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STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Set up your Construction Safety File (South Africa) — Beginner Friendly

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Step-by-Step Guide: Set up your Construction Safety File (South Africa)

A plain-language guide for first-time contractors and self-employed persons.



Who this is for

Contractors and self-employed persons compiling a Safety File for the first time. Plain language. No templates. Only what you must create, find, and file.

How to use this guide

Follow each section. For every item you get: what it is, why it matters, where to get it, exactly what to include, how to name and file it, when to update, and common mistakes to avoid.



Your path: set legal base → appoint people → compile plans & risks → run registers → hand over.

Exact Safety File Index (Minimum Required Documents)

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- Public Liability Insurance

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The rest of this guide explains, step by step, how to compile every item above.

1. Company Documents

Letter of Good Standing

- What it is: proof your company is registered and paid up with the Compensation Commissioner or a Mutual Association.
- Where to get it: Compensation Fund (CompEasy) or your Mutual Association portal; ask finance if unsure.
- What to include: company name and number, Compensation Fund/M.A. number, validity dates, and cover type.
- Quality: print clearly; dates must cover the project period; the company name must match your contracts.
- File name suggestion: YYYYMMDD_LOGS_[Project].pdf.
- Where to file: Section 1.1 in the Safety File; keep a digital copy in /01_Company_Docs/LOGS.

Quick check

- Dates are valid
- Names match exactly
- Readable copy

Tax Clearance Certificate

- What it is: SARS tax status confirmation (often a TCS with a PIN).
- Where to get it: eFiling → Tax Compliance Status → Good Standing; export the confirmation.
- What to include: company legal name, reference number or PIN, date issued.
- Quality: ensure it is current for tender/contract; do not share your passwords—print the confirmation.
- File name suggestion: YYYYMMDD_TaxClearance_[Project].pdf.
- Where to file: Section 1.2; digital in /01_Company_Docs/Tax/.

Quick check

- Shows current good standing
- Company name correct
- Readable dates

Public Liability Insurance

- What it is: insurance that covers third-party injury and property damage.
- Where to get it: your insurer or broker issues a certificate of insurance.
- What to include: insurer name, policy number, limit of indemnity, expiry date, insured name, and description of work.
- Quality: confirm limits meet client spec; check expiry covers the project; request an updated certificate if dates change.
- File name suggestion: YYYYMMDD_PLI_Certificate_[Project].pdf.
- Where to file: Section 1.3; digital in /01_Company_Docs/Insurance/.

Quick check

- Limit meets client minimum
- Dates valid
- Insured name is exact

2. Contractor Appointment Documentation

Mandatory Agreement with Client

- What it is: the formal agreement that sets out health and safety responsibilities between you and the client.
- Action: get the signed agreement from the client or contract pack; ensure your company details are correct.
- Check: the scope matches the work you will perform; sign where required.
- File: Section 2.1; digital folder /02_Contractor_Appointment/Client_Agreement/.

Quick check

- Signed by both parties
- Scope matches your work
- Company info correct

Contractor Appointment from Client

- What it is: the letter or document that appoints you for the project (e.g., Principal Contractor or Contractor).
- Action: request it from the client representative if missing.
- Check: project name, site address, dates, and your company name are correct.
- File: Section 2.2; digital folder /02_Contractor_Appointment/Appointment/.

Quick check

- Shows correct role
- Names and dates correct
- Legible and signed

Client Health & Safety Specifications

- What it is: client's H&S; rules for this project.
- Action: file the full specification. Highlight the parts that apply to your scope.
- Link: make a short note in your H&S; Plan showing where you meet each requirement.
- File: Section 2.3; digital /02_Contractor_Appointment/Client_Spec/.

Quick check

- Complete copy filed
- Relevant clauses highlighted
- Cross-referenced in your H&S Plan

Client Baseline Risk Assessment

- What it is: the client's list of known hazards for the project before work starts.
- Action: file the document and read it line by line.
- Link: make sure your risk assessments and method statements address every applicable hazard.
- File: Section 2.4; digital /02_Contractor_Appointment/Client_Baseline/.

