

Can we set different dress codes for each department?

Q. We are a retail company with about 200 employees. We have six different departments. The supervisors are not agreeing on an overall dress code. They wondered if there's any legal risk in having each department make and follow its own dress code. (Everyone works in the same office space.) — Michele, Minnesota

A. There is no legal reason that you must have the same dress code for each department. If some employees work with customers, for example, it would make very good sense to have a different dress code for them (perhaps more formal, or perhaps modeling the items you sell) than for the office workers.

If, however, everyone works under the same roof with roughly the same needs to interact with others, it will be challenging to enforce different dress codes without causing some ill feelings.

However, as long as the rules do not discriminate between workers based on a protected classification (race, age, sex, religion, etc.), the problems with enforcement are likely to be employee relations issues and not legal concerns.