

# HEALTH AND SAFETY: UNDERTAKING A RISK ASSESSMENT.

## Checklist 056

### » INTRODUCTION

In the United Kingdom, employers and business owners have a legal duty to manage health and safety and provide a safe and healthy workplace as part of their general duties to employees and this includes undertaking risk assessments. The need to assess risks to employees is implied by Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. Section 3 of the Act extends this duty to all those who may be affected by activities of the employer including contractors, partners, visitors, customers and members of the public. In addition, regulations such as the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999), and the Control of Substances Harmful to Health Regulations (2006) are more specific about the need for risk assessment.

Failure to comply with the relevant legislation can result in fines and/or imprisonment for those directly responsible, as well as senior managers or directors. If failure is deliberate and amounts to Gross Negligence, and a person dies as a result, then the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 as amended may be used to charge and prosecute organisation.

A risk assessment identifies hazards in the workplace and assesses the likelihood of accidents, so that employers can take action to prevent accidents and deal with the most pressing areas before there is a problem. Reducing accidents in the workplace benefits both employer and employee through the creation of a safer working environment and the savings gained from less time spent dealing with incidents and reduced productivity, as well as fewer accident claims. Carrying out a risk assessment can also help to improve workforce morale as it demonstrates a caring and responsible attitude. However, it is important for employers to be aware of the resource requirements in terms of staff time and effort if risk assessment is to be undertaken in a thorough and consistent manner.

This checklist focuses on legal requirements in the UK. It does not aim to cover the complex legal issues involved in risk assessment for which expert advice should be sought, but provides a general introduction for those carrying out a risk assessment in their organisation. The requirements of legislation relating to specific risk assessments in high hazard industries are not addressed here.

### » DEFINITION

A health and safety risk assessment is a planned procedure for identifying hazards in the workplace and evaluating their risk potential. This includes risk to the physical and mental well-being of personnel. Risk potential is calculated by combining likelihood (when and how often is an accident likely to happen) and severity (how serious the impact would be if an accident did happen). The aim of risk assessment is to identify sensible measures to control risks in the workplace.

## 1. Risk assessments

Risk assessments should be an integral part of any Health and Safety management system. They play a fundamental role in creating safe and effective working environments. Risk assessment is a continual process that examines the risk potential of all workplace hazards. All risk assessments should be reviewed on a regular basis depending on the level of the risk potential and whether there have been changes to any aspect of:

- › working practices
- › the location of machinery
- › new equipment
- › the capability of operators
- › changes in the working environment
- › alterations to buildings
- › dangerous materials
- › contractor management
- › visitor procedures.

In addition, the Regulatory Reform (Fire safety) Order 2005 requires fire risk assessments to be made. These examine the organisation's premises and classify what hazards are present and what provision has been made for means of escape and firefighting.

Risk assessments may need to be undertaken for various aspects of an organisation's operations and at differing levels within the organisation. These may be defined as:

- › corporate risk assessments, e.g. travelling on business, lone working, new contracts and stress
- › area/building risk assessment, e.g. lighting, ventilation, traffic routes, fire and first aid provision
- › specific risk assessments, e.g. task or process based.

## 2. Train assessors in identifying risk

Identifying risks in the workplace is not an easy task. Where the individual carrying out the risk assessment is not a qualified health and safety officer, it is essential to provide adequate training to ensure that those involved are competent. This might be obtained from an internal source, if available or from an external training provider. Suppliers of equipment, machinery or chemicals can be a good source of advice on suitable training. It is important to make sure that assessors are able to rate the severity of a risk. Examples of hazards should be discussed with the trainee(s) to ensure that a standardised approach is applied across the organisation.

## 3. Identify hazard types

The number and type of hazard will vary from place to place. Some of the more common are:

- › fire - flammable materials, heat sources, inadequate escape routes, obstructions
- › manual handling - lifting or reaching for items, carrying heavy or bulky loads
- › damaged electrical equipment or cables, damaged plugs and sockets, overloaded sockets
- › slips, trips and falls - trailing leads, slippery floors, liquid spillage, leaks, inadequate guard rails
- › cuts and bruises and other minor injuries – sharp edges, low ceilings, poor handling facilities
- › environment - inadequate lighting or ventilation, insufficient space, excessive noise, dust, fumes
- › chemicals - lack of COSHH information, insufficient first aid measures, inadequate storage
- › machinery - inadequate guards, lack of clear gauges, control labels or emergency stops

- › poorly designed work stations - display screen equipment, uncomfortable or inadequate seating
- › failure to take rest breaks
- › situations that may cause emotional upset, stress or mental health problems - aggressive customers, aggressive or bullying behaviour, conflict situations or excessive workloads.

