

One platform, fewer gaps: Why joined-up HR and health and safety software matters

A guide for SMEs



 breathe



As small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) grow, core operational areas like human resources and health and safety naturally become more complex. More people. More locations. More ways of working. And often, more processes and systems needed to keep everything running smoothly.

Plus, in the early days, there's often no dedicated HR or health and safety role. Workplace safety responsibilities get picked up by people doing their best alongside other priorities - office managers, operations leads or business owners.

Or even if there is a dedicated HR manager looking after the people side of things, workplace safety sometimes sits with someone else - like the managing director.

Whatever the setup, it's common for HR and health and safety to grow separately in SMEs.

One system or spreadsheet here. Another document or tool there. It's rarely a deliberate decision - it's simply how things evolve as the business grows.

For a while, this can feel fine. But over time, information starts to spread out. Training lives in one place, incidents and accidents in another. Context gets lost. And when someone needs a clear answer quickly, it's harder than it should be to join the dots.

Research conducted by Breathe* looked at what managers and leaders in UK SMEs found hardest about managing health and safety. The top challenges included:

- **Finding the time to keep on top of it**
- **Manual processes that slow things down**
- **A lack of in-house expertise**
- **Unclear roles or ownership**

In this guide, we'll explore how bringing HR and health and safety together in a single, joined-up system can help resolve these issues. We'll look at how disconnected approaches quietly create risk, and how using one platform for both HR and health and safety can support compliance, confidence and better day-to-day decisions as your business grows.

Where HR and health and safety naturally overlap



HR and health and safety are often treated as separate functions, but in practice they are deeply connected. Even from a reporting perspective, both look closely at illness and absence data.

[HSE data for 2024/2025](#) shows:

40.1 million working days lost due to ill-health and non-fatal workplace injury.

1.9 million suffering from work-related ill health, with work-related stress, depression and anxiety accounting for over 50% for the first time ever.

£1.3 billion annual costs of workplace injury and new cases of work-related ill-health.

Together, they shape a business's safety culture, influence risk management and help insure the right control measures are in place to support both physical health and overall wellbeing.

When these areas are managed in isolation, important context can be lost. A training record might sit in HR, while the reason for that training lives in a risk assessment elsewhere. Or a new starter completes onboarding, but key health and safety steps aren't clearly linked or followed up.

"In practice, HR and health and safety are closely linked. When you're dealing with people issues, whether that's absence, wellbeing, performance or workplace concerns, health and safety sits alongside employment law and HR responsibilities. For SMEs especially, treating them as connected makes it much easier to manage risk and support people properly."

- [Emma del Torto, MD, Effective HRM](#)

But the overlap doesn't stop with the numbers. **Both HR and health and safety play a vital role in:**

- Employee wellbeing and safety
- Setting clear roles and responsibilities
- Training and competence
- Building policies, procedures and records
- Fair, consistent processes

What happens when HR and health and safety systems don't scale



When HR and health and safety continue to rely on manual or disconnected tools, gaps start to appear.

In our survey of SME managers and leaders:

