



**UNITED KINGDOM**

# Workplace Health and Safety Guide



## *Health and Safety Risk Assessments*

**Provided by:**

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## Health and Safety Risk Assessments

In addition to a written health and safety policy, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (2000 in Northern Ireland) states that every UK employer must make a 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessment of the health and safety risks workers and any other persons who may be affected by their business face. These assessments help you know what procedures or processes are necessary to keep your workers and third parties safe throughout the working day.

Employers should also note that country-specific legislation requires them to also conduct a fire risk assessment of their workplace and premises. This fire risk assessment can be combined with the health and safety risk assessment or conducted separately. Contact Robison & Co Ltd for more information on how to create a fire risk assessment.

A health and safety risk assessment is simply a careful examination of what in your workplace could cause harm to your employees or customers. This helps you better analyse your current procedures and protects your most valuable asset—your workforce. A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in your workplace. You are probably already taking steps to protect your employees, but your risk assessment will help you decide whether you have covered all you need to.

Think about how accidents and ill health could happen and concentrate on real risks—those that are most likely and those that will cause the most harm. For some risks, other regulations require particular control measures. Your assessment can help you identify where you need to look at certain risks and particular control measures in more detail.

Employers with five or more employees must keep a written record of their health and safety risk assessments. However, even you have fewer than five employees, it is best practice to record the risk assessment.

## Completing a Risk Assessment

To complete a risk assessment, the HSE recommends employers:

### 1. Identify the hazards

One of the most important aspects of your risk assessment is accurately identifying the potential hazards in your workplace. A good starting point is to walk around your workplace and think about any hazards. In other words, what is it about the activities, processes or substances used that could injure your employees or harm their health?

When you work in the same place every day it is easy to overlook some hazards, so here are some tips to help you identify the ones that matter:

- Take account of non-routine operations—such as maintenance, cleaning operations or changes in production cycles.
- Remember to think about long-term hazards to health—such as high levels of noise or exposure to harmful substances.
- Review manufacturers' instructions or data sheets for chemicals and equipment as they can be very helpful in explaining the hazards and putting them in their true perspective.
- Look back at your accident and ill-health records—these often help to identify the less obvious hazards.

## 2. Decide who might be harmed and how

Think about who (employees and visitors) may be harmed and how. Ask your employees what they think the hazards are, as they may notice things that are not obvious to you and may have some good ideas on how to control the risks.

For each hazard you need to be clear about who might be harmed—it will help you identify the best way of controlling the risk. That doesn't mean listing everyone by name, but rather identifying groups of people—such as people working in the storeroom or passers-by.

Remember:

- Identify how people or groups may be harmed and what type of injuries may occur. Think about people not in the workplace all the time, such as visitors, contractors, maintenance workers, etc.
- Include people with disabilities, contractors, members of the public, etc.
- Some workers may have particular needs, such as new and young workers, migrant workers, new or expectant mothers, people with disabilities, temporary workers, contractors, homeworkers and lone workers.
- Ask your employees if there is anyone you may have missed.

## 3. Evaluate the risks and decide on precaution

Having identified the hazards, you then have to decide how likely it is that harm will occur, for instance the level of risk and what to do about it. Risk is a part of everyday life and you are not expected to eliminate all risks. What you must do is make sure you know about the main risks and the things you need to do to manage them responsibly.

Generally, you need to do everything 'reasonably practicable' to protect people from harm. This means balancing the level of risk against the measures needed to control the real risk in terms of money, time or trouble. However, you do not need to take action if it would be grossly disproportionate to the level of risk. Your risk assessment should only include what you could reasonably be expected to know—you are not expected to anticipate unforeseeable risks.

Look at what you're already doing and the control measures you already have in place. Ask yourself:

- Can I eliminate the risk altogether?
- If not, how can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?

Some practical steps you could take include:

- Trying a less risky option.
- Preventing access to the hazards.
- Organising your work to reduce exposure to the hazard.
- Issuing personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Providing welfare facilities such as first aid kits and washing facilities.
- Involving and consulting with workers.

Improving health and safety need not cost a lot. Failure to take simple precautions can cost you a lot more if an accident does happen. Involve your workers, so you can be sure that what you propose to do will work in practice and won't introduce any new hazards.

