

Can I Make My Employees Get a Haircut?



QUESTION

Can I require the male employees I manage to cut their hair? I'm not talking buzz cut—just something below shoulder length?

ANSWER

Probably not.

EXPLANATION

Personal grooming policies are allowed only in very limited situations. Unfortunately, I don't know enough about your situation to determine whether you could implement such a policy at your own organization—although the fact that it applies only to men raises a very red flag. What I can do is present a few scenarios to help you and the other HR directors reading this determine whether it would be okay to make their employees cut their hair:

MANDATORY HAIRCUT POLICIES

MIGHT BE OK IF:	NOT OK IF:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The policy is in writing and clearly explained• The policy is necessary for health or safety, e.g., risk employee might get hair caught in a machine• The policy applies equally to women who face the same hazard• You can't accomplish the same purpose in a less intrusive way, e.g., by simply having employees restrain their hair• Wearing their hair long isn't part of employees' religious practice or ethnicity• The policy doesn't violate employees' rights under the collective agreement• The policy is consistently enforced	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The policy isn't in writing• The policy is vague and ambiguous• The policy is based on taste, aesthetics or subjective notions about how people, i.e., men should wear their hair• You claim but can't prove the policy is based on health or safety• The policy is based on health or safety but it applies only to men• Forcing employees to cut their hair intrude upon their religious beliefs or ethnicity• The policy is inconsistent with the terms of the collective agreement• The policy isn't consistently enforced

The 7 Conditions Under Which Personal Grooming Policies Are Allowed

In sum, employers *are* allowed to impose a personal grooming or dress code only if:

1. It serves a legitimate and important purpose;
2. The policy is necessary to accomplish the purpose;
3. There are no less restrictive alternatives that will accomplish the purpose;
4. The policy is clear and unambiguous about what's allowed;
5. The policy doesn't violate the collective agreement (in a union workplace);
6. The policy doesn't discriminate on the basis of gender, race, religion, etc.;
and
7. You enforce the policy consistently.

For More Help with Dress Codes & Personal Appearance Policies

- [Model Dress Code Policy](#)
- [Model Summer Dress Code Policy](#)

GOT A QUESTION FOR OUR EXPERTS?

Submit it to glennd@bongarde.com