓ How findings are communicated to workers and how compliance is checked.



< **Download our
risk assessment
model template**

Welfare facilities and inclusive workplaces

Employers must provide welfare facilities and a working environment that is safe, healthy and accessible.

Baseline welfare facilities

- Toilets and washing areas with soap and drying facilities.
- Drinking water.
- A place to rest and eat meals.
- Storage for clothing and, where needed, changing facilities.



Inclusion and equality

- Facilities must work for everyone: consider disabled access, privacy, and safe routes.
- Ensure PPE and work equipment is suitable for all body types and disabilities; insist on individual fitting.
- Where relevant, seek policies and risk assessments that cover pregnancy/maternity, menopause and reproductive health.
- GMB has separate materials on women's health and safety – use them alongside this toolkit.

[See page 27 for a list of resources](#)

Lockers are not always a specific legal requirement, but safe and suitable storage is required where staff need to change or store special clothing/PPE, and where contamination risks exist.



Fire safety (including home and hybrid working)

In non-domestic premises the 'responsible person' (employer/owner/landlord/occupier or anyone with control) must carry out and maintain a fire risk assessment, implement controls, provide information and training, and plan for emergencies.

Weekly fire alarm tests

In many workplaces, weekly manual fire alarm testing is part of good practice (and may be required by standards such as BS 5839 depending on the system and premises). Testing should confirm alarms operate and signals are received correctly.

Home and hybrid workers

- Employers should provide basic fire safety guidance and ensure homeworkers know escape routes and keep them clear.
- Electrical safety matters: avoid overloading sockets; check cables and chargers; maintain equipment where the employer provides it.
- Homeworking risk assessments should be practical and proportionate – focus on real hazards (electrics, cooking/charging, smoking, escape routes).

Temperature (cold and hot workplaces)

There is no single ‘too hot’ legal maximum because workplaces differ, but employers must control temperature risks like any other hazard.

Minimum indoor temperatures (general guidance)

- 16°C for most indoor work.
- 13°C where work involves rigorous physical effort.

Minimum indoor temperatures (general guidance)

- Ventilation, shading/blinds, local cooling/heating, and safe rest areas.
- Access to drinking water and more frequent breaks during heat/cold stress.
- Job rotation or re-scheduling work to cooler/warmer times where feasible.
- PPE can increase heat stress – ensure recovery breaks and suitable alternatives where possible.

Protecting mental health at work

Stress, anxiety and depression are major drivers of sickness absence. Safety Reps can treat psychosocial risks like any other risk: identify causes, push for controls, and track outcomes.

What to focus on

- Workload, staffing levels, unrealistic targets and excessive overtime.
- Bullying/harassment, poor communication and lack of control over work.
- Lone working, violence and aggression, traumatic incidents and support after events.
- Manager competence: training to spot early warning signs and to respond appropriately.

Rep actions

- Push for stress risk assessments (team/role-based, not just individual).
- Secure clear policies: dignity at work, reasonable adjustments, sickness absence, and post-incident support.
- Encourage members to report issues collectively; document patterns (not just anecdotes).

Legionella

Legionella bacteria can cause Legionnaires' disease. Risk increases where water systems allow stagnation and temperatures in the 20–45°C range, particularly in complex hot and cold-water systems and cooling equipment.

What employers must do

- Identify and assess Legionella risks in water systems.
- Implement proportionate control measures (temperature control, flushing, cleaning, monitoring).
- Keep records and appoint competent support where needed.
- Review risk assessments when systems change or issues arise.

HSE guidance includes ACoP L8 and HSG274 (parts covering cooling systems and hot/cold-water systems).



Asbestos and silica dust

Asbestos remains present in many older buildings. Disturbing asbestos-containing materials can release fibres that cause fatal diseases. Respirable crystalline silica (e.g., from cutting/grinding stone, concrete or bricks) also causes serious long-term lung disease and is a major occupational health risk.

Where asbestos is commonly found

- Insulation boards, ceiling tiles and partition walls.
- Pipe/boiler lagging and sprayed coatings.
- Textured coatings, mastics, sealants and some floor tiles/bitumen.
- Roofing and wall cladding products in older properties.
- Alongside Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC), a key issue in schools and other buildings.

