

# 5 steps to

## RISK ASSESSMENT

This leaflet aims to help employers and self-employed people to assess risks in the workplace. It is aimed at firms in the commercial, service and light industrial sectors.



### What is risk assessment?

A risk assessment is nothing more than a careful examination of what, in your work, 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 ruin lives, and affect your business too if output is lost, machinery is damaged, insurance costs increase, or you have to go to court. You are legally required to assess the risks in your workplace.

The important things you need to decide are whether a **hazard is significant**, and whether you have it covered by satisfactory precautions so that the **risk is small**. You need to check this when you assess the risks. For instance, electricity can kill but the risk of it doing so in an office environment is remote, provided that 'live' components are insulated and metal casings properly earthed.



## How to assess the risks in your workplace

Follow the five steps in this leaflet:

**STEP 1: Look for the hazards**

**STEP 2: Decide who might be harmed and how**

**STEP 3: Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done**

**STEP 4: Record your findings**

**STEP 5: Review your assessment and revise it if necessary**

Don't be overcomplicated. In most firms in the commercial, service and light industrial sectors, the hazards are few and simple. Checking them is common sense, but necessary. You probably already know whether, for example, you have machinery that could cause harm, or if there is an awkward entrance or stair where someone could

be hurt. If so, check that you have taken what reasonable precautions you can to avoid injury.

If you are a small firm and you are confident you understand what's involved, you can do the assessment yourself (you don't have to be a health and safety expert!). If you are a larger firm, you could ask a responsible employee, safety representative or safety officer to help you. If you are not confident, get help from a competent source (see under 'Getting help' on page 8). But remember - you are responsible for seeing it is adequately done.

Hazard and Risk - don't let words in this guide put you off!

**hazard** means anything that can cause harm (eg chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, etc)

**risk** is the chance, high or low, that somebody will be harmed by the hazard.

## STEP 1

# 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 on significant hazards which could result in serious harm or affect several people.

Ask your employees or their representatives what they think. They may have noticed things which are not immediately obvious. Manufacturers' instructions or data sheets can also help you spot hazards and put risks in their true perspective. So can accident and ill-health records.

## STEP 2

# Decide who might be harmed, and how

Don't forget:

- young workers, trainees, new and expectant mothers, etc who may be at particular risk
- cleaners, visitors, contractors, maintenance workers, etc who may not be in the workplace all the time
- members of the public, or people you share your workplace with, if there is a chance they could be hurt by your activities.



## STEP 3

# Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done

Consider how likely it is that each hazard could cause harm. This will determine whether or not you need to do more to reduce the risk. Even after all precautions have been taken, some risk usually remains. What you have to decide for each significant hazard is whether this **remaining risk is high, medium or low**.

First, ask yourself whether you have done all the things that the law says you have got to do. For example, there are legal requirements on prevention of access to dangerous parts of machinery. Then ask yourself whether generally accepted industry standards are in place. But don't stop there - think for yourself, because the law also says that you must do what is reasonably practicable to keep your workplace safe. Your real aim is to **make all risks small** by adding to your precautions as necessary.

If you find that something needs to be done, draw up an 'action list' and give priority to any remaining risks which are high and/or those which could affect most people. In taking action ask yourself:

- a) can I **get rid of the hazard** altogether?
- b) if not, how can I **control the risks** so that harm is unlikely?

In controlling risks apply the principles below, if possible in the following order:

- try a less risky option
- prevent access to the hazard (eg by guarding)
- organise work to reduce exposure to the hazard
- issue personal protective equipment
- provide welfare facilities (eg washing facilities for removal of contamination and first aid)

Improving health and safety need not cost a lot. For instance, placing a mirror on a dangerous blind corner to help prevent vehicle accidents, or putting some non-slip material on slippery steps, are inexpensive precautions considering the risks. And failure to take simple precautions can cost you a lot more if an accident does happen.

But what if the work you do tends to vary a lot, or you or your employees move from one site to another? Identify the hazards you can reasonably expect and assess the risks from them. After that, if you spot any additional hazards when you get to a site, get information from others on site, and take what action seems necessary.

**But what if you share a workplace?** Tell the other employers and self-employed people there about any risks your work could cause them, and what precautions you are taking. Also, think about the risks to your own workforce from those who share your workplace.

**But what if you have already assessed some of the risks?**

If, for example, you use hazardous chemicals and you have already assessed the risks to health and the precautions you need to take under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH), you can consider them 'checked' and move on.

More information about legal requirements and standards can be found in the HSE publications *An Introduction to Health and Safety*, *Essentials of Health and Safety* and *Management of Health and Safety at Work: Approved Code of Practice*. Details of these are given on page 8.

## Record your findings

If you have fewer than five employees you do not need to write anything down, though it is useful to keep a written record of what you have done. But if you employ five or more people you must record the significant findings of your assessment. This means writing down the significant hazards and conclusions. Examples might be 'Electrical installations: insulation and earthing checked and found sound' or 'Fume from welding: local exhaust ventilation provided and regularly checked'.

