



Hardfacts

Norwich Union Risk Services

Ref No 5010 (v4)

June 2006

Conducting Risk Assessments

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 supplements the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 by extending the employers obligations to develop a general framework for safety management and enhance any control measures provided. The main provision of the Regulations is the need for an employer to conduct risk assessments of his work activities and to identify the action needed to control the health and safety risks in the workplace.

The assessment of hazardous operations should not just be a paper exercise diverting scarce management resources from the business of managing. It should be a practical exercise taking the opportunity to review and evaluate operations and seek improvements.

What is Risk Assessment?

A hazard is something which has the potential to cause harm, eg, a substance, machine or situation, such as working at heights. A risk is the likelihood that the harm will occur combined with its severity (ie, the number of people likely to be affected and whether the hazard would cause minor or major injuries or even a fatality). Risk assessment is an evaluation of the chance that harm will occur.

Conducting Risk Assessments

1) Hazard spotting - Appoint a small group (usually 3 persons) to walk round the workplace and look at what could cause harm, concentrating on significant hazards which could have severe consequences.

During the walk round ask employees for their opinions and what they consider to be significant. The use of accidents/ill health records and manufacturers' instruction/ data sheets can aid in your hazard spotting.

2) Decide who might be harmed and how. You need to consider not only employees but also people who may not always be present in the workplace, eg, cleaners, visitors, delivery personnel, contractors, maintenance, staff, etc.

3) Decide for each hazard whether the risk is high, medium, low or not significant. Have you done everything that the law says you have to? Are industry standards in place? The law says that you must do what is reasonably practicable to keep your workplace safe.

Improving health and safety need not necessarily cost a lot. Some control measures are very simply implemented with no major restraints on budget. For example, non-slip material on slippery steps.

Ask yourself whether you can get rid of the hazard altogether or, if not, how you can control the risk so that harm is unlikely.

Generally, personal protective equipment should only be used when there is nothing else reasonably practicable.

Preventive and protective measures should be implemented as a result of the assessment and these could include such items as avoidance of a risk by elimination or reduction (eg, buying in dangerous substances in a lesser quantity) or

combating a risk at source (eg, removing spillages from floor areas rather than introducing warning signs).

4) The legal requirement is to record the significant findings of a risk assessment. These should include a list of hazards identified in the assessment, highlighting the types of people who may be at risk. Existing control measures should be identified, if they are in place.

It is necessary to indicate that all risks have been assessed, but only records of those risks assessed as significant need to be kept.

The prime objective of recording an assessment is to indicate that it was done soundly, addressed the significant issues and came to justifiable conclusions. The amount of effort put into recording should be related to the degree of risk and the complexity of the issues involved. The records should also serve purposes that are worthwhile, such as to enable management to identify:

- the basis for monitoring health and safety controls
- training programmes needed
- the standards against which unusual events are judged
- changes which make re-assessment necessary.

5) From time to time review your assessments and revise as necessary. Fresh hazards will arise from the introduction of new machines, substances and procedures. Significant changes should be added to assessments to take account of new hazards.

There is no need to amend your assessments for trivial changes but new hazards will become apparent and thus you will have a need to review your assessments accordingly.

The review process should be undertaken at least once every five years, or more often if things change or if the risks are high.

6) Make sure that all employees are made aware of the risk assessments and their commensurate control measures via training and communication. Keep a record of all such sessions.

Key Action Steps

- Look for the hazards by making a workplace inspection.
- Decide who might be harmed and why.
- Consider the risks arising from the hazards and decide whether existing arrangements are adequate.
- Make written records of your findings.
- Carry out periodic reviews of your assessments and make necessary revisions.
- Share the findings of the assessments - and the control measures - with your employees.

References

HSE Five Steps to Risk Assessment - IND(G) 163L (Rev) HSE Books, 1998 – tel: 01787 881165.

HSC Management of Health and Safety at Work: Approved Code of Practice and Guidance L21, 2000 ISBN 0 7176 2488 9.

Ref No 5010 (v4)

June 2006

Norwich Union Risk Services operates a Risk Helpline during normal business hours for the cost of a local telephone call. The telephone number is:
0845 366 66 66
www.nu-riskservices.co.uk