 **50%** said they still rely on spreadsheets, email or bits of paper to manage health and safety

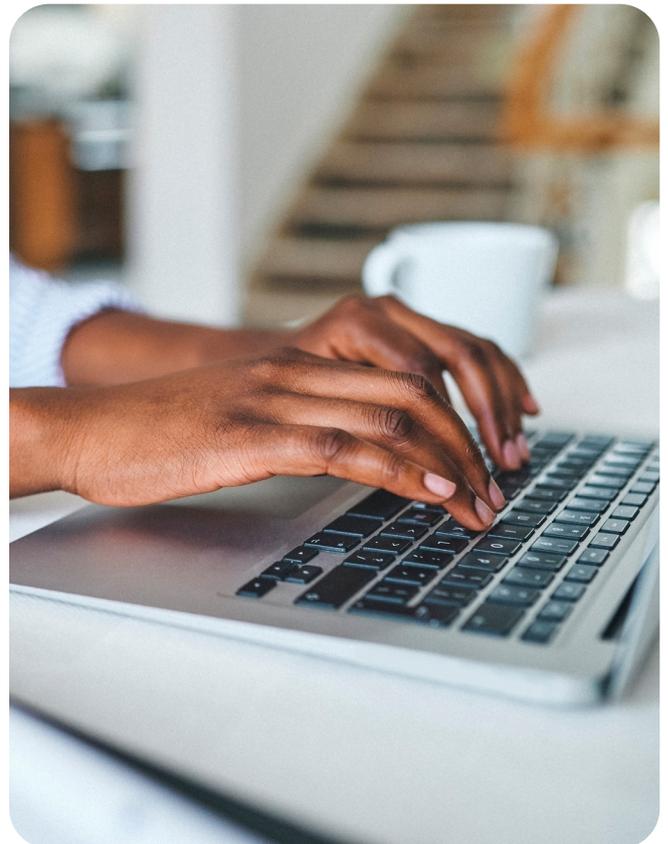
 **45%** reported having at least one key health and safety document missing or out of date

 **42%** said records, tasks or inspections sometimes fall behind

 **Nearly half** hadn't completed a health and safety audit in the last 12 months, or weren't sure if they had

These aren't signs of neglect. They're signs that existing systems haven't kept pace with how the business now operates.

If you're not sure where gaps might exist in your own setup, a simple [health and safety checklist](#) can help you sense-check what's in place and what might need attention.



"Many people who run small businesses start out using the HSE templates and put the documentation in place but then things change in the organisation. For example, new machinery, new systems, new practices, new staff. And in a busy business - one that's growing - health and safety can fall off the radar. We see it all the time."

- [Emma del Torto, MD, Effective HRM](#)

The hidden cost of disconnected HR and health and safety systems



Most SMEs don't set out to create fragmented systems. Spreadsheets, shared folders, separate bits of software and email chains appear because they're quick, familiar and easy to start with.

Over time, though, having HR and health and safety managed in different places starts to carry a cost.

That cost shows up in a few ways:

- Paying for multiple systems that don't talk to each other
- Duplicating work, with the same information and employee data entered in more than one place
- Spending extra time pulling together data and resources before audits, reviews or inspections
- Relying on people to manually join the dots between HR records and safety activity

It also creates practical challenges:

- Multiple versions of the same document
- Unclear ownership of tasks
- Health and safety training completed but not recorded
- Incidents and accidents logged but not followed up
- Risk assessments that don't reflect how people actually work

These issues don't always cause immediate problems. They tend to surface when pressure is on – during an audit, an insurance query, a tender process or after an incident.

At that point, teams are forced to react. Time is lost pulling information together. Confidence dips. And gaps that felt manageable day-to-day suddenly become very visible.

"Most businesses are reactive. They don't come to you because they want to improve health and safety, they come because something's happened or they've got a deadline."

[Adam Older](#), Managing Director, [A.Older Safety Solutions](#)

There's also the wider reputational and financial impact to consider. When health and safety issues aren't managed effectively, problems can quickly become public. Incidents can lead to negative publicity, loss of trust and difficult conversations with clients, partners or insurers.

In more serious cases, failing to meet HSE requirements can result in enforcement actions and fines, which can be significant for small and medium sized-businesses. Having a single joined-up HR and health and safety software helps reduce the risk by making responsibilities, records and follow-up clearer day-to-day.

One source of truth for people, safety and compliance



Using one combined HR and health and safety software creates a single, reliable source of truth.

Instead of spreading information across tools, key health and safety activity sits alongside employee data records. This makes it easier to understand what's happening, who's responsible and where attention is needed.

In practice, this means:

- Training records linked to individual employees
- Incident reporting is straightforward and connected to people, roles and locations
- Risk assessments easy to find and review
- Roles like first aiders and fire wardens are clearly recorded
- It's easy to collaborate with external advisors when support is needed

Managing HR and health and safety in one place doesn't just help those responsible for health and safety. **It helps everyone across the business.**

For HR teams, it reduces duplication. For operations teams, it improves visibility. For leadership, it supports informed decision-making. And for employees, it makes admin quicker and easier.

