

Questions on the retail work environment – answers from the expert



A little while ago we wrote an article discussing various work environment risks associated with waste management in the retail sector. The subject attracted a good deal of interest, so we contacted Katrin Dagergren, work environment expert at the Swedish Trade Association for Retail "Svensk Handel", for some more answers to your and our questions.

Preventative work environment measures are key

What is the general work environment situation in Sweden's stores in terms of ergonomics and safety?

"As far as ergonomics are concerned, there are more risks in certain sectors of the retail industry than in others – risks that need to be addressed. Heavy lifting, uncomfortable working positions, and cashier work that can be repetitive. It is therefore important that both managers and staff know how to prevent accidents and occupational illness.

Most people find their work environment to be good, but there are certainly challenges. We've had reports from some of our member companies about events that could result in the work environment being perceived as unsafe. In some cases, customers have sexually harassed staff or made racist remarks. Unfortunately, we're seeing a rise in shoplifters threatening and harassing staff."

How common is sick leave in the retail sector, and what are the most common occupational injuries?

"Just as in other sectors, recent years have seen an increase in sick leave in the retail sector, primarily for mental health reasons. The most common cause of accidents in the retail sector is falling. The most serious causes of accidents are threatening behaviour, violence, and robbery."

The right skills, resources, and powers are required to ensure an effective work environment

What responsibility do store managers have for their staff, and what do store managers need to know to be effective in their role?

"A store manager is an employer representative and in their managerial role they are responsible for the store's operations, which include the work environment. Senior management has overall responsibility and must ensure that things like work environment measures are working in the company. This includes ensuring that managers have the skills, resources, and powers they need to carry out the tasks necessary for them to improve and maintain a good work environment."

What's the best way for store managers to keep up to date on current work environment legislation and regulations?

"[The website of the Swedish Work Environment Authority](#) has a lot of useful information, as does [Prevent](#), an organisation owned by the key parties in the private labour market. [The website of the Swedish Retail and Wholesale Council](#) has information about free online training that has been developed by stakeholders in the retail sector."

Many questions about new work environment regulations

What are the most common work environment questions you get from retailers?

"Questions about systematic work environment efforts, which all employers should undertake regardless of size, are common. These include questions about risk assessments, task allocation, and annual follow-ups. There are often questions about the relatively new regulations on the organisational and social work environment and on rehabilitation.

In terms of safety, in addition to questions regarding how to prevent and deal with threats, violence, and robbery, we receive questions about forklift trucks and how to prevent accidents when using them."

Finally, what do you think the future holds for the work environment for store staff?

"As in many other contexts, digitalisation is having an impact on the retail sector. New payment solutions, e-commerce, and other digital sales and support services are developing rapidly. This all affects the work environment in different ways," Katrin concludes.