

Five steps TO risk assessment





5 steps to **RISK ASSESSMENT**

This leaflet aims to help employers and self-employed people to assess risks in the workplace. It is aimed at firms in the commercial, service and light industrial sectors.

What is risk assessment?

A risk assessment is nothing more than a careful examination of what, in your work, could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. The aim is to make sure that no one gets hurt or becomes ill. Accidents and ill health can ruin lives, and affect your business too if output is lost, machinery is damaged, insurance costs increase, or you have to go to court. You are legally required to assess the risks in your workplace.

The important things you need to decide are whether a hazard is significant, and whether you have it covered by satisfactory precautions so that the risk is small. You need to check this when you assess the risks. For instance, electricity can kill but the risk of it doing so in an office environment is remote, provided that 'live' components are insulated and metal casings properly earthed.

How to assess the risks in your workplace

Follow the five steps in this leaflet:

STEP 1: Look for the hazards

STEP 2: Decide who might be harmed and how

STEP 3: Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done

STEP 4: Record your findings

STEP 5: Review your assessment and revise it if necessary

Don't be overcomplicated. In most firms in the commercial, service and light industrial sectors, the hazards are few and simple. Checking them is common sense, but necessary. You probably already know whether, for example, you have machinery that could cause harm, or if there is an awkward entrance or stair where someone could

be hurt. If so, check that you have taken what reasonable precautions you can to avoid injury.

If you are a small firm and you are confident you understand what's involved, you can do the assessment yourself (you don't have to be a health and safety expert!). If you are a larger firm, you could ask a responsible employee, safety representative or safety officer to help you. If you are not confident, get help from a competent source (see under 'Getting help' on page 8). But remember - you are responsible for seeing it is adequately done.

Hazard and Risk - don't let words in this guide put you off!

hazard means anything that can cause harm (eg chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, etc)

risk is the chance, high or low, that somebody will be harmed by the hazard.

STEP 1

Look for the hazards

If you are doing the assessment yourself, walk around your workplace and look afresh at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm. Ignore the trivial and concentrate on significant hazards which could result in serious harm or affect several people.

Ask your employees or their representatives what they think. They may have noticed things which are not immediately obvious. Manufacturers' instructions or data sheets can also help you spot hazards and put risks in their true perspective. So can accident and ill-health records.

STEP 2

Decide who might be harmed, and how

Don't forget:

- young workers, trainees, new and expectant mothers, etc who may be at particular risk
- cleaners, visitors, contractors, maintenance workers, etc who may not be in the workplace all the time
- members of the public, or people you share your workplace with, if there is a chance they could be hurt by your activities.



STEP 3

Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done

Consider how likely it is that each hazard could cause harm. This will determine whether or not you need to do more to reduce the risk. Even after all precautions have been taken, some risk usually remains. What you have to decide for each significant hazard is whether this **remaining risk is high, medium or low.**

First, ask yourself whether you have done all the things that the law says you have got to do. For example, there are legal requirements on prevention of access to dangerous parts of machinery. Then ask yourself whether generally accepted industry standards are in place. But don't stop there - think for yourself, because the law also says that you must do what is reasonably practicable to keep your workplace safe. Your real aim is to **make all risks small** by adding to your precautions as necessary.

If you find that something needs to be done, draw up an 'action list' and give priority to any remaining risks which are high and/or those which could affect most people. In taking action ask yourself:

- a) can I get rid of the hazard altogether?
- b) if not, how can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?

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

- try a less risky option
- prevent access to the hazard (eg by guarding)
- organise work to reduce exposure to the hazard
- issue personal protective equipment
- provide welfare facilities (eg washing facilities for removal of contamination and first aid)

Improving health and safety need not cost a lot. For instance, placing a mirror on a dangerous blind corner to help prevent vehicle accidents, or putting some non-slip material on slippery steps, are inexpensive precautions considering the risks. And failure to take simple precautions can cost you a lot more if an accident does happen.

STEP 4

Record your findings

But what if the work you do tends to vary a lot, or you or your employees move from one site to another? Identify the hazards you can reasonably expect and assess the risks from them. After that, if you spot any additional hazards when you get to a site, get information from others on site, and take what action seems necessary.

But what if you share a workplace? Tell the other employers and self-employed people there about any risks your work could cause them, and what precautions you are taking. Also, think about the risks to your own workforce from those who share your workplace.

