

What is a risk assessment

And how do I complete one?

In conjunction with our Health and Safety Risk Assessment Templates, this guidance sheet is intended to allow you to carry out risk assessments on the majority of workplace activities. However, to complete a risk assessment correctly, you must ensure that you are competent to do so. You must also determine the level of risk to your employees in your particular circumstances and take steps to eliminate or reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practicable. All information and advice is given in good faith. We cannot accept any responsibility for your subsequent acts or omissions. If you have any doubts, queries or concerns, you must refer to the relevant regulations and take further professional advice.

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 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 be carried out to satisfy the requirements of legislation but above all to ensure the Health & Safety of employees.

To use this guidance effectively you will need to purchase and download one of our **Risk Assessment Templates**. You may also need to write a **Method Statement** to produce a Safe System of Work.

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 to assist in the risk assessment.

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 assessments 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, biannually, 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 (HSE) can issue improvement or prohibition notices, this is likely to happen where an inspector finds a situation with the potential to cause harm, for example an unguarded machine. If you are prosecuted and found guilty for more serious breaches i.e. one of your staff has been seriously injured, then in the magistrate court you can be fined up to £20,000 and imprisoned for up to 6 months, in Crown court fines are unlimited and prison sentences can be up to 2 years. The lack of suitable and sufficient risk assessments could weigh heavily against you.

How do I Complete a Risk Assessment?

The following paragraphs describe the process and methodology for carrying out Risk Assessments. 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;

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

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
- Data sheets – COSHH
- 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.

How likely is it that the hazard may result in harm? Is it;

1. Very rare
2. Remote
3. Occasional
4. Regular
5. Frequent

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

1. Scratch (Negligible)
2. Cut (Minor injury)
3. Fracture (Major injury – Over 7 day injury)
4. Amputation (Major injury)
5. Death (Fatality)

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

RISK CALCULATIONS (severity x likelihood)					
Fatality	5	10	15	20	25
Major	4	8	12	16	20
Reportable	3	6	9	12	15
Minor	2	4	6	8	10
Negligible	1	2	3	4	5
	Very Rare	Remote	Occasional	Regular	Frequent

After the multiplication you will be left with a number from 1 to 25 which you can match against the following:

- Risk score of 1 – 6 are deemed **acceptable**
- Risk score of 8 – 12 are deemed **tolerable**
- Risk score of 15+ are deemed **unacceptable**

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

Decide/Implement 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.