#### 4. Define the scope and coverage of risk assessments

Some choose to be strict about the extent of risk assessment in their organisations. However, in most circumstances blanket coverage would be a waste of time and effort. You need to consider which areas and tasks are likely to present the greatest hazards and concentrate on those to begin with. Look at accident books and near-miss/near-hit reports; walk around your organisation; talk to management, operators and Health and Safety representatives. Then draw up a 'hit list' of areas and tasks that may constitute the highest risks. Base your programme on this list and communicate the results to the workforce.

Take account of current legislation and ACOPs (Approved Codes of Practice) when drawing up any guidelines for assessments. These include, but are not limited to:

- › Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005
- › Environmental Protection Act 1990
- › Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, as amended in 2002
- › Manual Handling Operations Regulations (MHO) 1992 as amended in 2004
- › Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations (LOLER) 1998
- › Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 as amended in 2002
- › Control Of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) 2002 as amended
- › Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2012
- › Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER) 1998 as amended in 2002.
- › Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 as amended in 2003.
- › Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015
- › Electricity at Work Regulations 1989
- › Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.

These documents are free to download from the internet. (See Additional resources below.) Be aware that several regulations require a specific risk assessment to be made.

#### 5. Create a template for recording risks

This document must be easy to understand and supported by explanatory notes. The text must be simple and clear, so resist the temptation to over-elaborate.

A pure quantitative risk assessment is one based on known facts and figures; these are frequently used in high hazard industries and by engineers and architects as part of a (re)design process. A pure qualitative risk assessment is one based on defining threats (to people, equipment or infrastructure) and predicting any likely loss. For most organisations a risk assessment is a mixture of qualitative data, with predictions of likely losses. This approach is described below. A risk assessment attempts to quantify the risk level in terms of the likelihood of an accident and the subsequent severity of its impact. A simple 3x3 matrix scoring system, suggested by the Health and Safety Executive, is a simple way to determine risk levels.

##### Likelihood of occurrence

Harm is certain or near certain to occur  
 Harm will often occur  
 Harm will seldom occur

##### Likelihood level

High 3  
 Medium 2  
 Low 1

When considering the likelihood of occurrence, it is good practice to record the period that has been considered, and the population that has been considered. Is harm likely to happen seldomly to any one of 100

employees over the next 10-years? Or is harm almost certain to happen to any one of 10 employees in the next 12-months? Ensuring these considerations are part of the risk assessment helps to define the likelihood level.

**Severity of harm**

Death or major injury (as defined by RIDDOR)  
 3 day injury or illness (as defined by RIDDOR)  
 All other injuries or illnesses

**Severity level**

Major 3  
 Serious 2  
 Slight 1

**Risk = Severity x Likelihood**

Likelihood	Severity		
	Slight 1	Serious 2	Major 3
Low 1	Low 1	Low 2	Medium 3
Medium 2	Low 2	Medium 4	High 6
High 3	Medium 3	High 6	High 9

Thus:

- › 6-9 High risk
- › 3-4 Medium risk
- › 1-2 Low risk

Many organisations emphasise the risk level by assigning colour codes, such as red for high risks, amber for medium risks, and yellow or green for low risks. Clearly the higher the likelihood and severity, the higher the risk will be. The likelihood is dependent on such factors as the control measures in place and the frequency of exposure to the hazard. The severity will depend on the magnitude of the hazard, e.g. voltage, toxicity, etc.

**6. Carry out the assessments**

When conducting the risk assessment, score the risk potential with your existing controls in place. This will help to identify whether your existing controls are sufficient. Record all the findings on the risk assessment record. Decide what action is needed to either eliminate any hazards or reduce them to a more acceptable level. Then repeat the risk assessment with the assumption that the new controls are now in place, this helps to ascertain that the new controls are appropriate and sufficient, and also provides an opportunity to check whether the new controls have unintentionally created a hazard that did not previously exist.

