



Discipline: Is it necessary to document all employee disciplinary actions or only those resulting in major policy violations?

Proper documentation of employee disciplinary actions is extremely important, regardless if the disciplinary action results from a violation of a major work rule or policy or from incidents that the employer perceives as less significant. Employers that do not document disciplinary actions regardless of their significance will have a much harder time defending disciplinary terminations if legally challenged with a claim of discriminatory or wrongful discharge.

There is really no recommended format for documenting disciplinary actions, nor must doing so be a complex or time-consuming process. Documenting disciplinary actions simply means writing down events as they took place.

Disciplinary documentation may be as formal as using specially designed forms or as informal as making notes on a ruled legal pad or piece of scrap paper. However, it is important to document events while they are still fresh in the minds of supervisors or managers.

Many employers find it necessary not only to document employee performance or disciplinary issues but also to train managers and supervisors regarding company policies and procedures.

During such training sessions, some employers stress the importance of documenting any inappropriate conduct that is observed and what disciplinary action was taken, as well as dates, times and places. Remember that many documents may be rendered useless as a defense mechanism if not appropriately dated, etc.

A wide range of methods may be utilized for documenting employee performance or disciplinary issues, so deciding on a specific format or method to use will be strictly a matter of internal policy decision making.

While some employers prefer extensive reports on each incident--including possible witness statements and any available supporting evidence--others may require only a simple hand-written format. Keep in mind that it is not the actual format of documentation that is of importance but rather that events be properly documented.

If you would like additional information about the disciplinary process or help in writing or implementing an effective, legal disciplinary process, please contact Sharon Ely, Director of Human Resources, Infinite Workforce Solutions/TX Works at sely@infinite-ws.com or call me at 512-271-9700, ext 209.

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