



ARBEJDSMILJØSEKTIONEN  
AALBORG UNIVERSITET

# A well-functioning working environment organization

---

GOOD ADVICE FOR THE MANAGER AND THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT REPRESENTATIVE IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT GROUP



The Working Environment Section  
AALBORG UNIVERSITY

JULY 2023

## Content

Introduction.....	1
Be visible.....	2
Clarify tasks and responsibilities .....	3
Ensure systematicity in performing your tasks .....	4
Build the necessary competencies .....	5
Ensure a good framework for carrying out your duties .....	7
References.....	8
Annex 1. The Managements e-mail, sept. 2022.....	9

## Introduction

At Aalborg University, we regard a good working environment as a prerequisite for the university's development, productivity, employee well-being and motivation, as well as for optimal use of the university's resources. This is described in the university's working environment policy.

All the university's managers and employees can and should contribute to developing a safe and healthy working environment and a good and secure working community, but naturally the members of the university's working environment organization (AMO) play a central role here, i.a. by uncovering, preventing and remedying challenges in the working environment.

It is important that your local AMO, including your working environment groups (sometimes called health and safety groups), can implement the necessary measures. If your AMO is to succeed in its tasks, there are several prerequisites that must be present.

In this guide you can read about these prerequisites and what you can specifically do to pave the way for a well-functioning local AMO.

The guide has the status of GOOD ADVICE. It is primarily addressed to the manager and the working environment representative in a working environment group and is based on an instigation that AAU's management sent per email to all managers at the university in September 2022. The email text is shown in **Annex 1**.

## Be visible

Your colleagues must feel that they have you. It is therefore important for the fulfillment of your role and for your success as a working environment group that you are visibly present in everyday life.

Visibility is about being conscious of your role as a manager or working environment representative in your daily work, and using the role when the opportunity arise and it makes sense.



AMO emblem.

A central part of your task is to influence behavior. Be present where your colleagues work and take an interest in their tasks and the way they carry them out. Explain in words and demonstrate through actions the significance of a good working environment and set a positive example yourself.

It is good to show and say that you are always accessible, but don't use this as an excuse to withdraw and remain passively waiting. Not even if you're busy in your daily work.

### This is what you can specifically do:

- **Be part of introductory processes**  
Make sure that you are involved in the introduction of new colleagues, so they not only get know you for your normal job function, but also specifically for your role as a working environment group.
- **Seek out your colleagues**  
Prioritize cultivating relationships with all colleagues in your coverage area. It is especially important if you cover colleagues who you do not have daily contact with, perhaps because they have different tasks than you or work in a different building.
- **Be active on meetings**  
At employee, departmental or team meetings, make sure to give the topics on the agenda a working environment angle when it makes sense. Make contributions yourself when possible and relevant.
- **Provide inputs to the management**  
Assist the management in incorporating and articulating working environment considerations into the foundation of management decisions. Get involved where possible. Remember that it is often you, not the management, who possess the relevant competencies on these matters.
- **Cultivate the collegial community**  
Participate in the initiation of activities that can positively impact the work environment, such as social events. Emphasize that the event strengthens the collegial community and use the motto: 'We are each other's working environment' to motivate your colleagues to participate.
- **Tell about your work**  
Use relevant occasions to tell your colleagues about the results of your work, both when your work has been preventive and when it has led to the elimination of problems. This applies not only in relation to APV-processes, but also in relation to everyday working environment work. Consider making a small log so that you can later remember what you have done and achieved.

## Clarify tasks and responsibilities

For a working environment group, some tasks are self-evident because they are specifically listed in the legislation. For instance, you should participate in the investigation of work-related accidents and contribute to the planning and execution of the workplace assessments (APV) within your coverage area.

However, the legislation itself does not provide a comprehensive overview of all relevant tasks. Perhaps there haven't been any recent accidents, and there may not be a current need to do a workplace assessment. In such cases, what should you do?

Remember, the purpose of a working environment group is not only to react when problems arise but also to **proactively** implement measures that are relevant to your colleagues' working environment and can have a preventive effect.



Be proactive – not just reactive.

By being **proactive** and taking initiative, you contribute to shaping your colleagues' perception of the importance of the working environment thereby fostering a positive safety culture. This includes encouraging an open dialogue about workplace health and safety among your colleagues.

### This is what you can specifically do:

- **Make a plan**  
Agree within the group on where and how it makes sense to implement initiatives that benefit your colleagues—and consider how your collaboration should proceed overall. For instance, should you have recurring 1:1 meetings or can you collaborate effectively on an ad hoc basis? Feel free to create a brief document describing your collaboration and the tasks involved in your initiatives. Remember to keep the document updated as your work progresses.
- **Be together in dividing the work between your**  
Agree within the group on what you always do together—and clarify individual responsibilities. Avoid placing all the work burden on just one person, such as the working environment representative. It's crucial that your colleagues witness your collaborative task management within the group. The leader's active participation emphasizes the priority and significance of the work.
- **Align expectations with colleagues**  
Coordinate your considerations with the colleagues you cover. It's essential that they understand what you intend to work on and what they can expect from you. This communication can occur during meetings or in your daily interactions with colleagues. Often, you'll receive just as valuable feedback during informal chats in the kitchen as in formal meetings.
- **Seek support**  
Take your thoughts on initiatives and tasks with you to the next committee meeting. In this connection, seek support for your initiatives from the manager responsible for the working environment, if you need it. At AAU, the manager responsible for the working environment usually means a Head of Department, an Share Services Deputy Director or a manager at a similar level.

