



# Organisational and social work environment

**The Swedish Work Environment Authority provisions on  
organisational and social work environment, with general  
recommendations on application thereof**

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## THE SWEDISH WORK ENVIRONMENT AUTHORITY

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The Swedish Work Authority's Statute Book (AFS in Swedish) publishes the Authority's provisions and general recommendations.

The provisions are binding regulations. The general recommendations have a different legal status than provisions. They are not binding, but contain recommendations on the application of the provisions indicating how someone can or should act in a certain respect. They can, for example, inform you of suitable ways of meeting the requirements, and they demonstrate practical solutions.

Note that references to statutes always relate to the original number of the statute. Later amendments and reprints may exist.

As regards amendments and reprints of National Board of Safety and Health and Work Authority statutes, please see the latest Register of Provisions and General Recommendations.

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# The Swedish Work Environment Authority's Statute Book

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## Swedish Work Environment Authority provisions and general recommendations on organisational and social work environment;

Adopted 22nd September 2015.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority issued the following pursuant to Section 18 of the Work Environment Ordinance (SFS 1997:1166) and establishes the following general recommendations.

### Purpose

**1 §** The purpose of these provisions is to promote a good work environment and prevent risks of ill health due to organisational and social conditions in the work environment.

### Scope of provisions

**2 §** The regulations apply to all activities in which employees perform work on the employer's account.

*General recommendations:* The concepts 'employer' and 'employee' have the same meaning in these provisions as in the Work Environment Act (SFS 1977:1160), with the exceptions indicated in 3 § of these provisions.

### Who the provisions are intended for

**3 §** The employer has the responsibility for these provisions being followed. Those who hire a workforce are placed on an equal footing with employers.

Those who are undergoing education or are in custody in an institution are not placed on an equal footing with employees in connection with the application of these provisions.

*General recommendations:* In Chap. 1, Section 3 of the Work Environment Act, people such as those undergoing education or in custody in an institution are placed on an equal footing with employees in the application of chapters 2-4 and 7-9 of the Work Environment Act. Through this paragraph, they are exempted from coverage by the regulations on organisational and social work environment.

## Definitions

4 § In these provisions, the following terms have these meanings.

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Demands in the work             | Those parts of the work that demand repeated efforts. The demands could, for example, encompass amount of workload, degree of difficulty, time limits, and physical and social conditions. The demands could be of a cognitive, emotional and physical nature.   |
| Victimization                   | Actions directed against one or more employees in an abusive manner, which could lead to ill health or their being placed outside the community of the workplace.  |
| Unhealthy workload              | When the demands in the work <b>more than</b> temporarily exceed the resources. This imbalance becomes unhealthy if it is prolonged and the opportunities for rest and recovery are insufficient.  |
| Organisational work environment | <p>Conditions and prerequisites for the work that include</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. management and governance;</li> <li>2. communication;</li> <li>3. participation, room for action;</li> <li>4. allocation of work tasks; and</li> <li>5. demands, resources, and responsibilities.</li> </ol>   |
| Resources for the work          | <p>That in the work which contributes to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. achieving the objectives of the work; or</li> <li>2. managing demands in the work.</li> </ol> <p>Resources can be: working methods and work equipment, competence and staffing, reasonable and clear objectives, feedback on effort, opportunities for control in the work, social support from managers and colleagues, and opportunities for rest and recovery.</p> |

Social work environment    Conditions and prerequisites for the work that include social interaction, collaboration, and social support from managers and colleagues.

## Systematic work environment management

5 § In the Swedish Work Authority's provisions on systematic work environment management, there are rules about work environment policy, knowledge and how the employer shall regularly investigate and assess what risks could occur in the operations. There are also regulations that the employer must take actions to manage the risks.

In 6 § below, there are particular requirements for knowledge, and in 7–8 §§ there are requirements for objectives. 9–14 §§ regulate particular organisational and social factors covered by the systematic work environment management.

## Knowledge

6 § The employer shall see to it that managers and supervisors have the knowledge below:

1. How to prevent and deal with unhealthy workloads.
2. How to prevent and handle victimization.

The employer shall see to it that there are prerequisites for putting this knowledge into practice.

*General recommendations:* A way for the employer to supply knowledge is to provide training, preferably for managers, supervisors and safety representatives together. It makes it easier for managers and supervisors when the safety representatives also have the corresponding knowledge. Training can be provided by occupational health services or other resource with competence in the field.

Prerequisites means things such as sufficient authority, a reasonable workload, and support in the role as manager or supervisor.

## Objectives

7 § Beyond what applies in accordance with 6 § and 9–14 §§ in these provisions, the employer shall have objectives for the organisational and social work environment. The objectives shall be aimed at promoting health



and increasing the organisation's ability to counteract ill health.

The employer shall give employees the opportunity to take part in the work on producing these objectives, and shall see to it that the employees know about this opportunity.

*General recommendations:*

Fundamental for successful work with these objectives is that they are firmly entrenched at top management level and other parts of the organisation.

The objectives can be aimed, for example, at strengthening and improving communication, learning, leadership, collaboration, influence and participation.

There must be a work environment policy, according to the Work Authority's provisions on systematic work environment management. The objectives should be founded on and consistent with these.

**8 §** The objectives shall be documented in writing, if there are at least ten employees in the operations.

## Workload

**9 §** The employer shall see to it that the work tasks and authority assigned to the employees do not give rise to unhealthy workloads.

This means that the resources shall be adapted to the demands in the work.

*General recommendations:* Assigning work tasks entails demands in the form of a certain amount of work and degree of difficulty that needs to be counterbalanced by resources. The employer should take the signs and signals of unhealthy workloads into consideration during allocation of work tasks.

