

Training Guidance for Safety Representatives

A properly trained Safety Representative can make a significant contribution to improving safety and health standards in the workplace. Training equips Safety Representatives with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to play an effective and influential role in promoting safer, healthier, and more sustainable workplaces. This document offers guidance for employers and Safety Representatives on training requirements for Safety Representatives.

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What is a Safety Representative

A Safety Representative is an employee selected by their fellow employees, whose role is to make representations on their behalf to management on all health and safety issues. The Safety Representative provides a direct link between the employer and employees on issues that may be identified through workplace inspections or through communication with their fellow workers.

In Ireland, employers must consult with workers on health and safety. **Irish law entitles employees to elect a Safety Representative to represent them on matters related to occupational safety and health in the workplace. Employers are required to consider the representations made by Safety Representatives and act upon them if necessary.**

The **Safety Representative** plays a vital role in promoting and supporting workplace health and safety on behalf of employees. While they **do not have legal duties** for enforcing safety or conducting risk assessments (that remains the employer's responsibility), Safety Representatives act as a key link between workers and management.

The Safety Representative is a trusted role. Safety Representatives are expected to act objectively and fairly when raising and addressing safety concerns, maintaining confidentiality and avoiding bias. This ensures that:

- Employees feel safe reporting issues.
- Management respects the Safety Representative's input.
- Safety discussions are constructive, and solutions focused.
- The Safety Representative maintains credibility across all levels of the organisation.

Safety Representatives Training and the Law

Training enables Safety Representatives to make a positive contribution to safety and health at work.

Irish law requires that Safety Representatives **receive adequate training, paid for by the employer, to support their role in promoting health and safety in the workplace.** The training should enable the Safety Representative to **acquire the knowledge necessary to discharge their functions** under the Act. The level of training should match the **complexity of the workplace hazards** and the **representative's duties.** Training should be provided over a **minimum of three days.**

In all sectors except for construction, **the employer is legally obligated to ensure that Safety Representatives receive training.** On construction sites where more than 20 persons are employed at any one time, the Project Supervisor for the Construction Stage (PSCS) must facilitate the appointment of a Safety Representative and ensure that Safety Representatives receive training.

Separately, employers are responsible for training Safety Representatives on the specific hazards and safe systems of work in their own workplaces.



The Importance and Benefits of Training for Safety Representatives



Compliance with Legal Requirements

Employers have a legal obligation to consult with workers on health and safety matters. Trained Safety Representatives help fulfil this requirement, ensuring compliance with legislation and regulations.



Accident and Illness Prevention

When Safety Representatives are properly trained, they can proactively carry out workplace inspections, identify hazards, contribute to risk assessments, and recommend controls. This preventative approach reduces workplace accidents, injuries, and illnesses—benefiting both employees and employers.



Empowerment and Confidence

Training equips Safety Representatives with the knowledge and skills to carry out their role effectively. It helps them understand health and safety laws, risk assessment processes, and how to raise concerns constructively. This confidence is crucial in ensuring that they can act as competent advocates for safety in the workplace.



Enhanced Communication and Collaboration

Well-trained Safety Representatives serve as a vital link between workers and management. Training enhances a Safety Representatives ability to communicate effectively, interpret safety data, and represent employee concerns clearly and professionally. This collaboration fosters a culture of mutual trust and shared responsibility for safety in the workplace.



Promotion of a Positive Safety Culture

Safety Representatives play a key role in promoting safe work practices, supporting behavioural change, and encouraging accountability at all levels. Training helps Safety Representatives spread safety awareness across the organisation.



Support for Continuous Improvement

Trained Safety Representatives contribute to ongoing safety improvements through audits, inspections, incident investigations, and Safety Committee work. The provision of effective training ensures that Safety Representatives can actively participate in these processes.

Best Practice for Safety Representative Training

Training Goals

The goal of Safety Representative training is to equip Safety Representatives with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to effectively represent employees on health and safety matters and contribute to a safer workplace. The goal is NOT to make Safety Representatives into safety experts. On completion of training, Safety Representatives should be empowered to act as effective advocates for occupational safety and health in the workplace.

Safety Representatives should be trained to:

1. Understand safety processes and legislation.
2. Consult effectively with both employees and management.
3. Participate in and carry out safety inspections.
4. Represent employees' safety concerns appropriately.
5. Communicate effectively with managers and staff.
6. Promote a positive safety culture.

Keypoint

Safety Representatives have a legal right to consult with staff and management on occupational safety and health matters. They also have a right to undertake safety inspections. However, the Safety Representative is not a Safety Officer or Safety Advisor. Safety Representatives are not required by law to carry out risk assessments or enforce safety rules—that is the employer's responsibility. These tasks are typically handled by a Safety Officer or Safety Advisor, who has the necessary expertise and detailed knowledge.



