



Risk Assessment



Introduction

This section seeks to give practical guidance to employers on risk assessment requirements as set out in the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

In order to fully understand how you, as an employer, should manage workplace health, it is necessary to have an understanding of risk assessment, which is fundamental to good health and safety.

In your workplace there will be a variety of different activities taking place, these may require an employee to clean a part using chemicals, to lift a heavy load or to work in an area where there is a high noise level. These work activities present risks to employees' health and safety. A risk assessment is a necessary and useful task in tackling the risk of ill health at work.

All employers are required to carry out a risk assessment at their place of work and to keep a written record of that risk assessment. This section will explain the practical steps that you can take to comply with this legal requirement. It will:

- Give direction on risk assessment.
- Outline the risk assessment process.
- Give examples of the relationship between risk assessment and workplace health.

Risk assessment helps you to target the hazards that have real potential to cause harm and to put improvements or control measures in place to reduce the likelihood of anyone being harmed. The benefits of conducting a risk assessment include increased productivity, reduced risk of ill health, reduced absenteeism and related costs and reduced exposure to compensation claims.

What is a hazard?

A hazard is anything with the potential to cause harm in terms of human injury or ill health. An example of a hazard would be high noise levels in the workplace. This hazard has the potential to cause noise-induced hearing loss to an employee, which is very harmful.

What is a work activity?

A work activity takes place when an employee carries out an action at work that needs to be completed so that a business can function. Examples of a work activity include writing a report, moving a box in a warehouse, assembling a computer, making a telephone call, drilling a hole, operating a meat slicer or handling baggage. The potential of each work activity for harm is identified as part of a risk assessment.

What is risk?

When carrying out a work activity, risk is the likelihood that someone could be harmed, together with the potential severity of that harm. For example, if an employee is transporting a hazardous chemical stored in a glass container to a laboratory, and is not wearing eye glasses or protective gloves, the risk is as follows:

Likelihood of harm: Employee has no protection if the chemical spills or splashes. In this situation the likelihood of harm is high.

Severity: The employee could receive serious burns due to lack of protective equipment.

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In this example the overall level of risk of injury or ill health is high and action would need to be taken to avoid or reduce the risk.

Why do I need to carry out a risk assessment?

Legally, you are required to identify the hazards in the workplaces under your control and to assess the risks to safety and health at work presented by those hazards. You need only consider hazards that are generated by work activities. You are not expected to consider every minor hazard or risk that we accept as part of our everyday lives.

You must examine and write down each workplace hazard and what you will do about it. Ultimately, assessing risk means that anything in the workplace that could cause harm to your employees, other employees and other people (including customers, visitors and members of the public) must be carefully examined. The results of any risk assessments should be written into your safety statement.

Remember the aim is to ensure that no one gets hurt or becomes ill.

What is a risk assessment?

A risk assessment is a careful examination of work activities carried out at a workplace in order to:

- Identify hazards (potential for harm).
- Identify the level of risk for each hazard, which will be determined by the likelihood of harm and the potential severity of injury or ill health.

- Identify the controls or improvements that need to be put in place to avoid or reduce risk.

Risk assessment aims to ensure that employees are properly protected from injury and ill health. The focus is on reducing real risk: ensuring that risk created at a workplace is managed through the proper implementation of control measures.

Table 2.1 gives examples of potential workplace hazards, the level of risk they involve and measures that can be taken to avoid injury or ill health.

How do I complete a risk assessment?

There is no one standard risk assessment method. This toolkit details different risk assessment methods used for specific areas such as manual handling and working at a display screen. Differences in approach are acceptable provided the main

elements of the risk assessment process are included.

In general there are five key elements or steps in a risk assessment:

Step 1: Understand the work activity
In basic terms this will require you to observe how a work activity is carried out. It will require careful study in order to understand the simple steps or actions that are involved in completing the work activity. As part of this study you will need to talk to the person who does the job in order to understand fully how the task is completed.

Step 2: Collect all relevant information
The type of information to collect may include a description of a machine, details on a chemical being used, weight of a load being handled, whether or not a footstool is provided to an employee working on a computer, and general work environment factors. The important

Table 2.1: Workplace Hazards			
Type of Business	Hazard	Level of Risk	Improvements
Off-licence	Staff or customers may slip or trip over boxes left in the aisle	High likelihood of harm High severity	Ensure staff are aware that aisles should be kept clear at all times
Food preparation	Contact with bleach and other washing chemicals	Medium likelihood of harm Medium/high severity	Remind staff to dry their hands thoroughly Remind staff to check for dry, red or itchy skin on their hands and to tell their manager if they find these symptoms

point is that you make the effort to collect as much information as possible for use in identifying hazards and assessing the risk level.

