Risk Assessment

Whether you are an employer or self-employed, you have a legal obligation to assess the risks in your workplace and arising from your work practices. Improving health and safety need not be costly; however, failure to make simple adjustments to the way you work and/or your workplace may have very expensive consequences.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, require that employers, and the self-employed, must undertake a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. These regulations also require employers to take particular account young people and new and expectant mothers.

A risk assessment is simply an examination of your work and your working environment. The purpose of a risk assessment is to identify anything with the potential to cause accidents and ill health to either you, your employees or to members of the public/visitors.

If this assessment identifies a significant a risk to health and safety, the employer, or the self employed person, must implement measures to either eliminate or control the risk to a reasonable level. The law does have an appreciation for the fact that it is not possible to eliminate all risk; however, it does require all risks to be controlled.

Employers who employ 5 or more employees have a legal duty to record the significant findings of the assessment; however, it is considered good practice for all assessments to be recorded irrespective of employee number. It should be noted that when tendering for contracts, some companies might require a written risk assessment to demonstrate a commitment to health and safety.

The risk assessment must be reviewed on a regular basis, as and when there are any changes in the environment, personnel, equipment used etc. and this should be done at least annually irrespective of change in the aforementioned. Although the employer/self-employed person has the responsibility to ensure that the risk assessment is carried out, they must also ensure that whoever undertakes the risk assessment is competent to do so. This may be via formal training or simply by virtue of time served in that particular discipline.

What is Risk Assessment?

A HAZARD is defined as “anything, which has the potential to cause harm”

Examples of typical hazards are as follows:

- Working at height with no edge protection
- Working in the presence of asbestos containing materials
- Working with chemicals.

Once the hazard has been identified it is possible to consider the risk from that hazard.

A RISK is defined as “the likelihood of a particular hazard causing harm”

Examples of typical risks are as follows:

- A person falling from height
- Exposure to asbestos fibres
- A burn caused by a spillage of a chemical on to exposed skin.

In order to differentiate between the severities of the identified risks, it is important to give them a risk rating, i.e. Low, medium or high.

In order to assist you with this, consider the following:

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Minor impact/damage quickly repaired	**Moderate impact/partial loss of operations**	**Disaster/very serious consequences**

Risk assessments do not need to be overcomplicated; it is essential only to judge whether the hazards are significant and whether or not the precautions in place are satisfactory.

Conducting Risk Assessments

There are 5 main steps:

Step 1 - Identify the Hazards

First you need to work out how people could be harmed. When you work in a place every day it is easy to overlook some hazards, so here are some tips to help you identify the ones that matter:

- **Walk around** your workplace and look at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm.
- **Ask your employees** or their representatives what they think. They may have noticed things that are not immediately obvious to you.
- **Check manufacturers’ instructions** or data sheets for chemicals and equipment as they can be very helpful in spelling out the hazards and putting them into their true perspective.
- Have a look back at your **accident and ill-health records** – these often help to identify the less obvious hazards.
- **Remember to think about long-term hazards to health** (e.g. high levels of noise or exposure to harmful substances) as well as safety hazards.

Refer to the Hazard indicator checklist at the end of this Guidance Note for further assistance.

List them in column one on Risk Assessment Form

Alternative forms and guidance notes are available to use for specific hazards and risks such as chemicals, noise, vibration and for certain groups of staff such as new and expectant mothers. Please refer to the document library for more specific advice.

Step 2 - Decide Who Might be Harmed and How

For each hazard you need to be clear about who might be harmed. There is no need to list everyone by name, but rather identify what groups of people (e.g. 'people working in the storeroom 'or 'passers-by'), might be at risk.

In each case, identify how they might be harmed, i.e. what type of injury or ill health might occur. For example, 'construction workers may suffer back injury from repeated lifting of building materials'. It is vital to be aware that some workers may have particular requirements, e.g. new and young workers, new or expectant mothers and people with disabilities may be at particular risk.
Further consideration needs to be made for the following groups:

- Cleaners, visitors, contractors, maintenance workers etc, who may not be in the workplace all the time.
- Members of the public, if they could be harmed by your activities.
- If you share your workplace, you will need to think about how your work affects others present, as well as how their work affects your staff.

List them in column 2 on the Risk Assessment Form

Step 3 - Evaluate the Risks and Decide on Precautions

Once the hazards have been identified, appropriate control measures need to be implemented. The law requires you to do everything 'reasonably practicable' to protect people from harm. Initially you need to look at the current work situation to see what you're already doing, consider what controls you have in place and how the work is organised. Then compare this with best practice to see if there's more you should be doing to bring yourself up to standard. This will mean that additional control measures are required.

With the existing and additional control measures in place you must then decide if the residual risk high, medium or low?

When looking at the situation you need to keep the following in mind:

- Am I complying with legislation and Approved codes of practice?
- Are all accepted industry standards in place?
- Is everything that is reasonably practicable being done to reduce the risk to the lowest level possible?
- Can the hazard be eliminated altogether?
- If not, how can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?

When controlling risks, apply the principles below, if possible in the following order:

- Try a less risky option (e.g. switch to using a less hazardous chemical);
- Prevent access to the hazard (e.g. by guarding);
- Organise work to reduce exposure to the hazard (e.g. put barriers between pedestrians and traffic);
- Issue personal protective equipment (e.g. clothing, footwear, goggles etc); and
- Provide welfare facilities (e.g. first aid and washing facilities for removal of contamination).

If the work practices or the working environment changes, or if there is generally any significant change, the risk assessment will need to be reviewed, and possibly modified.