Quick check

- Filed and read
- Mapped to your controls
- All applicable hazards covered

Mandatory Agreements with Contractors

- What it is: signed agreements with each subcontractor about H&S; responsibilities.
- Action: sign one with every subcontractor and collect their LOGS, insurance and competencies.
- List: create a subcontractor list with company name, scope, contact, and agreement date.
- File: Section 2.5; digital /02_Contractor_Appointment/Subcontractors/ with one subfolder per company.

Quick check

- Agreement signed for every subcontractor
- Evidence of competence attached
- Register kept up to date

3. Plans & Policies

Health and Safety Plan

- What it is: your project rule book. It explains responsibilities, training, risk management, emergency response, audits and record keeping.
- Action: write it for this project. Use the client spec and baseline risks to set your controls.
- Include: project details, roles, communication, risk process, emergency arrangements, monitoring and file contents.
- Approval: sign and date. Keep a revision table on page 1.
- File: Section 3; place near the front and cross-reference other sections.

Quick check

- Project-specific (not generic)
- Signed and dated
- Easy to navigate

Fall Protection Plan

- What it is: the plan for all work at height, including rescue.
- Action: define access, edge protection, anchors, harness systems, inspections and rescue steps.
- Include: names of competent persons, equipment control, training, and rescue equipment locations.
- File: behind the H&S; Plan under Section 3.

Quick check

- Rescue method is practical
- Equipment inspections scheduled
- Roles named

Occupational Health & Safety Policy

- What it is: management's commitment to health and safety.
- Action: put it on letterhead, sign and date it. Display a copy on site.
- Content: commitment to comply with law, prevent injury/ill health, and provide resources.
- File: Section 3.

Quick check

- Current signature
- Clear commitments
- Visible on site

Environmental Policy

- What it is: commitment to environmental protection on the project.
- Action: sign on letterhead. State waste, spill, and pollution controls at a high level.
- File: Section 3.

Quick check

- Signed and dated
- Relevant to your activities
- Aligns with client rules

Site Rules

- What it is: simple rules everyone must follow on site.
- Action: keep it to one page: access, PPE, housekeeping, speed limits, smoking, alcohol/drugs, reporting hazards.
- Display: post at entrances and include in induction.
- File: Section 3.

Quick check

- Clear and short
- Displayed on site
- Briefed at induction

Section 14: Duties of Employees

- What it is: employees' legal duties in plain words.
- Action: print and brief workers. Ask them to acknowledge in induction.
- File: Section 3.

Quick check

- All workers briefed
- Acknowledgement recorded
- Displayed in welfare area

Substance Abuse Policy

- What it is: rules on alcohol and drugs on site.
- Action: write when testing applies, who authorises testing, consequences, and support channels.
- File: Section 3.

Quick check

- Clear zero tolerance where required
- Fair process stated
- Privacy respected

HIV/AIDS & Chronic Diseases Policy

- What it is: commitment to non-discrimination and support; infection control basics.
- Action: include confidentiality and referral to medical services.
- File: Section 3.

Quick check

- Non-discrimination stated
- Privacy protected
- Up-to-date contacts included

(POPI) Act Policy for Health and Safety and Site Safety Files

- What it is: how you handle personal information in the Safety File.
- Action: restrict access to medicals and IDs; store securely; share on need-to-know only.
- Include: consent where applicable, retention times, and destruction process.
- File: Section 3.

Quick check

- Restricted medicals
- Access list controlled
- Retention defined

Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan

- What it is: what to do when things go wrong.
- Action: draw a simple site map; mark muster points and emergency equipment.
- Include: alarms, roles, numbers, clinics, hospital route, drills and log.
- File: Section 3; display key pages on noticeboards.

Quick check

- Numbers are current
- Drills recorded
- Map is readable

Working at Heights Procedure

- What it is: step-by-step method to plan, set up, work and close out any height work.
- Action: cover permits, access, edge protection, harness use, inspections, weather limits, and exclusion zones.
- File: Section 3; cross-reference Fall Protection Plan.

Quick check

- Clear steps
- Linked to rescue plan
- Inspection intervals defined

Waste Management Procedure

- What it is: how you handle, store and remove waste.
- Action: list waste types, storage, segregation, disposal method and records.
- File: Section 3.

Quick check

- Bins labelled
- Waste removed regularly
- Disposal records kept

4. Organogram & Legal Appointments

Project Health & Safety Organogram

- What it is: a one-page picture of who is in charge and who reports to whom.
- Action: include names, roles and phone numbers. Put it on a noticeboard.
- Update when people change.