You may also come across model assessments developed by trade associations, employers' bodies or other organisations concerned with a particular activity. You may decide to apply these model assessments at each workplace, but you can only do so if you:

- Satisfy yourself that the model assessment is appropriate to your type of work.
- Adapt the model to the detail of your own work situations, including any extension necessary to cover hazards and risks not referred to in the model.

#### **4. Record your significant findings**

Make a record of your significant findings—the hazards, how people might be harmed by them and what you have in place to control the risks. Any record produced should be simple and focused on controls. If you have fewer than five employees you don't have to write anything down. But, it is useful to do this so you can review it at a later date in case something were to change. If you have five or more employees you are required by law to write it down.

Any paperwork you produce should help you to communicate and manage the risks in your business. For most people this does not need to be a big exercise—just note the main points down about the significant risks and what you concluded.

A risk assessment must be suitable and sufficient, it should 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.
- You involved your employees or their representatives in the process.

Where the nature of your work changes fairly frequently or the workplace changes and develops (such as a construction site), or where your workers move from site to site, your risk assessment may have to concentrate more on a broad range of risks that can be anticipated.

If your risk assessment identifies a number of hazards, you need to put them in order of importance and address the most serious risks first. Identify long-term solutions for the risks with the biggest consequences, as well as those risks most likely to cause accidents or ill health. You should also establish whether there are improvements that can be implemented quickly, even temporarily, until more reliable controls can be put in place.

Remember, the greater the hazard the more robust and reliable the measures to control the risk of an injury occurring will need to be.

#### **5. Review your assessment periodically and update when necessary**

Few workplaces stay the same. Sooner or later, you will bring in new equipment, substances and procedures that could lead to new hazards. So it makes sense to review what you are doing on an ongoing basis, look at your risk assessment again and ask yourself:

- Have there been any significant changes?

- Are there improvements you still need to make?
- Have your workers spotted a problem?
- Have you learnt anything from accidents or near misses?

Formally review your risk assessment at least once a year. Keep up to date on changes, new equipment and procedures that could lead to new hazards.

### **Additional Action Items**

Here are some additional actions to consider:

- Conduct a survey of the hazards that exist in your workplace and those that could potentially develop. You can also contract for such services from expert private consultants.
- Obtain professional advice when you make changes to procedures or equipment, to ensure that the changes are not introducing new hazards into your workplace. Find ways to keep current on newly recognised hazards in your industry.
- Periodically review occupational dangers with employees and analyse the dangers step-by-step to see if there are any hidden hazards in the equipment or procedures.
- Set up a self-inspection system to check your hazard controls and evaluate any new hazards. Make sure your employees feel comfortable in alerting you or another member of management when they see things that look dangerous or out of place.
- Learn how to conduct a thorough investigation when things go wrong. This will help you develop ways to prevent recurrences.
- Review several years of injury or illness records to identify patterns that can help you devise strategies for improving your safety and health programme. Periodically review several months of experience to determine if any new patterns are developing.

## Sample Health and Safety Risk Assessment

**All employers must conduct a health and safety risk assessment. Employers with five or more employees have to record the significant findings of their risk assessment.**

A sample entry has been provided for reference. Look at how this might apply to your business, continue by identifying the hazards that are the real priorities in your case and complete the table to suit.

**Organisation name:**

<b>What are the hazards?</b>	<b>Who might be harmed and how?</b>	<b>What are you already doing?</b>	<b>Do you need to do anything else to manage this risk?</b>	<b>Action by whom?</b>	<b>Action by when?</b>	<b>Done</b>
<i>Slips and trips</i>	<i>Staff and visitors may be injured if they trip over objects or slip on spillages</i>	<i>We carry out general good housekeeping. All areas are well lit including stairs. There are no trailing leads or cables. Staff keep work areas clear, eg no boxes left in walkways, deliveries stored immediately, offices cleaned each evening</i>	<i>Better housekeeping is needed in staff kitchen, eg on spills</i>	<i>All staff, supervisor to monitor</i>	<i>01/10/2012</i>	<i>01/10/2012</i>

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	Do you need to do anything else to manage this risk?	Action by whom?	Action by when?	Done

You should review your risk assessment at least yearly or if there are any significant changes to the hazards in your workplace, such as new equipment or work activities.

For more information on workplace risk assessments, case studies, industry specific concerns, and samples, please see: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/manage.htm>.