

From: HS Direct, UK

Risk Assessment

What is a Risk Assessment



A risk assessment is a systematic examination of a task, job or process that you carry out at work for the purpose of identifying the significant hazards, the risk of someone being harmed and deciding what further control measures you must take to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

We have detailed these further below:

- Identifying the significant hazards that are present (a hazard is something that has the potential to cause someone harm or ill health).
- Deciding if what you have already done reduces the risk of someone being harmed to an acceptable level, and if not;
- Deciding what further control measures you must take to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

Risk Assessments should also be carried out to satisfy the requirements of legislation but above all to ensure the Health & Safety of employees

Who should do risk assessments?

Risk assessments should always be carried out by a person who is experienced and competent to do so, competence can be expressed as a combination of Knowledge, Awareness, training, and experience. If necessary consult a more experienced member of staff or external professional help to assist with the risk assessment template.

Remember competence does not mean you have to know everything about everything, competence also means knowing when you know enough or when you should call in further expert help.

When should risk assessment templates be done?

A separate risk assessment should be carried out for all tasks or processes undertaken by your organisation, they should be carried out before the task starts, or in the case of existing or long running tasks, as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Risk Assessments should also be reviewed on a regular basis; monthly, annually, bi-annually, depending on risk, or if something changes i.e. a new worker, a change of process or substance etc.

Non Compliance

The penalties for failing to carry out risk assessments can be strict, The Health & Safety Executive can issue improvement or prohibition notices, this is likely to happen where an inspector find a situation with the potential to cause harm, for example an unguarded machine. If you are prosecuted and found guilty for more serious breeches i.e. one of your staff has been seriously injured, then in Court you can be fined an unlimited amount and imprisoned. The lack of suitable risk assessments will weigh heavily against you.

What About Method Statements?

A Safety Method Statement, sometimes called a "safe system of work" must be produced for all jobs or tasks that contain some measure of risk, contractors are more and more noticing that Method Statements are being requested by their clients, the request for a Method Statement can come at any time, Pre-Tender, Tender, Pre start of contract and sometimes after the contract has started, so it is best to be prepared.

How do I Complete a Risk Assessment?

The following paragraphs describe the process and methodology for carrying out Risk Assessment templates, when carrying out Risk Assessments it is often useful to fill in a template as you go.

Risk Assessment Methodology

There are 8 steps to carrying out a risk assessment template;

1. Identify the hazards
2. Identify those at risk
3. Identify existing control measures
4. Evaluate the risk
5. Decide/Implement control measures
6. Record assessment
7. Monitor and review
8. Inform

Identify the hazards

A hazard is a situation or a condition with the potential for harm!

Find out what the significant hazards associated with the task or processes are. There are several ways of identifying hazards; by observation, experience and talking to those who carry out the job you can also consult the following;

- Workforce
- Accident, ill health and near miss data
- Instruction Manuals
- Hazard Crib sheets
- Workplace inspections

Look for the hazards that you could reasonably expect to result in significant harm, for example;

Slipping and tripping hazards from poorly maintained floors, Fire hazards from flammable materials etc.

Identify those at risk

Think about individuals or groups of people who may be affected e.g.

- Office staff
- Maintenance personnel
- Members of the public
- Machine operators

Particular attention must be paid to disabled staff, lone workers, temporary staff and young inexperienced workers.

Identify Existing Control Procedures

Examine how you already control the risks; it is unlikely that your workers are getting injured on a daily basis, so you must have some controls in place already. To decide if those existing control procedures are adequate, and to evaluate the risk, complete a risk ranking which will determine the residual risk.

Evaluate the risk

A risk is defined as the likelihood that a hazard will cause harm

I.e. Risk = Likelihood x Severity - below is an example of a simple 1-5 risk ranking system.

1. Highly Unlikely
2. Unlikely
3. Possible
4. Probable
5. Certain

If the hazard does result in harm, how severe would the injury be?

1. Scratch (trivial)

2. Cut (Minor injury)
3. Fracture (Major injury - Over 3 day injury)
4. Amputation (Major injury)
5. Death (Death)

To carry out a risk ranking simply multiply the likelihood by the severity,

Likelihood	Severity				
	Trivial	Minor Injury	Over 3 Day Injury	Major Injury	Incapacity or Death
Highly Unlikely	1	2	3	4	5
Unlikely	2	4	6	8	10
Possible	3	6	9	12	15
Probable	4	8	12	16	20
Certain	5	10	15	20	25

After the multiplication you will be left with a number from 1 to 25 which you can match against the following table to get the Residual Risk i.e. the risk that remains after the controls are in place.

Priority

- 1 Urgent Action - (Risk no 15 - 25)
- 2 High Priority - (Risk no 10 - 12)
- 3 Medium Priority - (Risk no 5 - 9)
- 4 Low Priority - (Risk no 2 - 4)
- 5 Very Low Priority - No Action Required (Risk no 1)

The risk ranking will now give you your residual risk either Low, Medium, or High. If the risks are acceptable (Low Risk) then you may wish to skip the next part, if the risk are still Moderate/High (Medium/High Risk) then you must do something to bring the risk to a "tolerable" level, you can also prioritise your actions from 1 - 5.

Decide and Implement new control measures

If the risk is not adequately controlled decide which new control procedures are required and ensure these procedures are implemented. The control measures are the actions performed to reduce either the probability of the accident happening or the severity of the outcome, and where possible both. When considering what measures to put in place it is important to consider both severity and likelihood, in order to minimise the overall risk.

When deciding what new control measures will be required, it is helpful to work through the 'hierarchy' of controls. The hierarchy is as follows:

1. Elimination – get rid of the risk altogether
2. Substitution – exchange one risk for something less likely or severe
3. Physical Controls - separation/Isolation, eliminate contact with the hazard
4. Administrative controls - safe systems of work, rules in place to ensure safe use/contact with hazard

5. Information, instruction, training & supervision – warn people of hazard and tell/show/help them how to deal with it
6. Personal Protective Equipment – dress them appropriately to reduce severity of accident

Control measures should be practical and easy to understand (what to do and why they are doing it), applicable to the hazard, able to reduce the risk to acceptable levels, acceptable to the workforce and easy to operate.

After you have implemented the new control procedures, then re-rank the risks as above to determine the new residual risk, you should aim to get the risk to as low as is reasonably practicable until it is at a tolerable level.

Record the assessment

Keep copies of the assessments for your records and for inspection by the HSE should they ever be requested

Monitor and review

You must ensure that the control measures are achieving the desired level of control. You must review the assessment on a regular basis or if anything changes e.g. new staff, change in machinery or process.

Inform

You have a legal duty to relay the findings of the assessment to everyone who is affected by it. You must also provide information to the workforce on any new control measure implemented, any emergency procedures that have been developed and their duties as employees

General

Get a few people to check your risk assessment template; other people may spot something that you have missed, also start a register of risk assessment so that you can find them quickly if needed.