## Ensure systematicity in performing your tasks

A lot of work in your role as a working environment group will properly consist of small and large ad hoc tasks, which you are expected to handle alongside your regular work. Perhaps you need to respond to email inquiries from your colleagues about working environment matters. Maybe you have to search for information on specific websites or reach out to the Working Environment Section for assistance. Or you might need to create an internal notice, a sign, or a guideline that your colleagues require.

Often, you will be able to perform such tasks without significant planning. However, ad hoc tasks tend to reappear repeatedly, and in that case, it will be helpful for your group to develop a systematic approach to for performing them. In this regard, it becomes important for you to retain documentation of your previous work of the same type, so that you have a reference to return to.

You are already familiar with the systematics from your recurring workplace assessments (APV) but as far as possible do the same in your daily ad hoc work.

### This is what you can specifically do:

- **Plan tasks in the calendar**

Make a calendar planning for your work if the task requires some time and extends beyond, for example, 1 hour. This will make it clear when you intend to work on the task, ensuring it aligns with other pressing tasks. This approach will help you better manage expectations with the person or people who may have approached you with the task.

Insist that you, along with your immediate supervisor, coordinate to determine which other tasks or responsibilities you should **not** handle, so that the work related to occupational health and safety does not simply end up at the bottom of the stack of other tasks. Remember that you have the right to the necessary time to fulfill your role, whether it's as a team leader or as a working environment representative.

Later, you will also be able to more easily assess how much time you actually spend on work within the group. If possible, use the calendar's features to assign a special color or category to working environment work.

- **Use templates and checklists**

Create fixed templates or checklists when it makes sense. It can, for example, be the case when you have to carry out training and instruction on a recurring basis or when you have to purchase new equipment or review building drawings.

Templates and checklists will help you to focus on relevant working environment conditions. Do you remember e.g. to get an EU declaration of conformity and a noise declaration when your institute or department buys a noisy machine? Or to make a service agreement for your air freshener? A checklist can remind you of that.



Checklists are useful tools in working environment work.

In some cases, you will be able to use templates or checklists that you can find online or that have been prepared by the Working Environment Section, but make sure you have them ready when you need them. A lot of time can be spent finding materials online.

- **Create system in documentation**

Agree on how you will store your written work. Use a shared drive or the journal system for this purpose. It's important that both of you can access the documents, presentations, or email responses that you expect to reuse at a later occasion. Consider creating a shared email group, which can also serve as an insight group within the journal system.

This will also facilitate a smooth transition when you are eventually replaced in your role.

## Build the necessary competencies

Even though both of you have completed the mandatory occupational health and safety training at some point, this training has only provided you with a very basic understanding of workplace safety. Therefore, it is quite important for effective management of your roles in the working environment group that you ensure the development of competencies in areas relevant to your work—even as you naturally gain experience on the job.

No one expects you to know everything about occupational health and safety. The field of occupational health and safety is simply too vast. However, you should have enough knowledge to recognize when workplace conditions can become problematic and understand how to take preventive measures before any of your colleagues are affected by injury or illness at work.



Consider your competencies.

It is especially important within the organizational and social context, where you need to develop an awareness of the consequences of issues such as conflicts, abusive acts, work pressure, or layoffs on the well-being and sense of security of your colleagues.

In many cases, you will be the ones your colleagues turn to when their work life becomes challenging. If you do not develop your competencies, your work may end up involving too much 'firefighting' and too little prevention.

### This is what you can specifically do:

- **Get acceptance for supplementary education**

You have a legislative requirement for supplementary education. In the first year, you are entitled to 2 days of supplementary education, and in all subsequent years, 1½ days. However, besides the time commitment, education can also incur costs. Therefore, it's a good idea to establish the framework for your further occupational health and safety training with the responsible manager – naturally based on the guidelines already provided by legislation.

- **Take time to explore educational opportunities**

Be proactive regarding the courses offered internally at AAU. In many cases, these courses are free to participate in.

Alternatively, the course fees may be lower than those for a comparable course 'in town'.

If you are a member of a labor union, explore the possibilities there. Several unions offer extensive course options for members who hold positions of trust.

- **Participate in events, conferences and professional networks**

At AAU, themed days or conferences may be organized where the entire university's working environment organization can participate. It's usually free to join, so make it a priority to attend.

Bear in mind however that these events usually are held in Danish.

Such events are also held outside AAU. Some are 1-day events, others extend over several days and therefore require overnight accommodation.

As examples, we would like to highlight:

- **The Universities' Working Environment Conference**

Arranged in even years by AEU. Lasts 2 days. Participant payment and expenses for accommodation and transport (usually held in the city of Nyborg).

