FIVE STEPS TO RISK ASSESSMENT

1. Look for the hazards

- This leaflet is intended to help employers assess risks at work. It is aimed at firms in the commercial, service and light industrial sectors.
- An assessment of risk is a careful examination of what, in your workplace, could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. The aim is to make sure that no one gets hurt or becomes ill. Accidents and ill health can run lives and affect your business too if output is lost, machinery is damaged, or insurance costs increase.

2. Evaluate the risks

- ‘Risk’ is the chance, great or small, that someone will be harmed by the hazard.
- ‘Hazard’ means anything that can cause harm (for example, chemicals, electricity, working at height, and so on), and
- ‘Risk’ in this context means anything that can cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm.

3. Decide who might be harmed, and how

- It is the chance, great or small, that someone will be harmed by the hazard.
- The important thing you must do is decide whether a hazard is significant, and whether you have covered it by satisfactory precautions so that the risk is small. You need to check this when you assess the risks.

4. Record your findings

- Don’t be overcomplicated. You may have already assessed some of the risks. You probably already know whether you have machinery that could cause harm, or if there is an awkward entrance or stair where someone could hurt themselves. If so, check that you have taken what reasonable precautions you can to avoid injury.

5. Review your assessment

- If you are a small firm and you are confident you understand the work, you can do the assessment yourself. If you are a larger firm, you could ask a responsible employee, safety representative or safety officer to help you. But remember - you are responsible for seeing it is adequately done.

How to assess risks in the workplace

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2. An assessment of risk is a careful examination of what, in your workplace, could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. The aim is to make sure that no one gets hurt or becomes ill. Accidents and ill health can run lives and affect your business too if output is lost, machinery is damaged, or insurance costs increase.
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4. ‘Risk’ in this context means anything that can cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm.
5. Don’t be overcomplicated. You may have already assessed some of the risks. You probably already know whether you have machinery that could cause harm, or if there is an awkward entrance or stair where someone could hurt themselves. If so, check that you have taken what reasonable precautions you can to avoid injury.
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LOOK FOR THE HAZARDS

If you are doing the assessment yourself, walk around your workplace and look afresh at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm. Ignore the trivial and concentrate only on significant hazards that could result in serious harm or affect several people. Ask your employees or their representatives what they think. They may have noticed things that are not immediately obvious. Manufacturers’ instructions or datasheets as well as accidents and ill-health records can also help you spot hazards and put risks in their true perspective.

DECIDE WHO MIGHT BE HARMED, AND HOW

You have to assess risks to the safety and health of anyone that may be affected by your activities - yourself, workers and anyone who may not be in the workplace all the time, for example cleaners, visitors, maintenance workers, and so on.

EVALUATE THE RISKS ARISING FROM THE HAZARDS AND DECIDE WHETHER EXISTING PRECAUTIONS ARE ADEQUATE OR MORE SHOULD BE DONE

Even after all precautions have been taken, usually some risks remain. What you have to decide for each hazard is:
- whether to stop the job (a non-essential hazard);
- whether to continue with the work but take action to reduce the risk (moderate risk);
- whether to take action to reduce the risk (high risk).

RISK RECORDINGS

This means (1) writing down the more significant hazards and (2) recording your most important conclusions - for example, “Electrical installations: insulation and earthing checked and found sound”, or “Tune from welding: local exhaust ventilation provided and regularly checked”. You must also inform your employees about your findings. Keep the written document for future reference or use. It can remind you to keep an eye on particular matters and it helps to show that you have done what the law requires.

To make things simpler, you can refer to other documents, such as manuals, the arrangements in your safety and health policy statement, company rules, manufacturers’ instructions, and your safety and health procedures. These may already list hazards and precautions. You don’t need to repeat all that, and it is up to you whether you combine all the documents, or keep them separately.

REVIEW YOUR ASSESSMENT FROM TIME TO TIME AND REVISE IT IF NECESSARY

Sooner or later you will be bringing in new machines, substances and procedures that could lead to new hazards. If there is any significant change, you should add to the assessment to take account of the new hazard. But it is good practice to review your assessment from time to time. Don’t amend your assessment for every trivial change or even for each new job, but if a new job introduces significant new hazards of its own, you will want to consider them in their own right and do whatever you need to keep the risks down.

Enquiry Services

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Information on the services offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Council can be obtained through hotline 2739 9000.