But what if you have already assessed some of the risks?

If, for example, you use hazardous chemicals and you have already assessed the risks to health and the precautions you need to take under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH), you can consider them 'checked' and move on.

More information about legal requirements and standards can be found in the HSE publications *An Introduction to Health and Safety, Essentials of Health and Safety* and *Management of Health and Safety at Work: Approved Code of Practice*. Details of these are given on page 8.

If you have fewer than five employees you do not need to write anything down, though it is useful to keep a written record of what you have done. But if you employ five or more people you must record the significant findings of your assessment. This means writing down the significant hazards and conclusions. Examples might be 'Electrical installations: insulation and earthing checked and found sound' or 'Fume from welding: local exhaust ventilation provided and regularly checked'.

You must also tell your employees about your findings.

Suitable and sufficient - not perfect!

Risk assessments 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 obvious significant hazards, taking into account the number of people who could be involved
- the precautions are reasonable, and the remaining risk is low.

STEP 5

Keep the written record for future reference or use; it can help you if an inspector asks what precautions you have taken, or if you become involved in any action for civil liability. It can also remind you to keep an eye on particular hazards and precautions. And it helps to show that you have done what the law requires. There is an example at the end of this guide which you may find helpful to refer to, but you can make up your own form if you prefer.

To make things simpler, you can refer to other documents, such as manuals, the arrangements in your health and safety policy statement, company rules, manufacturers' instructions, your health and safety procedures and your arrangements for general fire safety. These may already list hazards and precautions. You don't need to repeat all that, and it is up to you whether you combine all the documents, or keep them separately.

Review your assessment and revise it if necessary

Sooner or later you will bring in new machines, substances and procedures which could lead to new hazards. If there is any significant change, add to the assessment to take account of the new hazard. Don't amend your assessment for every trivial change, or still more, for each new job, but if a new job introduces significant new hazards of its own, you will want to consider them in their own right and do whatever you need to keep the risks down. In any case, it is good practice to review your assessment from time to time to make sure that the precautions are still working effectively.



Getting help

Here's a selection of practical guidance to help you. If you are still stuck on the assessment, your local health and safety inspector can advise you on what to do.

You will find most of what you need to know about standards and legal requirements in:

An introduction to health and safety
INDG259 1997 **FREE**

Essentials of health and safety at work
ISBN 0 7176 0716 X 1995 **£5.95**

but you might also find the following useful:

Management of health and safety at work: approved code of practice
ISBN 0 7176 0412 8 1992 **£5**

Successful health and safety management HSG65
ISBN 0 7176 1276 7 1997 **£12.50**

Writing your health and safety policy statement ISBN 0 7176 0424 1 1989 **£3**

Selecting a health and safety consultancy INDG133 1992 **FREE**

COSHH: the new brief guide for employers INDG136 1996 **FREE**

Personal Protective Equipment at Work: Guidance on Regulations L25
ISBN 0 7176 0415 2 1992 **£5**

Getting to grips with manual handling
INDG143 1993 **FREE**

Electrical safety and you INDG231
1996 **FREE**

Managing vehicle safety at the workplace INDG199 1995 **FREE**

Workplace transport safety HSG136
ISBN 0 7176 0935 9 1995 **£7.50**

Working with VDUs INDG36 1998
FREE

Display screen equipment work: guidance on regulations L26
ISBN 0 7176 0410 1 1992 **£5**

Whose risk is it anyway video **£12.50**
(available from CFL Vision, PO Box 35,
Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7EX)

The publications listed above (except the video) may be obtained from:

HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury,
Suffolk CO10 2WA

Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995

HSE offices

Inter City House
Mitchell Lane
Victoria Street
BRISTOL BS1 6AN
Tel: 01179 886000
Fax: 01179 262998

Priestley House
Priestley Road
BASINGSTOKE RG24 9NW
Tel: 01256 404000
Fax: 01256 404100

3 East Grinstead House
London Road
EAST GRINSTEAD RH19 1RR
Tel: 01342 334200
Fax: 01342 334222

St Dunstan's House
201-211 Borough High Street
LONDON SE1 1GZ
Tel: 0171 556 2100
Fax: 0171 556 2200