List precautions in column 3 and the residual risk factor can be completed once precautions have been put into place in column 4 on the Risk Assessment Form.

Step 4 - Record your Findings and Implement

The benefits of recording the details of your risks assessments are far more than simply compliance with the law and industry best practice. It also proves to staff and potential clients that health and safety issues have been considered and relevant action has been taken to eliminate these risks and subsequently provide a safer working environment.

When recording your results, keep it simple, over complicated assessments will not be fully appreciated by those who are expected to adhere to them.

All risk assessments carried out must be suitable and sufficient. You need to be able to show that:

- A proper check was made;
- You asked who might be affected;
- You dealt with all the significant hazards, taking into account the number of people who could be involved;
- The precautions are reasonable, and the remaining risk is as low as possible;
- You involved your staff or their representatives in the process.

Make sure that all employees are made aware of the risk assessments and their control measures via training and communication. Appropriate supervision may be necessary to ensure that staff are adhering to control measures.

An example risk assessment form can be found in the Risk Assessment Guidance Note, subtopic risk assessment form and at the end of this document with a worked example of two common hazards.

Step 5 - Review your Risk Assessment and Update it if Necessary

Your risk assessments should be considered a live document and as such be reviewed on a regular basis to determine if the process, personnel or environment has altered since the time of the last assessment. Consideration must be given to changes in legislation and industry best practice. You should also consult with employees as they may have identified failings in the current control measures that have not been picked up by the risk assessment.

Risk assessments need to be revised (and a revision date documented) after;

- A change of working practice
- The delivery of new equipment
- Any adverse event, accident, equipment failure etc

Overview:

- Identify hazards
- Identify who might be harmed

- Identify the risks and if existing control measures are adequate
- Identify if further controls are necessary
- Inform, implement and monitor
- Document your findings
- Complete periodic review of assessments - train staff as necessary

Further Guidance:

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, L21, ISBN 0110856252

Successful Health and Safety Management Revised, HSG65, ISBN 0717612767

Five Steps to Risk Assessment, INDG163 (rev2)

The above publications are available from HSE Books - 01787881165

Hazard Checklist

Hazard Type	Yes	No
1. Fall of person from height	☐	☐
2. Fall of object or material from height	☐	☐
3. Fall of person on same level (e.g. slip or trip)	☐	☐
4. Manual handling (includes: pushing / pulling as well as lifting and carrying and repetitive actions)	☐	☐
5. Use of machinery	☐	☐
6. Operation of vehicles	☐	☐
7. Electricity or electrical equipment	☐	☐
8. Drowning	☐	☐
9. Excavation work (where this is part of the task)	☐	☐
10. Stored energy (e.g. elastic cords, hydraulic & air pressured systems)	☐	☐
11. Explosions (e.g. from chemicals or dust)	☐	☐
12. Contact with excessively hot or cold surfaces	☐	☐
13. Compressed air or gases	☐	☐
14. Mechanical lifting operations	☐	☐
15. Noise	☐	☐
16. Biological agents	☐	☐
17. Hot work	☐	☐
18. Asbestos	☐	☐
19. Excessive vibration	☐	☐
20. Use of hand tools	☐	☐
21. Outdoor work - weather	☐	☐
22. Chemicals or substances	☐	☐
23. Storage, stacking or shelving	☐	☐
24. Stress	☐	☐
25. Lighting levels (too high or too low, glare, rapid changes)	☐	☐
26. Confined spaces	☐	☐
27. Temporary workplace	☐	☐
28. Use of display screen equipment (as part of the task)	☐	☐
29. Lone or unaccompanied working	☐	☐
30. Exposure to personal violence or aggression	☐	☐
31. Other (please state)	☐	☐

Transfer all hazards identified as Yes in the tick box to column one on the risk assessment form

Risk Assessment Form

Company Name:	
Division / Department:	
Address / Location:	
Department Manager:	
Work Activity being Assessed:	

Assessment Number:	
Date Prepared:	
Review Date:	

Key To Assessment:	LOW Moderate impact/partial loss of operations	MEDIUM Moderate impact/partial loss of operations	HIGH Disaster/very serious consequences

Hazard/s	People at Risk	Precautions/controls required to reduce the level of risk to the lowest practicable level	Residual Risk Low/medium/high

Risk Assessment Form (Example)

Company Name:	Any Office
Division / Department:	Administration
Address / Location:	Any Town
Department Manager:	Mr Bloggs
Work Activity being Assessed:	Administrator

Assessment Number:	01/08
Date Prepared:	25 November 2008
Review Date:	25 November 2009

Key To Assessment:	LOW Moderate impact/partial loss of operations	MEDIUM Moderate impact/partial loss of operations	HIGH Disaster/very serious consequences

Hazard/s	People at Risk	Precautions/controls required to reduce the level of risk to the lowest practicable level	Residual Risk Low/medium/high
Operating Electrical Office Equipment	**Staff Contractors**	• **All electrical Equipment to be PAT tested and labelled** • **Area to be kept clean and tidy** • **Cables to be secured** • **Plug sockets not to be overloaded** • **Users trained in use of office equipment**	**Low**
Slip, Trip or Fall same level	**Staff Contractors**	• **Warning signs in noticeable places when cleaning activities undertaken** • **Spillage procedure for clearing standing liquids** • **No storage of materials or waste in public walkways** • **Keep trailing lead distance to a minimum by using nearest electrical point** • **Report any defects to carpets or other floor surfaces to maintenance team** • **No cable runs on throughway**	**Low**