Reducing the amount of workload, changing the order of priority, varying work tasks, providing opportunities for rest and recovery, applying other work methods, increasing staffing or supplying knowledge are examples of measures for preventing unhealthy workloads. The employer should also make sure that the technology used is designed for and adapted to the work to be carried out.

The employer's obligations to prevent unhealthy workloads covers both managers and supervisors, as well as other employees. It is important that the employer create prerequisites for employees to notify the employer about greater demands and inadequate resources.

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By practicing leadership that makes regular dialogue with employees possible, the signs and signals of unhealthy workloads can be noted, and imbalances corrected.

It is important that the employer, as part of work environment management, investigates and fixes risks linked to workloads. The employer needs to counteract workloads leading to illnesses and accidents. Identifying the causes behind the workload is essential in order for the measures to have effect. Questions concerning measures may also need to be dealt with at another level, or in another part of the organisation. Apart from the organisational and social work environment, physical, cognitive, and ergonomic conditions may contribute to the workload.

**10 §** The employer shall see to it that the employees know:

1. which work tasks they are to perform;
2. which results are to be achieved with the work,
3. whether there are particular methods with which the work is to be performed, and if so, how;
4. which work tasks are to be prioritized when available time is not enough for all work tasks to be performed; and
5. to whom they can turn in order to receive help and support in carrying out the work.

The employer shall, in addition, ensure that the employees know what authority they have according to Points 1-5.

*General recommendations:* Through continually reviewing Points 1-5, it will be possible to prevent unnecessary demands and burdens on the employees. It may be suitable to communicate the points collectively to employees who share responsibilities and work tasks, in order to facilitate collaboration. The employer should create opportunities for the employees to inform the employer of any ambiguities concerning the points. It is important that the employer take into account the employees' differing prerequisites as regards communicating.

In work where support and help from colleagues cannot be arranged, the employer should make sure that managers, supervisors or other designated person are available for help and support.

**11 §** The employer shall take measures in order to counteract work tasks and situations that are severely mentally stressful leading to ill health among the employees.

*General recommendations:* Examples of work tasks and work situations that could be severely mentally stressful are treating people in difficult situations, being subjected to trauma, solving conflicts, and making difficult decisions that include ethical dilemmas under pressure.

Examples of measures that should be considered in connection with severely mentally stressful work, apart from those indicated in the recommendations for Section 9, are:

1. regular support from counselors or access to other experts in the field;
2. special informational and training efforts;
3. help and support from other employees; and
4. procedures for dealing with demanding situations in contact with customers, clients, and others.

It is important that the employer create prerequisites for employees to notify the employer about particularly stressful working conditions.

Which measures should be selected depends on what conditions make the work severely mentally stressful.

## Working hours

**12 §** The employer shall take any steps necessary in order to counteract scheduling of working hours leading to ill health among the employees.

*General recommendations:* During planning of the work the employer should already be taking into account how the scheduling of working hours could have an effect on employees' health. Examples of scheduling of working hours that could result in risks for ill health are:

1. shift work;
2. night work;
3. split shifts;
4. large extent of overtime work;
5. long work shifts; and
6. far-reaching possibilities of having to work at different times and places, with expectations of being constantly reachable.

The employer should take particular notice of opportunities for rest and recovery. The employer should also take into account that scheduling of working hours influences the risk of accidents.

The Working Hours Act (SFS 1982:673) indicates limits for how many hours, at most, an employee may work, and what rest periods they must have at the very least. The Working Hours Act thereby

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indicates the maximum limits for working hours, but contains no rules on how the employer is to take the scheduling of working hours into account in work environment management.

## Victimization

**13 §** The employer shall clarify that victimization will not be accepted in the operations. The employer shall take actions to counteract conditions in the work environment that could give rise to victimization.

*General recommendations:* This clarification is best done in a written policy. Managers and supervisory staff have a particular responsibility as regards preventing, noticing and dealing with victimization. It is therefore important that they fulfill the knowledge requirements in Section 6.

Collective work around treatment and conduct can contribute to counteracting victimization.

Examples of conditions in operations that are important to pay attention to are conflicts, workloads, allocation of work, conditions for collaboration, and consequences of changes.

**14 §** The employer shall see to it that there are procedures for how victimization is to be handled. The procedures should indicate

1. who receives information that victimization is occurring;
2. what happens with the information, what the recipient is to do; and
3. how and where those who are subjected to it can quickly find help. The employer shall make the procedures known to all employees.

*General recommendations:* Normally, victimization is reported to a manager when the person affected has not succeeded in the situation on their own. If the employee cannot turn to their immediate manager, they can turn to a manager further up. In addition, the employee can turn to a safety representative.

There may be a need to intervene quickly and assess the situation in order to prevent it from deteriorating, and to ensure that Point 3 is dealt with. The employer can give occupational health services or another specialist the task of providing support and help.

In Swedish Work Authority provisions on systematic work environment management, there are regulations that if any employee meets with ill health or an accident at work, and if any serious incident

occurs at work, the employer must investigate the causes so that the risks of ill health or accident can be prevented in the future.

A deficient investigation process as regards victimization may be harmful from a work environment and a health viewpoint. The person conducting an investigation should therefore have sufficient competence, have the opportunity to act impartially, and have the trust of those involved.

The purpose of work environment legislation is to prevent ill health and accidents, and does not regulate issues of compensation and guilt.

An employee organisation or legal representative can provide legal help.

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1. This statute enters into force on 31st March, 2016.
  2. Through this statute the following are repealed:
    - a) National Board of Safety and Health general recommendations (AFS 1980:14) on mental and social aspects of the work environment;
    - b) National Board of Safety and Health provisions (AFS 1990:18) on nursing care work in individual homes; and
    - c) National Board of Safety and Health provisions (AFS 1993:17) on victimization in working life.

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