

Risk assessments are a core requirement of modern Health and Safety legislation, including but not limited to, The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, and specific regulations for manual handling, work at height, hazardous substances, noise, vibration, work equipment, electricity etc. Regulations require “suitable and sufficient” risk assessments and this can be achieved by assessing the hazards associated with specific job tasks. As an integral part of a health and safety management system they can mitigate any civil claim and/or criminal investigation that may result from an accident or ill health.

MINIMUM STANDARDS

A company policy and methodology for undertaking risk assessments will be defined. This method should identify all significant job tasks requiring assessment and the need for technical assessments such as noise, vibration and hazardous substances. Task specific assessments can be supported by assessments of working areas such as the office or perhaps the vehicle yard. Complex process and machinery hazards may require the use of more sophisticated techniques. Once the methodology is determined the policy should:

- Incorporate a written statement of intent.
- Ensure assessments are recorded. Consider standard templates for consistency.
- Define responsibilities for completing assessments. A team approach should be adopted involving managers, supervisors, employees and health and safety representatives.
- Define the strategy and methodology for assessing hazards and determining the risk, including consideration of likelihood, severity and accident history.
- Commit to implementation of corrective actions identified by the assessment with controls requiring capital expenditure suitably planned and agreed.
- Ensure safe operating procedures for job tasks are recorded and embedded within any health and safety training, maintenance and housekeeping procedures.
- As risk assessments are updated, ensure a copy of the original is kept on record.
- As with all records they need to be archived in an identifiable and retrievable format.

The assessment of each job task and work environment should follow principles within the HSE’s ‘Five steps to risk assessment’.

Step 1 Identify the hazards:

Walk around, ask others, gather guidance, consult manufacturers’ instructions, review accident and ill health records.

Step 2 Decide who might be harmed and how:

Consider your employees, passers by, cleaners, maintenance workers and more vulnerable groups e.g. young workers, new or expectant mothers.

Step 3 Evaluate the risk and decide on precautions:

You need to do all that is ‘reasonably practicable’ and compare yourself to good practice for your industry. A hierarchy of improvement should be followed i.e. elimination, substitution, engineering or procedural controls including safe systems of work and training that reduce, isolate or control the risk to the lowest practicable level. PPE should be considered a last resort.

Step 4 Record your findings and implement them:

Write down your assessment and communicate the findings to those affected, prioritise and implement the additional controls identified.

Step 5 Review your risk assessment and update if necessary:

Risk assessments should be reviewed periodically but at least after any significant change to the working environment and after an accident or near miss.

GUIDANCE/USEFUL INFORMATION

- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations
- HSE: Five steps to Risk Assessment (INDG163) www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf
- HSE: Sample risk assessments: www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies/index.htm

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