HSA

An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta
Health and Safety Authority

An Information Pack for

MANAGING HAZARDS

in the Workplace

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Our Vision: Healthy, safe and productive lives and enterprises

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An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta
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Published in Dublin 2022 by the Health and Safety Authority, The Metropolitan Building, James Joyce Street, Dublin 1, D01 K0Y8

01 Introduction

Managing safety and health is essential to protect your workers and your business. These information sheets will provide you with practical advice on how to manage the most common hazards in your workplace, and how to prevent them causing harm. Throughout these information sheets, you will find references to carrying out risk assessments. But what is a risk assessment and how do you complete one?

Risk Assessment

What is a risk assessment?

A risk assessment is a written document that records a three-step process:

- **Identify the hazards in the workplace(s) under your control.**
- **Assess the risks presented by these hazards.**
- **Put control measures in place to reduce the risk of these hazards causing harm.**

Step 1 : Look at the hazards

The first step is to identify all the hazards in the workplace. A hazard is anything with the potential to cause injury or ill health. Some hazards are obvious, such as unguarded moving parts of machinery, dangerous fumes, electricity, working at height, moving vehicles or moving heavy loads. Less obvious, but at the root of many accidents, are hazards presented by untidy workplaces and poor maintenance.

Step 2: Assess the risks

Risk means the likelihood that someone will be harmed by a hazard, together with the severity of the harm suffered. Risk also depends on the number of people who might be exposed to the hazard.

In assessing the risk, you should estimate:

- **How likely it is that a hazard will cause harm?**
- **How serious that harm is likely to be?**
- **How often and how many workers are exposed?**

Step 3: Decide on the control measures

Your first approach should be to eliminate hazards from your workplace. Clearly if you get rid of a hazard, then you are making it safer for you and your employees. If you cannot eliminate a hazard, then the next step is to try a safer approach by changing the way the job is done so as to make it safer. If that's still not enough, then decide what control measures are necessary to reduce the risk to as low a level as possible and put them in place.

Record the findings of your risk assessments and talk to employees

Make sure your employees know what control measures are in place to protect their safety and health and what is expected of them in order to work safely.

You can prepare your risk assessments at:

BeSMART.ie

02 Work at Height / Falling Objects

Introduction

This information sheet will give employers practical advice on identifying and managing work at height and preventing falling objects.

Fig 2.1 Reaching high shelves

What is work at height?

Work at height is working in a place where a person could be injured by falling from it, even if it is at or below ground level.

Examples of work at height include:

- **Using a ladder, kick stool or stepladder in a stock room or store cupboard or to reach high shelves** (see Figure 2.1).
- **Using trestles or ladders to paint or clean.**
- **Changing light bulbs in an office.**
- **Working on the back of a lorry to cover a load.**
- **Working close to an open excavation or cellar trap door.**
- **Rigging lighting for a concert or stage production.**
- **Working on a roof.**
- **Dressing retail displays on a mezzanine edge** (see Figure 2.2).
- **Window cleaning.**
- **Working from a scaffold, cherry picker or mobile elevated work platform** (see Figure 3).

What do I have to do as an employer?

- Risk assess activities involving work at height and put control measures in place so that work at height is firstly avoided whenever possible. For example, can windows be cleaned using an extendable pole while staying on the ground instead of climbing a ladder?
- Make sure work at height is properly planned, supervised and carried out.
- Minimise the risk of falling where work at height is unavoidable. For example, make sure there is a parapet or double handrail around a work area at height or use suitable work equipment.
- Use suitable work equipment to minimise the distance someone could fall and the consequences of the fall e.g. safety nets, bean bags.

Fig 2.2 Retail displays on a mezzanine ledge

- Make sure the place where work at height is done is safe and employees can get to it safely. Take account of weather conditions if the place is outdoors.
- Instruct and train employees involved in work at height, for example in the safe use, storage and maintenance of personal protective equipment such as safety harnesses.
- Inspect equipment for work at height and keep records.
- Control the risks from fragile surfaces and falling objects.

Fig 2.3 Scaffolding

Fig 2.4 Equipment for reaching work areas at height

What do employees have to do?

Employees also have responsibilities including:

- Co-operating with their employer in relation to carrying out work at height safely
- Not being under the influence of any intoxicant such as alcohol or drugs
- Not behaving in a way that could endanger themselves or others
- Reporting any defects in the place of work, system of work, equipment etc.
- Using all machinery and equipment properly, including personal protective equipment

How do I carry out a risk assessment for work at height?