When we surveyed employees in SMEs about health and safety in their workplace*, **70% said it is or would be easier to log health and safety risks and incidents in the same system** they already use for HR tasks like booking leave or accessing documents.

"Systems can help you manage the areas where HR and health and safety overlap, reducing duplication, saving time and streamlining processes."

[Lee Craig](#), Principal of Health and Safety, [AAB People](#)



Clear ownership, without expecting one person to be an expert



In many SMEs, health and safety responsibility often lands with someone who already has a full role - HR managers, office managers, operations leads or business owners. Or, sometimes, health and safety duties might be managed by an external advisor.

Software doesn't remove the need for competent advice, but it does make ownership clearer and more manageable. It helps by:

- Making ownership visible
- Assigning tasks clearly
- Supporting shared responsibility across teams
- Reducing reliance on individual memory or spreadsheets

This clarity makes it easier for people to do the right thing, **even without specialist training.**

“Having access to competent health and safety advice is a legal requirement, systems don't replace that, but can play a key role in supporting and communicating the management of health and safety.”

[Lee Craig](#), Principal of Health and Safety, [AAB People](#)

Better records, better evidence, less disruption



Health and safety is as much about evidence as it is about action. This includes having clear, accessible records for all health and safety activities.

Employers have a legal duty, under the [Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974](#), to ensure (so far as is reasonably practicable) the health, safety and welfare of their employees.

HR and health and safety software supports better record-keeping by design. Training, incidents, reviews and actions are logged consistently and stored centrally.

This makes it easier to demonstrate how legal health and safety duties are being met in practice, especially when:

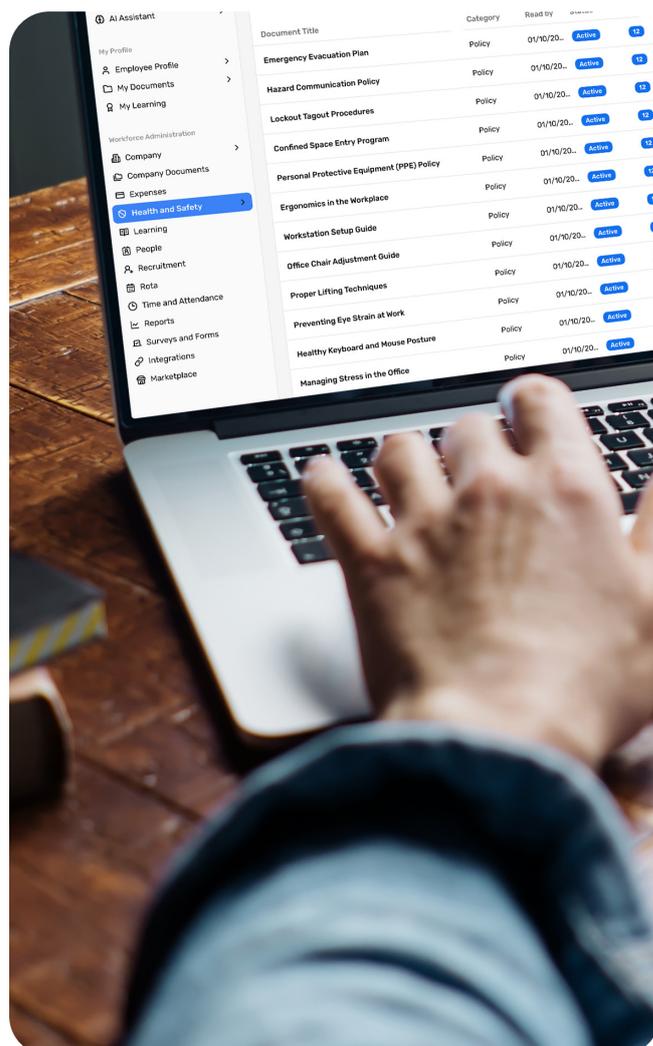
- Insurers ask for proof
- Auditors request documentation
- Clients or partners need reassurance

Instead of scrambling, teams can respond with confidence.