Key messages for Safety Reps

- Assume asbestos may be present in pre-2000 buildings until proven otherwise; demand an asbestos register/management plan where required.
- No one should drill, cut, sand or disturb suspect materials without the correct controls and competence.
- If suspect asbestos is found: stop work, isolate the area, report immediately, and insist on specialist assessment.
- Schools and public buildings: ensure asbestos management is robust and communicated to all staff and contractors.

Silica dust – rep priorities

- Demand substitution (e.g., prefabrication) and engineering controls (on-tool extraction, water suppression).
- Ensure suitable Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE)/PPE, face-fit testing where required, and health surveillance for high-risk tasks.
- Challenge ‘dry cutting’ and uncontrolled sweeping – these are red flags.

UnionLine can support members with asbestos-related legal claims; keep good records of exposure concerns and incidents.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

PPE is the last line of defence — controls should prioritise elimination/substitution/engineering measures first. Where PPE is required, it must be suitable, maintained, compatible with the task, and properly fitted.

Inclusive PPE

- Employers must provide PPE that fits the individual (including for disabled workers) and does not introduce new risks.
- Where respiratory protection is needed, ensure correct selection and face-fit testing where applicable.
- Training matters: workers must know how to wear, maintain and replace PPE.



Working with regulators (HSE / Local Authority)

If issues are serious and unresolved, you may need to involve the enforcing authority. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) enforces in many sectors; Local Authority environmental health teams enforce in others (e.g., retail, hospitality).

When to consider contacting the regulator

- Serious and imminent risk of harm; repeated failures to act; intimidation for raising safety concerns.
- After a serious incident, where you believe there are systemic failures or evidence may be lost.
- When you need technical input (e.g., exposure monitoring) and the employer will not act.

Start with your GMB Organiser/officer and the region's health and safety contact to agree the approach.

Investigating accidents and incidents

After an incident, act quickly: evidence disappears and memories fade. Your goal is prevention and protecting members' interests.

Immediate steps

- Ensure the injured person gets medical help and the area is made safe.
- Secure the scene where serious injury/near miss occurred; prevent re-start if danger remains.
- Gather facts: what happened, who was involved, equipment, training, supervision, workload, and any recent changes.
- Record witness accounts promptly; take photos/sketches where appropriate.

Reporting

- Ensure the incident is recorded in the accident book.
- For reportable events, the employer must report under RIDDOR – challenge under-reporting.

Supporting members

- Advise members not to feel pressured into immediate statements before they are ready.
- Signpost to UnionLine for legal advice on injury/ill-health claims and employment issues.

Download the HSE accident book template

books.hse.gov.uk/product/9780717666935

UnionLine

UnionLine is GMB's law firm, providing legal support for members. Services typically include personal injury claims, employment advice, and other discounted legal services.

 **unionline.co.uk**

 **0300 333 0303**

(Mon–Fri, 8am–7pm; out-of-hours callback available).

Keep a note of any workplace exposure concerns (e.g., asbestos/silica) and share them with your GMB officer where appropriate.

Resources

GMB Guides and other resources can be found on the National and London website

www.gmb.org.uk/networks/health-safety-and-environment

GMB London Region

Email

 londonhealthandsafety@gmb.org.uk

Website

 gmb-london.org.uk/departments/health-and-safety

HSE guidance (selected)

hse.gov.uk (main site)

hse.gov.uk/asbestos/

hse.gov.uk/legionnaires/

hse.gov.uk/temperature/

hse.gov.uk/stress/

hse.gov.uk/riddor/

hse.gov.uk/ppe/



The QR code is to complete the H&S survey. To report a workplace H&S issue please email londonhealthandsafety@gmb.org.uk

UNIONLINE

THE LAW FIRM OWNED BY GMB MEMBERS



SUFFERED AN INJURY?

WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK

If you make your personal injury claim with UNIONLINE, you'll keep 100% of the compensation we win for you.

We're owned by and run for GMB members – not to make a profit for shareholders. Contact our legal experts today.

GMB

UNION

0300 333 0303

unionline.co.uk



JOIN GMB