Quick check

- Names and phones visible
- Matches appointment letters
- Updated immediately

Legal Appointment Letters + Competency Certificates

- What it is: written appointments for roles such as Project Manager, Construction Manager, Construction Supervisor, First Aiders, Fire Marshals, Scaffold Inspectors, Operators.
- Action: issue signed letters with duties and dates. Attach proof of competence and ID for each person.
- Track expiries in a small register.

Quick check

- All required roles appointed
- Competencies valid
- Expiry dates tracked

5. Incident Management

Emergency Contact Numbers

- Action: compile a list with client contacts, site management, first aiders, fire/ambulance/police, nearest clinic and hospital route.
- Post at entrances and first aid points; add to the Safety File.

Quick check

- Phone numbers current
- Posted in multiple areas
- In the file front section

Incident Register

- Action: open on day one. Record all incidents, near misses and first aid cases.
- Include: date/time, what happened, who was involved, initial actions and follow-up.

Quick check

- Every event logged
- Follow-up tracked
- Totals reviewed monthly

Incident Reporting & Investigation Procedure

- Action: write a clear flow: make safe → treat → notify → record → investigate → correct → verify.
- Include: roles, forms to use, timelines and who signs off.

Quick check

- Everyone knows the steps
- Investigations start quickly
- Actions closed and verified

Injury Treatment Record (Dressing Record)

- Action: keep a simple record for every treatment given on site.
- Include: name, date, time, injury, treatment, who treated, and whether referred.

Quick check

- Every treatment recorded
- Privacy respected
- Stored with incidents

Hazardous Chemical Substances Register

- Action: list all chemicals on site with supplier, quantity and location.
- Link: keep the MSDS next to each entry.

Quick check

- Matches actual chemicals
- Locations accurate
- Linked to MSDS

Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS)

- Action: file the latest MSDS for every chemical on site.
- Include: language workers understand; keep copies near storage and in the file.

Quick check

- Current versions
- Accessible on site
- Workers briefed

WCL2 & WCL1 Forms

- Action: keep blank forms ready and know when to submit them for COIDA processes.
- Coordinate with HR/Compensation practitioner to meet timelines.

Quick check

- Correct form used
- Submitted on time
- Copies kept in file

Annexure 1 Investigation Forms

- Action: open for incidents that require a formal investigation.
- Attach statements, photos, risk assessments and close-out actions.

Quick check

- Complete and signed
- Evidence attached
- Actions closed

6. Risk Management

Risk Assessment Review Register

- Action: create a simple list of all risk assessments, version numbers and review dates.
- Review after incidents, changes, or monthly.

Quick check

- Shows version and date
- Reviews recorded
- Linked to actual tasks

Risk Assessment Procedure

- Action: explain your method to identify hazards, rate risk and choose controls.
- Keep the scoring system simple (likelihood x consequence).

Quick check

- Easy to follow
- Consistent scoring
- Used by supervisors

Monitor & Review Plan

- Action: plan when to check controls: daily supervision, weekly PTOs, monthly audits.
- Record checks and track corrective actions to closure.

Quick check

- Set intervals
- Evidence of checks
- Closed actions

Planned Task Observations (PTO`s)

- Action: supervisors watch a task in progress and compare it to the safe method.
- Record findings and fix problems immediately.

Quick check

- Done weekly for high risk tasks
- Findings recorded
- Improvements verified

Daily Safe Task Instructions (DSTI`s)

- Action: quick talk before work: hazards today, controls, who does what, and stop work signals.
- All workers sign to confirm they understand.

Quick check

- Happens before work
- Specific to today's task
- Signatures captured

Task-Specific Risk Assessments

- Action: for each activity (e.g., working at height, excavation), write the hazards and controls step by step.
- Keep it short and clear; workers must understand it.

Quick check

- Matches the actual method
- Controls practical
- Reviewed after changes

Safe Work Procedures

- Action: write the steps to do the job safely from planning to closeout.
- Include tools, PPE, permits, isolation, housekeeping and signoff.

Quick check

- Steps are logical
- Linked to TSRAs
- Workers briefed

7. Employee Details

Induction Attendance Registers

- Action: induct every person before they start work; record signatures and dates.
- Store copies in the file and keep a site copy at access control.

