

## Complaints

Complaints against WCOs are rare. However, if you have a complaint that these procedures have not been followed, you can contact the WCO's manager (through the address on the back page) to discuss the matter. The manager's name will also be quoted on the top of any correspondence which you receive from the WCO. You can either speak or write to the WCO's manager; they will investigate your complaint and tell you what is going to be done about it.

If you are still not satisfied, you can write to the Director General of HSE, who will see that your complaint is followed up promptly and fairly. You may also wish to write and ask your MP to take up your case with HSE, with ministers, or with the independent Parliamentary Commission for Administration (the Ombudsman).

You can contact the Director General of HSE at:

Health and Safety Executive,  
Rose Court,  
2 Southwark Bridge,  
London SE1 9HS.

## How to find out more about health and safety law and how it is enforced

HSE produces a large number of free and priced publications to help you comply with the law. HSE free and priced publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995 Website: [www.hsebooks.co.uk](http://www.hsebooks.co.uk) (HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops and free leaflets can be downloaded from HSE's website: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk))

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 08701 545500 Fax: 02920 859260 e-mail: [hseinformationservices@natbrit.com](mailto:hseinformationservices@natbrit.com) or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

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If you wish to speak to a Workplace Contact Officer or an inspector in the future, you can contact them at:-



Alternatively, HSE's website ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)) contains details of all HSE offices.

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# What to expect when a Workplace Contact Officer calls

A brief guide for businesses, employees and their representatives



## About this leaflet

This leaflet is intended for those in business who have duties under health and safety law ('dutyholders'), for example employers, the self-employed and those in control of workplaces. It explains what a Workplace Contact Officer (WCO) is and what they do. It also tells you what you can expect when a WCO calls and what happens following their visit.

It also tells employees and their representatives what information they may expect from a WCO as a result of the visit.

## Who enforces health and safety law?

Health and safety law relating to work activities is enforced by inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or by inspectors from your local authority. Further details are given in the free leaflet *The Health and Safety Executive: Working with employers* (HSE38). Inspectors have the right to enter any workplace without necessarily giving notice. An inspector would expect to look at specific issues associated with your workplace, the work activities, your management of health and safety **and to check that you are complying with health and safety law.**

Unlike inspectors, WCOs do not possess powers to enter your premises without your agreement; **they enter your premises solely with your consent.** WCOs do, however, have powers to enforce certain aspects of Employer's Liability Compulsory Insurance (ELCI) legislation, and they will inform you of your duties as an employer under this important legislation.

## What is the role of the Workplace Contact Officer?

WCOs are specially trained staff whose role is to support HSE's regulatory work, promote health and safety awareness and provide information to employers, employees and others who may be affected by work activities. This wide ranging work includes working with other organisations and partners (such as Learning and Skills Councils, Business Links, training organisations, FE colleges, ethnic business groups, local authorities, trades unions and business and safety groups) to stimulate greater health and safety awareness among dutyholders.

When WCOs visit your business, their primary role is to give you information, guidance and advice and to collect information about your business which will be used solely by HSE in any further contact with you.

During their visit, a WCO will observe work activities in your workplace as well as the standards of housekeeping, the quality of welfare facilities and any obvious problems such as noise, transport, manual handling or dust and fumes. They will also be able to tell you about any guidance, publications and other sources of advice and information which are relevant to your business. **However, WCOs are not health and safety inspectors and they will not give advice on technical matters (eg the suitability of a machine guard) or express an opinion on compliance with the law.**

Before leaving, the WCO will want to talk with your safety or employees' representative. This is an important aspect of HSE's visiting procedures.

## What happens after a Workplace Contact Officer visit?

After a visit and on return to their office, the WCO will set up a record of your business (which will be used by HSE in any further contact with you). They will make a note of their visit and, if appropriate, will write to you confirming the issues discussed, enclosing any relevant leaflets which they did not leave with you during the visit. They will also send a copy of this letter to your safety or employees' representative.

Sometimes, it may also be necessary for an inspector to visit you. This could be because there are particular hazards in your workplace or because the WCO considers that there are issues which an inspector would wish to discuss with you.

If the WCO believes that a visit by an inspector may be necessary, they will tell you at the time of their visit. However, it may not always be apparent that a visit by an inspector is appropriate until the WCO has returned to their office and discussed their visit with an inspector.

## Information to employees or their representatives

During their visit, the WCO will check that those in charge, eg the employer(s), have arrangements in place for consulting and informing employees or their representatives, eg safety representatives, about health and safety matters. Employees or their representatives should always be given the opportunity to speak privately to the WCO.

If the WCO does send the dutyholder a letter, they will also send a copy to the safety or employees' representative under separate cover.