Here there is a good opportunity to network with employees from other universities and, on top of that, hear about working environment topics that are relevant and current for the university world.

- **Conferences, fairs and theme days at the Sector Working Environment Council (BFA) for Welfare & Public Administration**

The working environment at Danish universities falls within this BFA. It is therefore relevant to stay continuously informed about the offerings provided from here.

- **Working Environment Summit**

Organized every year by BFA for Industry. Lasts 1 day. Free participation, but costs for transport (usually held in Odense).

Large meeting with many participants from all kinds of professions. Several of the topics could easily be relevant for a working environment group at AAU.

- **Working Environment Roadshow**

Organized annually by BFA for Industry, it lasts half a day and is free to attend. It takes place at several locations across the country, making it easily accessible by car from AAU's campus areas. During the meeting, the latest BFA guidelines are presented, which are valuable for the working environment group.

If you want to know more about these events you are welcome to contact the Working Environment Section.

## Ensure a good framework for carrying out your duties

You should consider the fundamental conditions for your working environment work. Do you have enough time for the task? Do you have the necessary resources to do what you believe is required? Is your work genuinely prioritized high enough? How does this prioritization align with the fact that your work is related to one of the prerequisites for the university's success in its core tasks – namely, a good working environment?

The management's call in **Annex 1** reflects concern about this matter. The background is that some members of AMO may not necessarily have room for working environment work due to tight, perhaps schematic, planning of regular work. Others may encounter the perception that working environment work is an ancillary task that ideally should not consume significant time or resources. Still, others are hindered in their work due to a lack of commitment or understanding from leaders and colleagues.

It is important that you create – within yourselves and among your colleagues – an awareness that working for a good working environment needs space and recognition.

### **This is what you can specifically do:**

- **Agree on your framework**

Follow the management's recommendation (see Annex 1): come together as a working environment group and agree on how much occupational health and safety work should reasonably occupy your time and resources, possibly at the expense of your regular work.

Unfortunately, health and safety work is not easy to fit into a fixed schedule, except perhaps for periodic risk assessment (APV) work. During certain periods, a significant and sustained effort is required for occupational health and safety, while in other periods, the work may be limited to occasional meeting participation. To succeed as a working environment group, ensure that resources, including allocated time, align with tasks and needs.

You will need to gain your own experiences here. What does 'sufficient resources' mean to you? Assess this, for example, once a year. It could be very appropriate to do so before your annual occupational health and safety discussion within your committee.

- **Clarify your room for action**

Create clarity about what your scope of action is. It may be that the manager in the group has limited decision-making authority, for example, regarding financial matters. This could mean that you cannot simply purchase safety equipment, pay for training, or engage a consultant without involving and obtaining permission from the responsible department manager. Would it be useful to define a budget framework within which you can operate? Feel free to discuss this topic at a committee meeting.

It may also be the case that your group covers other management areas or teams. What implications does this have for your scope of action? How can you best ensure collaboration with other leaders, such as section heads, laboratory managers, or project managers? How much involvement do they expect in your work?



- **Map available resources**

Are there useful resources in your department that you can draw upon? For example, are there key individuals from whom it's important to obtain information or assistance? This could be a colleague with specific skills that are beneficial for your team, or someone who handles planning tasks or manages project finances.

Resources can also refer to equipment, such as ergonomic aids, IT gear, or measurement tools. Do you have any such resources in your department? Where are they located, and who oversees them? Are there borrowing options available from other departments, perhaps through Campus Service?

## References

- **The Working Environment Policy of Aalborg University, november 2021**

## Annex 1. The Managements e-mail, sept. 2022

*Dear leaders at Aalborg University,*

*This is an appeal in continuation of the recent discussions within the Main Working Environment Committee (HAMiU) regarding the framework for the Working Environment Organizations (AMO) work on promoting well-being and a healthy, safe, and secure working environment. This includes the role and responsibilities of the Working Environment Representatives (AMR).*

*It is essential that AMO can implement necessary measures and contribute where needed, so that we at AAU can achieve real and lasting improvements in the field of occupational health and safety. AMR and supervisors should therefore have the necessary time available to carry out their working environment tasks, as well as the opportunity to acquire the knowledge necessary to support this work.*

*A healthy, safe, and secure work environment is a collective responsibility that we all share. We work together to create a positive working environment, a task in which managers and AMR play a special and important role. The importance of occupational health work was particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which required a completely new approach to occupational health. However, occupational health work is also crucial before, during, and after other organizational changes at the university.*

*In line with the follow-up on the well-being survey for 2021, it has been decided to initiate additional stress prevention measures across the university, which are also supported by AMO.*

*We encourage leaders and AMR to continuously discuss expectations for this work, how the necessary time for the tasks is ensured, the required competencies, and the associated resources. These discussions should take into account the specific characteristics and nature of each department, as well as its safety and health status. For inspiration, and given the diverse tasks, you can refer to Appendix 1: Framework for the Work of Occupational Health Representatives. The Working Environment Section is also always available for guidance and support.*

*With kind regards*

*The Management*