Who Provides Training

Training can be provided by commercial training organisations or Trade Unions. The cost of this training is borne by the employer and includes paid time off to attend training.

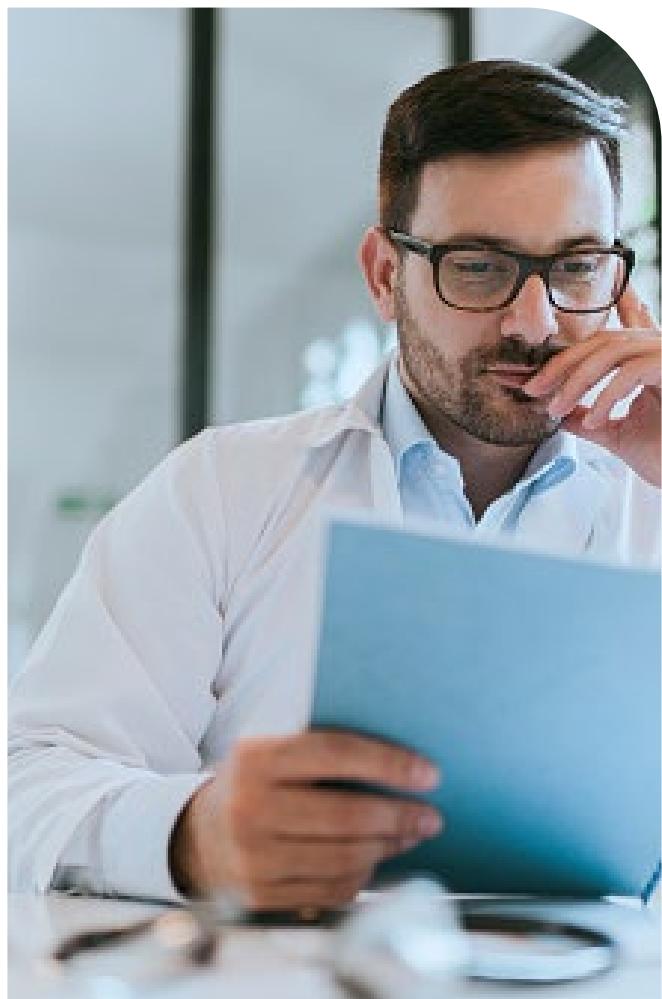
Some training organisations deliver training that leads to QQI certification in Safety Representation (Health and Safety Representation, Code 5N1451, NFQ Level 5, Minor Award).

Trainer Profile

The trainer should be qualified in Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). It is advantageous if the trainer has a solid understanding of the specific hazards and risks present in the workplace. Ideally, the trainer should have practical experience of the Safety Representative role to ensure that the training is relevant and grounded in real-world practice.

Training Syllabus

It is essential that Safety Representatives have the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their function effectively. Training should include the topic areas indicated in Table 1.



The level of detail to which each topic should be addressed will depend on the size, level of risk, degree of complexity and level of development of the safety and health management in the workplace.

Table 1: Training Topics

Topic/Area	Indicative Contents
1 Foundations of Occupational Safety and Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overview of Occupational Health and Safety (OSH). ● Role of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). ● The preventative approach to safety and health at work.
2 Legal framework and legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Safety and health legal system and legislation. ● Safety consultation and employee participation.
3 Safety Representative role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Role and functions of a Safety Representative. ● Communication skills for Safety Representatives. ● Representing employees on health and safety issues. ● Engaging employees in safety awareness initiatives. ● Safety promotion. ● Inclusion of vulnerable workers.
4 Risk-control and safety and health management at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hazard identification and carrying out risk assessments. ● Purpose of a Safety Statement. ● Carrying out inspections. ● Accident investigations.
5 Safety culture and safety leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Safety culture and leadership.
6 Safety performance evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reactive and active monitoring. ● Leading and lagging indicators.
7 Information & resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sources of safety and health information. ● HSA resources and tools.



Training Duration

Although the law mandates training, it does not prescribe course duration. **It is recommended that Safety Representatives receive between three to five days training.** Even for lower-risk workplaces, the training course should last at least three days.

Keypoint

Safety Representatives may need to undertake **self-directed study** as part of their development. This includes becoming familiar with the organisation's **safety processes, procedures, and relevant documentation**. This is necessary to effectively fulfil their role and contribute meaningfully to workplace safety.



Class Size and Delivery Format

Training can be delivered online, in person (face-to-face), or through a blended format combining both methods.

To ensure effective learning and interaction, class sizes should be limited to no more than 20 participants.

Training should include both theory and practical exercises to demonstrate the issues under study.

