

How to carry out Risk Assessments

Employers are required to complete risk assessments under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

There are many potential accidents just waiting to happen in the workplace and resulting accidents and health problems can change or even devastate lives forever and damage your business. Many of these risks can be avoided through conducting inexpensive measures, such as keeping the work area tidy so people don't trip and fall.

Carrying out a risk assessment will identify and minimise these risks, although impossible to remove all risks, you are obliged to protect people as far as 'reasonably practicable'. Risk assessment is a simple process; if you operate a small business you can actually do it yourself. If you are not confident doing this or run a large company, it might be wise to get a health and safety advisor to do it for you.

5 Steps to Risk Assessment

If you decide to carry out the assessment yourself there are 5 Steps to the Risk Assessment as recognised and recommended by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

1. Identify the hazards

Identify the areas you believe could cause an accident or prove harmful in your workplace. Involve your staff in this process as they will be aware of dangers that might not be instantly obvious to you. Check through the accident and sickness records as these can highlight possible issues. Manufacturers' instructions and guidelines can also help to identify potential dangers when using equipment or substances. The HSE website issues useful information on hazards and guidelines on how to control them. Also take into consideration possible long term effects that might harm, such as constant high levels of noise.

2. Decide who might be at risk and why

Identify who might be at risk. People in a higher risk category are trainees, pregnant women, young workers and those with disabilities. Also take into consideration the people who aren't there for the work day, such as visitors, clients and service providers.

3. Evaluate the risk and decide on precautions

Once the risks are identified, assess if existing precautions are sufficient and if not think about improving conditions to minimise risk. If the risk cannot be removed completely, consider controlling it by considering less hazardous options, avert access to the hazard, re-organise the workplace to minimise contact to the danger, provide protective equipment or provide safety facilities such as first aid.

4. Record your findings and implement them

If you have over 5 staff you have to keep written records of your risk assessment. Details need to demonstrate you carried out a proper check, you identified who might be affected, risks were dealt with, you took into account the number of people who could be involved, the precautions put into place are reasonable and the staff were involved.

Improvements don't have to be completed all at once. Prioritize the tasks and deal with the most important first. Consider cheaper or easier options until more reliable controls can be put into place. Try to come up with long term solutions. Arrange training programmes for staff on risks in the work place and ensure they know how to deal with them. Put regular checks into place to ensure controls stay in place and delegate tasks and responsibility to staff.

5. Review your assessment and update if necessary.

Companies are always updating with new technology, equipment and procedures, these could lead to new hazards so ensure you go through the same process as before. It's a good idea to re-examine your assessment regularly to make sure that the precautions are still working effectively and see if improvements can be made. Make a regular date to review the risk assessment.

When you carry out your risk assessment try to cover everything possible to cover every eventuality. Find out as much information as you can on the guidelines, read it and pass it onto your staff. Health and Safety guidelines are there to help you find ways to avoid accidents, use them to your advantage.