You must also tell your employees about your findings.

**Suitable and sufficient - not perfect!**

Risk assessments must be suitable and sufficient. You need to be able to show that:

- a proper check was made
- you asked who might be affected
- you dealt with all the obvious significant hazards, taking into account the number of people who could be involved
- the precautions are reasonable, and the remaining risk is low.

## STEP 5

Keep the written record for future reference or use; it can help you if an inspector asks what precautions you have taken, or if you become involved in any action for civil liability. It can also remind you to keep an eye on particular hazards and precautions. And it helps to show that you have done what the law requires. There is an example at the end of this guide which you may find helpful to refer to, but you can make up your own form if you prefer.

To make things simpler, you can refer to other documents, such as manuals, the arrangements in your health and safety policy statement, company rules, manufacturers' instructions, your health and safety procedures and your arrangements for general fire safety. 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 and revise it if necessary

Sooner or later you will bring in new machines, substances and procedures which could lead to new hazards. If there is any significant change, add to the assessment to take account of the new hazard. Don't amend your assessment for every trivial change, or still more, 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. In any case, it is good practice to review your assessment from time to time to make sure that the precautions are still working effectively.





# Getting help

Here's a selection of practical guidance to help you. If you are still stuck on the assessment, your local health and safety inspector can advise you on what to do.

You will find most of what you need to know about standards and legal requirements in:

*An introduction to health and safety*  
INDG259 1997

*Essentials of health and safety at work*  
ISBN 0 7176 0716 X 1995

but you might also find the following useful:

*Management of health and safety at work: approved code of practice and guidance*  
ISBN 0 7176 2488 9 2000

*Successful health and safety management* HSG65  
ISBN 0 7176 1276 7 1997

*Guide to preparing a health and safety policy statement for a small business*  
ISBN 0 7176 0424 1 1989

*Selecting a health and safety consultancy* INDG133 1992

*COSHH: the new brief guide for employers* INDG136 1996

*Personal Protective Equipment at Work: Guidance on Regulations* L25  
ISBN 0 7176 0415 2 1992

*Getting to grips with manual handling*  
INDG143 2000

*Electrical safety and you* INDG231  
1996

*Managing vehicle safety at the workplace* INDG199 1995

*Workplace transport safety* HSG136  
ISBN 0 7176 0935 9 1995

*Working with VDUs* INDG36 1998

*Display screen equipment work: guidance on regulations* L26  
ISBN 0 7176 0410 1 1992

*Whose risk is it anyway* video

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## STEP 1

### Hazard

Look only for hazards which you could reasonably expect to result in significant harm under the conditions in your workplace. Use the following examples as a guide

- slipping/tripping hazards (eg poorly maintained floors or stairs)
- fire (eg from flammable materials)
- chemicals (eg battery acid)
- moving parts of machinery (eg blades)
- work at height (eg from mezzanine floors)
- ejection of material (eg from plastic moulding)
- pressure systems (eg steam boilers)
- vehicles (eg fork-lift trucks)
- electricity (eg poor wiring)
- dust (eg from grinding)
- fumes (eg welding)
- manual handling
- noise
- poor lighting
- low temperature

## STEP 2

### Who might be harmed?

There is no need to list individuals by name - just think about groups of people doing similar work or who may be affected, eg

- office staff
- maintenance personnel
- contractors
- people sharing your workplace
- operators
- cleaners
- members of the public

Pay particular attention to:

- staff with disabilities
- visitors
- inexperienced staff
- lone workers

They may be more vulnerable

## STEP 3

### Is more needed to control the risk?

For the hazards listed, do the precautions already taken:

- meet the standards set by a legal requirement?
- comply with a recognised industry standard?
- represent good practice?
- reduce risk as far as reasonably practicable?

Have you provided:

- adequate information, instruction or training?
- adequate systems or procedures?

If so, then the risks are adequately controlled, but you need to indicate the precautions you have in place. (You may refer to procedures, company rules, etc.)

Where the risk is not adequately controlled, indicate what more you need to do (the 'action list')

## STEP 5

### Review and revision

Set a date for review of the assessment (see opposite).

On review check that the precautions for each hazard still adequately control the risk. If not indicate the action needed. Note the outcome. If necessary complete a new page for your risk assessment.

Making changes in your workplace, eg when bringing in new

- machines
- substances
- procedures

may introduce significant new hazards. Look for them and follow the 5 steps.

## RISK ASSESSMENT FOR

Company Name \_\_\_\_\_

Company Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

## ASSESSMENT UNDERTAKEN

(date) \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## ASSESSMENT REVIEW

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### STEP 1

List significant hazards here:

### STEP 2

List groups of people who are at risk from the significant hazards you have identified:

### STEP 3

List existing controls or note where the information may be found. List risks which are not adequately controlled and the action needed:

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**This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.**

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