This is where the return on health and safety shows up – not as revenue, **but as fewer disruptions, less stress and smoother processes.**

“The ROI for managing health and safety is in reduced injuries and less employee time off – the gains you don’t see.”

[Adam Older](#), Managing Director, [A.Older Safety Solutions](#)



Supporting safer behaviours, not just compliance



Systems shape behaviour. When reporting feels complicated or disconnected, people are less likely to log risks or near misses.

That matters, because near misses and small hazards are often early warning signs.

When systems are familiar and accessible, reporting becomes part of normal working life. HR and health and safety software supports a safer working environment by:

- Making processes clear
- Removing barriers to reporting
- Encouraging learning over blame
- Reinforcing shared responsibility

Over time, **this supports a healthier safety culture without adding pressure.**

“Getting health and safety right means a safer workplace - a culture or an organisation where people feel like their safety is being taken seriously. And that has a knock-on effect on retention, lower rates of attrition, engagement and productivity. So the return on investment of getting health and safety right is incredibly far reaching.”

- [Emma del Torto, MD, Effective HRM](#)

Growing businesses need systems that scale



Growth introduces new risks:

- More employees to train
- New locations to manage
- More equipment and processes

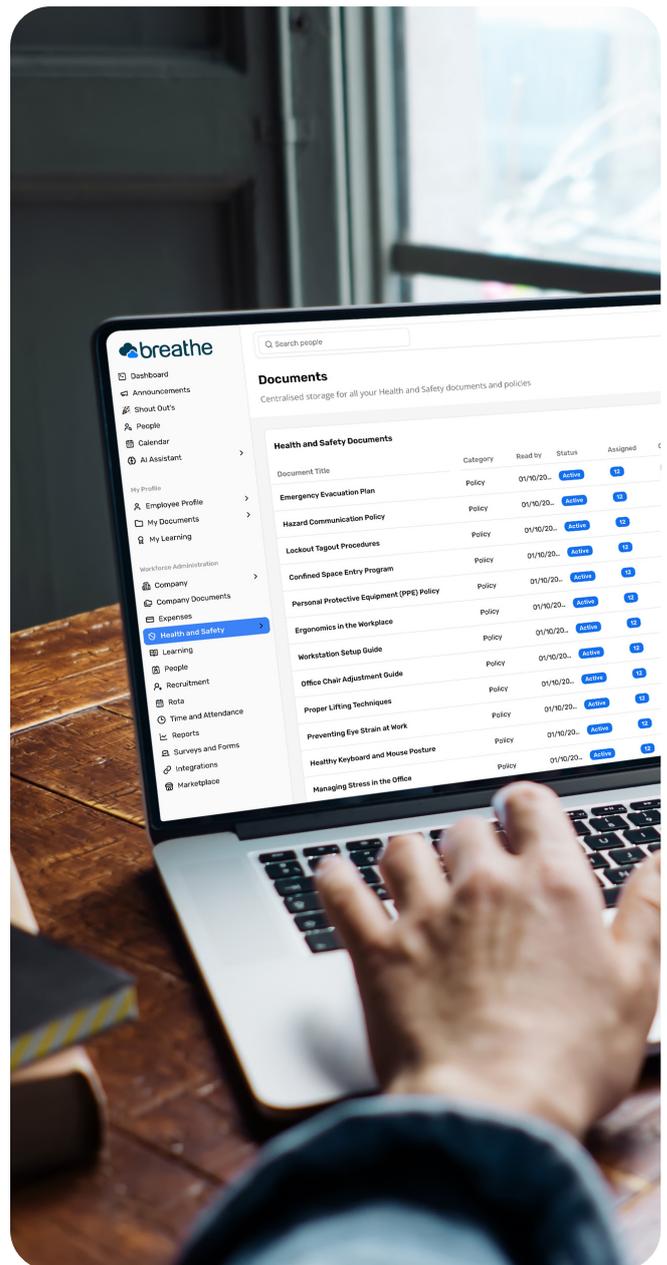
These changes often happen gradually, which makes it easy for health and safety processes to fall out of step.