39 Baddow Road
CHELMSFORD CM2 0HL
Tel: 01245 706200
Fax: 01245 706222

14 Cardiff Road
LUTON LU1 1PP
Tel: 01582 444200
Fax: 01582 444320

Belgrave House
1 Greyfriars
NORTHAMPTON NN1 2BS
Tel: 01604 738300
Fax: 01604 738333

McLaren Building
35 Dale End
BIRMINGHAM B4 7NP
Tel: 0121 607 6200
Fax: 0121 607 6349

Government Buildings
Ty Glas
Llanishen
CARDIFF CF14 5SH
Tel: 01222 263000
Fax: 01222 263120

The Marches House
Midway
NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME
ST5 1DT
Tel: 01782 602300
Fax: 01782 602400

1st Floor
The Pearson Building
55 Upper Parliament Street
NOTTINGHAM NG1 6AU
Tel: 01159 712800
Fax: 01159 712802

Sovereign House
110 Queen Street
SHEFFIELD S1 2ES
Tel: 0114 291 2300
Fax: 0114 291 2379

8 St Paul's Street
LEEDS LS1 2LE
Tel: 0113 283 4200
Fax: 0113 283 4296

Quay House
Quay Street
MANCHESTER M3 3JB
Tel: 0161 952 8200
Fax: 0161 952 8222

The Triad
Stanley Road
Bootle
MERSEYSIDE L20 3PG
Tel: 0151 479 2200
Fax: 0151 479 2201

Victoria House
Ormskirk Road
PRESTON PR1 1HH
Tel: 01772 836200
Fax: 01772 836222

Arden House
Regent Centre
Regent Farm Road
Gosforth
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
NE3 3JN
Tel: 0191 202 6200
Fax: 0191 202 6300

Belford House
59 Belford Road
EDINBURGH EH4 3UE
Tel: 0131 247 2000
Fax: 0131 247 2121

375 West George Street
GLASGOW G2 4LW
Tel: 0141 275 3000
Fax: 0141 275 3100

STEP 1

Hazard

Look only for hazards which you could reasonably expect to result in significant harm under the conditions in your workplace. Use the following examples as a guide

- slipping/tripping hazards (eg poorly maintained floors or stairs)
- fire (eg from flammable materials)
- chemicals (eg battery acid)
- moving parts of machinery (eg blades)
- work at height (eg from mezzanine floors)
- ejection of material (eg from plastic moulding)
- pressure systems (eg steam boilers)
- vehicles (eg fork-lift trucks)
- electricity (eg poor wiring)
- dust (eg from grinding)
- fumes (eg welding)
- manual handling
- noise
- poor lighting
- low temperature

STEP 2

Who might be harmed?

There is no need to list individuals by name - just think about groups of people doing similar work or who may be affected, eg

- office staff
- maintenance personnel
- contractors
- people sharing your workplace
- operators
- cleaners
- members of the public

Pay particular attention to:

- staff with disabilities
- visitors
- inexperienced staff
- lone workers

They may be more vulnerable

STEP 3

Is more needed to control the risk?

For the hazards listed, do the precautions already taken:

- meet the standards set by a legal requirement?
- comply with a recognised industry standard?
- represent good practice?
- reduce risk as far as reasonably practicable?

Have you provided:

- adequate information, instruction or training?
- adequate systems or procedures?

If so, then the risks are adequately controlled, but you need to indicate the precautions you have in place. (You may refer to procedures, company rules, etc.)

Where the risk is not adequately controlled, indicate what more you need to do (the 'action list')

STEP 5

Review and revision

Set a date for review of the assessment (see opposite).

On review check that the precautions for each hazard still adequately control the risk. If not indicate the action needed. Note the outcome. If necessary complete a new page for your risk assessment.

Making changes in your workplace, eg when bringing in new

- machines
- substances
- procedures

may introduce significant new hazards. Look for them and follow the 5 steps.

5 steps to **RISK ASSESSMENT**

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA. Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995.

This leaflet is available in priced packs of 10 from HSE Books, ISBN 0 7176 1565 0. Single free copies are also available from HSE Books.

HSE priced publications are also available from good booksellers.

For other enquiries ring HSE's InfoLine Tel: 0541 545500, or write to HSE's Information Centre, Broad Lane, Sheffield S3 7HQ.

HSE home page on the World Wide Web:
<http://www.open.gov.uk/hse/hsehome.htm>

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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