Step 3: Hazard identification and assessment of risk

At this stage, you (or the person completing the assessment) need to consult with those people that do the work. Study the information collected or go to the area where the work activity is carried out in order to identify each hazard and its level of risk. The level of risk will be determined by how likely it is that the hazard will occur, together with the potential severity of injury or ill health.

Step 4: Decide on the control measures and implement the action plan

The control measures must be agreed through consultation with employees. The control measures must be effective and a clear action plan will need to be agreed, outlining how they will be implemented, who will implement them and when they will be implemented.

Step 5: Review effectiveness of the control measures

This stage is similar to an audit or inspection; it is a check to ensure that the control measures are in place and that they are effective in eliminating or reducing the potential for harm.

How do I ensure that control measures will be effective?

It is not possible to create a totally risk-free workplace. The outcome of a risk assessment should be detailed control measures that are effective and well

thought out. These control measures are practical steps to protect people from real harm and suffering. A control measure is effective when the following elements are in place:

- *Facts:* All the necessary facts about the work activity, the hazards and the risk are collected and documented in writing.
- *Consultation:* The person carrying out the risk assessment consults with those doing the work in order to identify the hazards and to explore possible solutions.
- *Critical review:* All possible solutions are explored; the rationale for selecting a specific control measure is detailed and agreement is reached on the implementation of the control measures.
- *Communication:* The details of how the control measures will be implemented are communicated to all relevant staff and there is agreement on the plan.

Who should carry out a risk assessment?

As a small business employer, you could do it yourself, while involving a relevant manager and employees as much as possible. Where the in-house expertise is not available, you may need to employ the services of an external competent person to help. Check that this person is competent and has the ability to assess the specific work activities. The steps in carrying out a risk assessment do not generally require external expertise and many small businesses conduct their own assessments effectively.

Do employees have responsibilities?

Yes, employees must co-operate with your efforts to improve health and safety.

You need to consult them as part of the risk assessment process and they should co-operate in the implementation of the control measures (e.g. wear protective equipment when it is provided). Generally, the more involved employees are, the more committed and responsible they are in implementing good practices.

Can you give an example of a risk assessment?

Step 1: Understand the work activity

- Employee standing in the truck lifts the carcass and places it on the floor of the truck.
- Employee standing at the back entrance places the carcass on his shoulder and carries it on his shoulder for a distance before transferring the carcass on to the weighing scales hook.



Figure 2.1

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Step 2: Collect all relevant information

- Carcass weight: 90 to 100 kg.
- Carcass size: 1.5 metres in length.
- Number of lifting activities: 3 or 4, with significant manipulation when trying to alter position.
- Distance travelled when moving from truck to scales: 12 metres.
- Floor is sometimes wet and the carcass can be wet and difficult to hold.

Step 3: Hazard identification and assessment of risk

There are a number of hazards: the load is too heavy, it is difficult to grasp, it is too large and the physical effort is too strenuous. The level of risk is high as there are a number of factors that could result in an employee suffering a serious back injury.



Figure 2.2

Step 4: Decide on the control measures and implement the action plan

- Lever system put in place in the truck to allow a carcass to be lowered mechanically.
- Location of weighing scales changed to ensure close proximity to the truck location.
- The employee has only one lifting action to complete to transfer the carcass from the truck to the scales.
- There is now only one employee needed for this work activity.

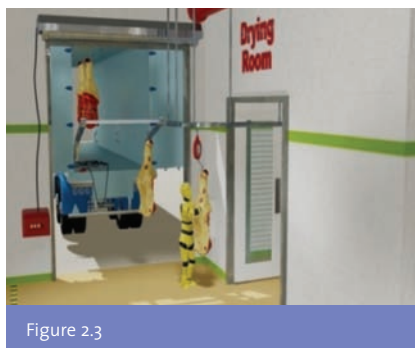


Figure 2.3

Step 5: Review effectiveness of control measures

- Check to ensure that the control measures are in place and that they are effective in eliminating or reducing the potential for harm.

Contacts/References

See Section 16 of this Toolkit for risk assessment templates.

See the HSA's website (www.hsa.ie) for copies of:

- Guidelines on Risk Assessments and Safety Statements.

