



# Employment Practices

**HR**

Courtesy of Meridian Benefits Consulting

**Q**

**Can I put restrictions on how employees dress or do their hair at work?**

**A**

Yes. Generally, employers have the right to create and enforce consistent and nondiscriminatory dress and hygiene policies, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Suggestions for drafting and enforcing such policies include:

- Explain the reasons for regulations (e.g., safety, visibility to customers, health).
- Inform all employees of the requirements and the consequences for failing to comply.
- Enforce policies and the consequences for violations consistently among all employees.
- Keep policies flexible enough to accommodate religious, racial and ethnic concerns. However, keep in mind that if providing an accommodation would create a legitimate safety issue or a bona fide hardship for the business, employers are not required to provide it.
- Set guidelines that fit the work environment—take safety, customer contact, type of business and working conditions into consideration.
- Ensure that guidelines do not affect a protected group of people differently than others—a guideline influenced by racial considerations is unlawful according to the EEOC.
- Avoid basing guidelines on perceived beliefs of others—an employer might think that customers feel wearing bright colors is unprofessional, but this may not represent the true beliefs of customers.

Regardless of whether or not there are dress and hygiene policies in place, employers are allowed to address issues of inappropriate attire and hygiene on a case-by-case basis, as long as they do so consistently and if their reasons are nondiscriminatory.