Peer Learning

Safety Representatives may consult and liaise with other Safety representatives in their organisation regardless of whether they work in the same place of work or not.

Safety Representatives should be **encouraged to support and learn from one another**.

This includes learning from other Safety Representatives within their own organisation and from others in the wider sector.

Learning from fellow Safety Representatives helps share knowledge, solve problems faster, and encourage teamwork across departments. By sharing real-life experiences and practical tips, Safety Representatives gain a deeper understanding of safety that goes beyond what can be taught in formal training.

Experienced Safety Representatives should mentor newer ones, sharing lessons from past incidents and practical know-how. This builds confidence and accelerates learning beyond formal training.

The training should include informal discussions and group activities.

It is good practice to incorporate simulation and role-play into the training. For example, mock Safety Committee meetings and presentations, inspections and communication with workers on sensitive issues.

Assessment & Certification

Assessment is not mandatory. However, it is considered good practice to include a short assessment (for example, a short multiple-choice questionnaire) at the end of the course. This helps reinforce learning, check understanding, and provide feedback to learners.

Learners should receive a **certificate of attendance** after attending the training.

Initial and Recurrent Training

Safety Representatives should receive **initial and refresher training**. Although the law does not specify a frequency, refresher training is recommended every three years (or sooner, if there are significant changes in workplace risks or legislation). **The recommended duration of refresher training is one day.** This training should cover the same core topics as the initial training.

In large organisations, Safety Representatives from different departments meet regularly to share concerns, review incidents, and propose safety initiatives. This promotes cross-functional learning and empowers employees to shape safety culture.

It is important to create safe spaces for discussion—both formal (such as Safety Committees) and informal (such as coffee chats or spontaneous conversations). These spaces encourage open communication and help build a strong culture of safety.



Competence Indicators

Area	Indicators
1 Knowledge of Safety Legislation and Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands relevant occupational safety and health (OSH) laws, regulations, and company policies. Knows the rights and responsibilities of employees, employers, and Safety Representatives. Knows where to access and interpret official guidance. Can distinguish between their own role (consultation and representation) and that of the employer or Safety Officer.
2 Risk Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes common workplace hazards and understands basic risk control principles. Understands how to interpret and engage with risk assessments and safety data.
3 Communication and Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates clearly with employees and management on safety matters. Actively listens to workers' concerns and conveys them effectively. Participates in Safety Committees meetings with confidence. Uses safety performance data to inform discussions with management and staff.
4 Safety Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes a positive safety mindset. Reinforces that everyone has a role in workplace safety—not just management or safety professionals. Encourages others to engage with safety policies and procedures. Encourages and monitors employee participation in safety meetings or toolbox talks. Supports near-miss reporting and helps identify underlying trends. Promotes a learning culture by encouraging reflection after both successes and setbacks.
5 Safety Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participates in regular safety inspections and hazard identification activities. Understands and follows procedures when participating in these activities. Identifies safety issues and suggests practical, reasonable solutions. Follows up on reported concerns or actions where appropriate.
6 Continuous Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeks opportunities for further learning (e.g. refresher training, learning from peers). Stays informed about changes in workplace practices or legislation.
7 Teamwork and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works cooperatively with other Safety Representatives, supervisors, and safety professionals. Shares information and good practices across teams or departments.
8 Professionalism and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts in a fair, objective, and responsible manner. Maintains confidentiality and respects others' input. Avoids blame and focuses on safety improvement.

hsalearning.ie



hsalearning.ie is the **Health and Safety Authority's (HSA) learning management system (LMS)**. There's a free, 30-minute online course specifically for **new and existing Safety Representatives**. This course does not replace the training provided by the employer. However, the content may be useful for new and existing Safety Representatives and accessed either before or after attendance at formal training. The course covers:

- Relevant sections of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act.
- Roles, rights and functions of a Safety Representative.
- Fundamentals of risk assessment.
- Available resources and supports.

Further, hsalearning.ie includes a short video explaining the role and responsibilities of Safety Representatives.

Keypoint

hsalearning.ie offers a wide range of courses on other occupational safety and health (OSH) topics. These can be highly valuable for Safety Representatives, helping them to **broaden their knowledge**, stay informed about key hazards, and contribute more effectively to workplace safety.



Further Resources and Information

For more information on Safety Representatives, please see the Safety Representatives topic page on the HSA website.



- Safety Representatives Resource Book available at https://www.hsa.ie/eng/_enterprise_and_employee_supports/safety_representatives/safety_representative_resource_book.pdf
- Safety Representatives Information Sheet available at https://www.hsa.ie/eng/_enterprise_and_employee_supports/safety_representatives/safety_representative_information_sheet_-_general.pdf
- A Short Course for Safety Representatives available at <https://hsalearning.ie/mod/page/view.php?id=542>