- A risk assessment is a careful examination of what could cause harm to people. It allows you to put in place control measures for eliminating or minimising the risk of harm from working at height.
- Document your risk assessment and any safe systems of work you have for organising and carrying out work at height.
- Have procedures in place for selecting suitable work equipment for work at height.
- The extent of the control measures is determined by how serious the harm would be if no action was taken.
- The employees involved in the work activity at height, and those who may be affected by the work, must be told about the hazards and the control measures to be used.

For some work at height activities it may be necessary to have emergency plans and procedures in place before work starts such as a rescue plan. For example, if a fall arrest system is used, a rescue plan must be in place in case an employee falls and becomes suspended.

How do I decide what work equipment is suitable for work at height?

The choice of equipment will depend on the risk assessment. There is a wide range of work equipment suitable for different environments and different activities. Whatever equipment is selected, it must be fit for purpose, in good condition, suitable for the activity and the work environment.

Where possible, you must choose equipment that protects all the people working at height in preference to equipment that protects them one by one, for example, handrails around the edge of the work area at height instead of safety harnesses with lanyards.

The choice of equipment has to be practical for the work environment including; the ground conditions, and the type and duration of the task. Equipment chosen to access the work area at height will depend on the use (e.g. frequent use, bulky or heavy materials to be carried). Employees must not have to climb over guardrails or step over gaps to get to the work area.

Fig 2.5 Boom hoist

Work equipment used for lifting people must have a thorough examination, (e.g. see Figure 2.5) which should be carried out by a competent person at least every six months. Accessories for attaching to lifting equipment such as slings or chains must also be examined every six months. All lifting equipment must be inspected weekly by the owner or user and records of these and all examinations must be kept. Proper maintenance is also essential in ensuring that equipment is safe to use.

Ladders

Ladders are commonly used in most workplaces, but falls from ladders, and ladders collapsing or falling, account for many serious work-related injuries each year. Ladders should only be used where the risk assessment shows other work equipment is not suitable and where the activity is light work, low risk and of short duration.

Do's

- ✔ Do a daily pre-use check
- ✔ Do secure the ladder
- ✔ Do set up on firm ground, never on a moveable surface e.g. pallets, blocks
- ✔ Do have a strong upper resting point
- ✔ Do have the ladder at a safe angle (1 out for every 4 units up)
- ✔ Do use for short duration work only
- ✔ Do use for light work only
- ✔ Do grip the stiles while climbing

Fig 2.6 Ladder use

Do not's

- ✘ Do not overreach: keep your belt buckle between the stiles and both feet on same rung
- ✘ Do not carry out work which causes sideways loadings
- ✘ Do not work on the top three rungs, or the top two steps for stepladders
- ✘ Do not straddle an A frame ladder
- ✘ Do not move a ladder while standing on the rungs
- ✘ Do not slide down the stiles
- ✘ Do not extend a ladder while standing on the rungs

Other equipment

Think about using work platforms with handrails on the steps and guardrails on the platform instead of ladders. Figure 2.7 gives an example of a work platform.

Guardrails may be needed to make a work platform or other place of work safe. They must be strong enough to prevent them breaking and secured to prevent them moving if someone falls against them. The rails should be spaced so that no one can fall over, under or between them.

Equipment designed to catch a falling person such as safety nets or bean bags, must be erected by a competent person in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. A rescue plan will be needed if this type of equipment is used.

Personal fall protection equipment such as lanyards, safety harnesses or work positioning equipment should only be used if the risk assessment showed that the use of other, safer equipment is not practical. They must be strong enough, correctly adjusted and fitted, and suitably anchored. A rescue plan will be needed if this type of equipment is used. This equipment must be visually checked before each use and must be inspected by a competent person at least every six months.

Fig 2.7 Ladder use

Fragile surfaces

Employers must identify any potential fragile surfaces in or on their premises.

A fragile surface is a surface where there is a risk of a person or object falling through it e.g. fragile roofs, ceilings, skylights. Employers must prevent employees passing across or near, or working on or near a fragile surface where it is practical to do so e.g. working from a suitable work platform underneath the fragile surface.

If passing near or on, or working near or on a fragile surface is impossible to avoid then measures must be put in place to prevent falls from height or minimise the distance of a fall using the risk assessment as before. If regular or occasional access is required to or near a fragile surface then permanent guardrails should be put in place.

