

Paid Sick Leave Tops Emerging Issues Addressed in Employee Handbooks, Says New XpertHR Survey

For employers, keeping current with the evolving workplace and changing legal issues is among their greatest challenges.

New Providence, NJ (March 12, 2015) – Paid sick leave tops the list of emerging issues most commonly addressed in employee handbooks, with an impressive 79.4% of respondents addressing this new legal trend in their handbooks, finds a new [XpertHR survey](#). Data privacy is the second most common issue addressed (67.2%) and social media is a close third (64.2%).

The [survey](#) also finds that wearable technology, such as so-called smart watches, isn't yet making its way into handbooks in any significant way, with only 4.1% of respondents indicating they have incorporated this budding technology into their handbooks. Medical marijuana, now legal in nearly half of the states, yet still against federal law, is a challenging issue for workplaces—but only 6.4% of respondents have explicitly addressed it in their handbooks. Bring your own device (BYOD) policies are addressed by 14.5% of handbooks; Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) protection by 17.2%; and e-cigarettes by 20.6%.

Respondents find that keeping their handbooks current with an evolving workplace and workforce (41%) is the most challenging aspect, and keeping it current with the law at a close second (35.6%). A distant third (11%) is getting employees to comply with handbook policies. Addressing state requirements is the top challenge for a mere 3.4%.

“Employee handbooks continue to be a perennial challenge and opportunity for employers,” says Peggy Carter-Ward, Head of Content, XpertHR. “The challenges of keeping up with a changing workforce, new laws and just getting employees to read the handbook are not new, yet addressing the evolving workplace issues of paid sick leave, data privacy, and social media are complex.”

Of the 521 individuals surveyed, 91.9% report having an employee handbook. Those with handbooks are generally diligent about keeping them updated, with 78% reporting updates within the last two years; 14.2% within three to five years; 3% within six to nine years; 2.1% within 10 or more years; and 2.8% unsure when updates were last made.

Sector plays a significant role in whether an employer has a handbook. 92.6% of the private sector reports having a handbook, while that figure is 86.1% for the public sector and 94.9% for nonprofits.

By far the majority (58.5%) of employee handbooks are prepared in-house by HR with review by a lawyer; 18.8% prepare handbooks in-house without review by a lawyer.

Roughly 1 in 5 of the respondents produce multiple handbooks for various employee groups, generally for one of the following categories: seasonal employees vs. permanent employees, corporate vs. locations by state, hourly vs. salary, union vs. non-union, field workers vs. office workers, staff vs. faculty vs. administration, exempt vs. non-exempt, and manager vs. employee. Handbooks continue to be distributed primarily via print (64.5%), although intranet is a close second at 55.3% and email at 28.2%.

The maintenance of the handbook falls squarely on HR's shoulders, with 83.4% of respondents reporting that in-house HR is responsible for updating their handbooks, distantly followed by in-house legal (3.7%), outside law firms (1.4%), and outside consultants (2.5%).

"When properly drafted, handbooks can be an excellent tool to ensure consistency in employee management as well as to make sure that all employees and supervisors are familiar with their rights and obligations," says Carter-Ward. "However, improperly drafted handbooks can create potential liability for employers and leave them susceptible to employee legal claims based on the content of the handbook."

To download a free copy of XpertHR's Employee Handbook survey report, visit [XpertHR](#).

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Editor's Note:

Peggy Carter-Ward, Head of Content, XpertHR is available for interview.

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Media Contact:

Beth Brody, fisher VISTA (For XpertHR)

[bbrody \[@ \] fisherVista.com](mailto:bbrody@fisherVista.com)

609-397-3737