Quick check

- Everyone inducted
- Registers legible
- Updated for new starters

List of Employees

- Action: maintain a current list with name, company, role, and contact number.
- Update when people join or leave.

Quick check

- Matches people on site
- Emergency contacts included
- Updated daily if needed

Employee Detail Forms

- Action: collect key details (ID, next of kin, medical notes relevant to fitness).
- Protect privacy and store securely.

Quick check

- Accurate data
- Secure storage
- Access controlled

Medical Certificates of Fitness

- Action: keep proof that workers are fit for the tasks they perform.
- Track expiry dates and book renewals early.

Quick check

- Valid and task-specific
- Expiry tracked
- Copies readable

Competency Certificates & ID Copies

- Action: file certificates for operators, first aiders, working at heights, etc., with ID copies as proof.
- Check provider accreditation where applicable.

Quick check

- Certificates match roles
- In date and valid
- ID copies clear

8. PPE Issue & Control

Personal Protective Equipment Policy

- Action: write what PPE is required for your tasks and who provides and replaces it.
- Explain storage, cleaning and disposal of damaged PPE.

Quick check

- Clear responsibilities
- Aligned to risk
- Available to workers

PPE Issue Register

- Action: record every item issued with size, date and the worker's signature.
- Check condition regularly and replace on schedule.

Quick check

- Traceable issue history
- No damaged PPE in use
- Replacements recorded

Personal Protective Equipment Procedure

- Action: describe how to select, issue, inspect and replace PPE, including training in correct use.
- Include signage and enforcement steps.

Quick check

- Simple steps
- Inspection intervals set
- Enforced consistently

9. Checklists & Registers

Daily, Weekly & Monthly Inspection Checklists

- Action: use the right checklist for the item (scaffolds, ladders, lifting gear, vehicles, electrical tools).
- Record defects and fix them with target dates.

Quick check

- 100% scheduled checks done
- Defects closed out
- Signatures and dates present

Equipment List

- Action: list all equipment on site with unique ID, owner and required inspection frequency.
- Update when equipment arrives or leaves site.

Quick check

- List matches reality
- IDs visible on equipment
- Frequencies correct

10. Training & Awareness

Toolbox Talk Registers

- Action: plan topics that match current risks and incidents.
- Record attendance and keep talks short and clear.

Quick check

- Weekly or as needed
- Relevant topics
- Everyone signs

Awareness Training Attendance

- Action: keep proof of any awareness sessions (HIV, HCS, environmental).
- Link sessions to live risks on site.

Quick check

- Attendance recorded
- Topics relevant
- Stored with training

11. Communication Registers

Safety File Communication Registers

- Action: record all formal H&S; communications: instructions, bulletins, client directives, and acknowledgements.
- Keep dates, who received, and what actions resulted.

Quick check

- Every instruction traceable
- Actions tracked
- Acknowledgements on file

Safety Meeting Attendance Records

- Action: keep minutes and attendance for safety meetings and ensure actions have owners and due dates.
- Verify closure at the next meeting.

Quick check

- Minutes filed
- Actions closed
- Attendance complete

12. Legislation

Legal Register

- Action: list the Acts/Regulations that apply and note where each requirement is addressed in your file (policy, procedure, assessment).
- Update when scope or law changes.

Quick check

- Cross-references in place
- Up to date
- Easy to read

Occupational Health & Safety Act 85 of 1993

- Action: keep a copy accessible on site (digital or printed).
- Brief workers on relevant duties and rights.

Quick check

- Copy available
- People know where it is
- Referenced in your H&S Plan

Construction Regulations 2014

- Action: keep a copy accessible; link key duties to your appointments, plans and procedures.

Quick check

- Copy available
- Links made in file
- Used during planning

COID Act

- Action: keep a copy or guidance handy for injury reporting and claims handling.

Quick check

- Accessible on site
- Used when incidents occur
- Linked to WCL forms

Wrap■Up

If a stranger can find any document in under 60 seconds using your index, you have a good Safety File. Keep both the physical binder and the digital master up to date. Review monthly or when the work changes.

One■minute health check

- Index is complete and matches the file
- All dates are valid (insurance, LOGS, medicals, certificates)
- Incidents are logged and actions closed
- Risk assessments reflect today's work