



ENCOURAGING EMPLOYEES TO VOLUNTEER FOR SAFETY FUNCTIONS

Q. I am having difficulty in recruiting a sufficient number of employees to volunteer to become first-aid trained personnel and fire wardens. Could you suggest how we could encourage employees to volunteer to undertake these functions?

A. Employers have a legal requirement to provide adequate first aid and fire warden personnel to a level that is commensurate with risk. This will often require staff to be trained in first aid and fire evacuation procedures.

There are many factors that can make staff reluctant to volunteer, including lack of motivation, a poor health and safety culture, demands of work, pressure from supervisors not to take on the role, lack of appreciation by the organisation of the demands that undertaking such functions will bring, and failure to give staff suitable time to practise their skills and procedures.

In situations where there is difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff, the employer should take steps to identify the causes of this and try to rectify the situation. To identify the issue, feedback should be sought from the workforce, for instance by questionnaires or interviews. Once the barriers have been identified a programme can be initiated to address them.

It is important that the employer recognises the need to motivate staff to volunteer and gives incentives to retain them in this role.

Many organisations provide monetary incentives to staff to become first-aid personnel or fire wardens. Thought may also be given to linking in volunteering to job appraisals or other incentive schemes that could reward the individual. Managers and supervisors could also volunteer, thereby setting an example to other employees. It may also be advisable to gain the support of trade union representatives who could influence their members to undertake these functions.

Once employees have volunteered, the employer should ensure they remain motivated. They should be fully involved in the formulation of first-aid and fire procedures and assisted with the necessary support and resources. Volunteers should be able to provide open feedback as to the effectiveness of, for example, the procedures and training provided.

All first-aid and fire warden personnel should also be supported in sustaining their skills. This could be by providing regular briefing sessions, allowing staff to exchange experiences and information, providing additional training if required and ensuring that line managers support staff by allowing them to attend such sessions.

Ideally, first-aid and fire warden personnel should be volunteers. However, some organisations do find it difficult to get sufficient staff to volunteer. In such cases it may be necessary to stipulate in job descriptions that an individual will be required to be trained in first aid or undertake fire warden duties. Where this route is taken, it should be made known in any recruitment process.