**7. Carry out any actions required**

The level of risk potential will determine how quickly you need to take action. In extreme circumstances this may mean stopping a machine or operation until the measures have been put in place. Consider whether hazards can be reduced by such measures as:

- › eliminating the task or process (e.g. changing from manual to automated)
- › making substitutions (e.g. using less hazardous materials or tools/equipment)
- › controlling the risk at source (e.g. asking suppliers to use lighter materials or supply smaller pack sizes)
- › changing the working environment
- › providing ergonomic seating
- › providing warning signs
- › giving operators further training

- › changing the location of a machine or job
- › modifying a machine by installing more guards or emergency stop buttons
- › issuing personal protective equipment – a last resort, as it only protects the individual
- › changing the operator – accident prone individuals, and high hazard equipment should be kept apart
- › promoting the need for adequate rest breaks
- › raising awareness of policies on bullying and conflict resolution
- › providing employee support or counselling programmes.

When changes have been made, carry out a follow up assessment to check that they have proved effective.

## 8. Review and revise your assessment

Once a risk assessment has been carried out you will need to determine when it should be repeated. This will depend on the risk potential but can also be influenced by the factors listed in action point 1. The introduction of new technology may also be used as a prompt for re-visiting a risk assessment.

It is important to ensure that all employees are made aware of risk assessments and that all findings are incorporated into Health and Safety training programmes. Remember that a risk assessment programme should be pro-active, not reactive, and properly managed will offer long term benefits to every organisation. Some insurance agents have specialist risk assessors who could be used to reinforce good practice. Developing a good working relationship with such specialists could also result in reduced premiums due to an overall lowering of risk or even just evidence that you are managing risk proactively.

Monitoring the number and type of accidents and near misses/near-hits before and after carrying out the assessments can give you a measure of success. Accident figures should decline following a series of risk assessments; however, it is also likely that near-miss/near-hit reports will increase as employees' risk awareness is raised and they feel that reporting will lead to a better working environment. This should be encouraged and applauded as it will contribute to the development of a health and safety culture, and will identify tasks and processes that would benefit from a subsequent risk assessment.

## » POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Managers should avoid:

- › thinking of risk assessment as a one-off - action must be taken on the results, and the findings must be reviewed and updated regularly
- › ignoring risks considered to be trivial
- › ignoring risks to employee welfare and mental health
- › over-complicating the process
- › forgetting to keep written records of the assessment
- › failing to provide information, instruction or training for employees
- › thinking that the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on its own is sufficient.

## » ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS

**Common sense guide to health and safety at work**, Subash Ludhra

London: Routledge, 2014

This book is also available as an [e-book](#)

**Introduction to health and safety at work, 5th ed**, Phil Hughes and Ed Ferrett

London: Taylor & Francis, 2011

This book is available as an [e-book](#)

**Employment law and occupational health a practical handbook**, Joan Lewis  
Chichester: Wiley, 2010

**Health and safety at work: an essential guide for managers, 9th ed**, Jeremy Stranks  
London: Kogan Page, 2010  
A copy of the rev 8th edition is available as an [e-book](#).

**The risk management of safety and dependability a guide for directors managers and engineers**,  
Wong W  
Cambridge: Woodhead Publishing, 2010

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from CMI's library. More information at:  
[www.managers.org.uk/library](http://www.managers.org.uk/library)

## RELATED CHECKLISTS

- 157** Health and safety managing the process
- 184** Health and safety fire precautions planning

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Health and Safety Executive** <http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/>  
Practical guidance for employers on risk assessment, including downloadable documents such as Risk assessment: a brief guide to controlling risk in the workplace and a risk assessment template at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/controlling-risks.htm>

**RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences)**,  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/>  
Incident Contact Centre launched by the HSE. Provides information on RIDDOR Regulations 2013 and has information on how to report accidents, diseases and dangerous occurrences.

**Legislation.gov.uk**  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>  
The text of relevant acts and regulations can be downloaded here.

**Occupational Health and Safety Consultants Register**  
[www.oshcr.org](http://www.oshcr.org)  
Offers a database of registered consultants searchable by industry and area of expertise.

## ORGANISATIONS

**Health and Safety Executive**, Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge, London SE1 9HS  
Web: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

**Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents**, 28 Calthorpe Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 1RP  
Tel: 0121 248 2000 Web: [www.rospa.com](http://www.rospa.com)

**British Safety Council**, 70 Chancellor's Road, London W6 9RS  
Tel: 020 8741 1231 Web: [www.britishsafetycouncil.org](http://www.britishsafetycouncil.org)

**Institution of Occupational Safety and Health**, The Grange, Highfield Drive, Wigston, Leicester, LE18 1NN  
Tel: 0116 257 3100 Web: [www.iosh.co.uk](http://www.iosh.co.uk)



## NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

- › Unit BB1: Manage risks to your organisation
- › Unit BB4: Ensure compliance with legal, regulatory, ethical and social requirements



## MORE INFORMATION

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