And unfortunately, manual tools struggle to keep up with this level of change. This means that ownership becomes blurred and essential updates get missed.

A single piece of software for both HR and health and safety **helps businesses scale processes by providing consistency across teams and locations**, even as complexity increases.

“Having a cloud-based system that has policies, training records, employee acknowledgements etc, means you can make sure all documentation is up-to-date and available for employees, in keeping with Regulation 10 of the [Managing Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#).”

- [Emma del Torto](#), MD, [Effective HRM](#)



What to look for in a HR and Health & Safety software



If you're exploring options, look for a system that:

- ✓ Connects health and safety activity, including training and incidents to accurate employee records, roles and locations
- ✓ Makes it easy for people to report incidents, hazards and near misses, without friction or fear
- ✓ Clearly shows who's responsible for what, and makes responsibilities easy to update as roles change
- ✓ Reflects how people actually work day-to-day, including schedules, attendance and different working patterns
- ✓ Gives people access when they need it, from any device and location - whether that's on site, remote or across multiple locations
- ✓ Keeps policies, procedures, documents, training and logs stored securely in one place
- ✓ Lets employees formally record when they've read a policy or completed training
- ✓ Supports e-signatures for easy signing of important documents, like contracts
- ✓ Provides clear, at-a-glance people and health and safety reporting that shows what's under control and what needs attention
- ✓ Covers essential HR needs such as absence and holiday management and performance conversations
- ✓ Includes tools that can help monitor "psychosocial" risks such as stress and fatigue
- ✓ Offers additional capabilities to reduce the number of separate tools you rely on for things like training, recruitment, expenses or payroll

The best systems support good practice and help you stay compliant with both employment law and health and safety law, without adding unnecessary complexity. **Breathe is designed to bring these HR and health and safety essentials together in one system**, so teams can manage people, safety and day-to-day admin without juggling multiple tools.

Speak to your HR Consultant to find out more.

Take the next step

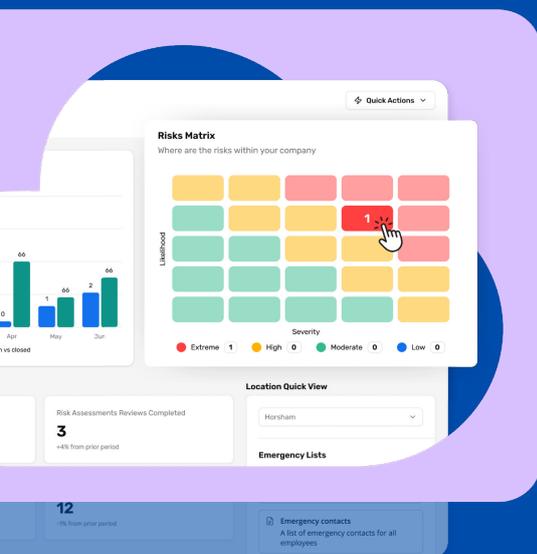
For growing businesses, bringing HR and health and safety into one system makes a practical difference day to day. It helps you:

- ✓ **Keep people, safety and compliance information connected**
- ✓ **Make ownership clearer, even when responsibilities overlap**
- ✓ **Spot gaps earlier, before pressure forces a reaction**

That's why many SMEs move away from disconnected tools as they grow. HR and health and safety software gives you clearer oversight, stronger evidence and more control, without adding complexity or extra admin.

Breathe is designed to support this next stage. Our software brings HR and health and safety together in one straightforward system, helping growing businesses stay organised and compliant with legal requirements.

If you're reviewing how HR and health and safety are managed in your business, take a look at Breathe and see how it can support you.



[→ Watch a short demo](#)

Your trusted Breathe Partner can help you assess whether the system is the right fit for your business and guide you through the next steps.

*The surveys referenced in this guide were conducted by Breathe in December 2025, involving 100 managers, leaders and employees from UK SMEs with between 10-250 employees. The surveys were conducted to understand how small businesses manage health and safety in practice.