



## August 2023 Q&A with Affinity HR Group

**Question: We have received complaints about the hygiene of one of our employees. Can we address it with them?**

**Answer:** Companies can usually require employees to follow basic personal hygiene while at work. This can include body odor, makeup, hair style, or facial hair. However, employers may not be able to require employees to "look" a certain way simply based on the personal preference of management, co-workers, or a client.

While certain standards may be set by a company, requirements that discriminate against an employee's race, national origin, religion, ethnicity, etc. are prohibited. These may include prohibiting certain hair styles or restricting facial hair.

Certain factors may need to be considered when deciding on appropriate action.

- **Job duties:** An employee whose job duties require physical exertion or working in uncontrolled climate conditions should be given more latitude than those who work in an office, for example.
- **Safety:** Since it is a primary concern, any factor (including personal hygiene) which negatively impacts the safety of the employee or others can be required to be corrected or changed.
- **Need vs. want:** While some restrictions may be legitimate (i.e., "Beards must be short enough so a gas mask fits properly"), others based on preference (i.e., "All men must be clean-shaven") may be prohibited.
- **Reasonable Accommodation:** Certain personal hygiene issues may need to be permitted as reasonable accommodation due to medical issues or religious or cultural beliefs.

When deciding whether to address an issue with an employee, assess all factors of the situation then, if needed, address the employee with sensitivity as there may be factors beyond their control such as finances or a medical condition. Document the conversation and protect any information gathered. Be consistent in what is required of all employees in a similar situation, being sure to not target certain employees or groups.

Affinity HR Group offers one-on-one support for all of your workplace challenges. Connect with us at 877-660-6400 or [hello@AffinityHRGroup.com](mailto:hello@AffinityHRGroup.com) for help.