Fig 2.8 Fragile surface

Falling objects

Employers must take steps to prevent the fall of any material or object to prevent injury to employees or others.

- Keep workplaces at height clear of loose materials and store materials well back from edges.
- Materials stored at height should be secured to prevent them being dislodged by the wind or knocked over.
- Store only small amounts of materials at height.
- Prevent objects rolling or being kicked off an edge by using toeboards (boards put lengthways at the edge of the storage area) or solid barriers.
- When using racking for storage, it must be erected as per the manufacturer's instructions, including correctly anchoring it and protecting the uprights (legs) from impact. Heavier items should be stored at lower levels. Racking and shelves must be checked regularly for damage. If damaged, they must not be used until replaced or repaired. Racks and shelves must not be overloaded and the maximum safe load must be prominently marked on all racking.

03 Slips, Trips and Falls

Introduction

This information sheet will give employers practical advice on how to control risks from slips, trips and falls. It will help you to identify high-risk areas in your workplace where there is an increased likelihood of a slip, trip or fall occurring. Slips, trips and falls on the same level can lead to serious injuries, with one in four resulting in an absence from work of over one month.

What do I have to do as an employer?

Employers have a responsibility to control risks from slips, trips and falls. This includes:

- conducting workplace specific slips, trips and falls risk assessment(s),
- putting in place controls to prevent slips, trips and falls,
- carrying out checks to make sure those controls are in place and working,
- providing personal protective equipment (e.g. slip resistant footwear) if required, and
- making sure employees receive appropriate training and instructions.

What do employees have to do?

Employees' responsibilities include:

- Reporting anything dangerous e.g. damaged flooring, spills.
- Using and taking proper care of any personal protective equipment (e.g. slip resistant footwear).

How do I carry out a risk assessment for slips, trips and falls?

A risk assessment is a careful examination of what could cause harm to people. It allows you to put in place control measures for eliminating or minimising the risk of harm from slips, trips and falls.

The extent of the control measures is determined by how serious the harm would be if no action was taken.

Key areas to consider when assessing the risk for slips, trips and falls include spills, high-risk areas, over-used warning signs, workplace cleanliness and shoes.

Spills

Spills can happen in any workplace, causing wet floors which will increase the likelihood of a slip or fall occurring. To reduce this likelihood you should:

- identify areas at high risk of spills and locate absorbent materials nearby,
- deal with spills straight away,
- routinely monitor areas where spills are likely,
- use absorbent material to soak up the spill,
- where possible avoid using wet cleaning,
- consider using spill kits, and
- ensure slip resistant footwear is provided and worn as needed.

By identifying areas where spills may occur and putting controls in place in anticipation of the spills e.g. proper mats, sufficient drainage, drip trays, you will also reduce the risk.

Fig 3.1 Spills cause slips

These are areas where there are sources of liquid e.g. equipment using water, wash-up areas, showers, cleaning store, toilets, water dispenser, flowers, plants, deep-fat fryers, hanging baskets.

Particular care is needed around self-service drinks areas and walk-in chiller and freezer floors if wet.

Small fruit / vegetable items with a high liquid content, such as grapes or tomatoes, may be a high slip risk if they fall onto the floor. Prepacked items can reduce the risk.

High-risk areas

The floor in a workplace must be suitable for the type of work being done. Where a floor can't be kept dry, people should be able to walk on it without fear of a slip, so it should have sufficient roughness (slip resistance) and must be fitted correctly to avoid slip hazards.

High-risk areas will include transition areas, where pedestrians move between surfaces with very different levels of grip, the most obvious being pedestrians going from wet to dry surfaces at entrances. These areas need to be identified and mats provided to remove excess moisture from footwear. Use heavy mats or ones with weighted edges or recess them into the floor to secure them and place them where people actually walk.

Fig 3.2 Training cables cause trips

Areas where levels change, e.g. slopes, ramps, steps / stairs, unexpected holes, bumps, drainage channels, are other high risk areas.

Consider the following control measures:

- Providing slip resistant surfaces
- Providing adequate lighting
- Highlighting changes in level
- Providing proper drain covers
- Keeping the top and bottom of stairs clean and tidy
- Avoiding carrying items on stairs, e.g. by the use of dumb waiters

Damaged flooring or paving can pose a high risk of trips and falls. You should identify any area where the surface is poorly maintained or damaged, repair the damage and take steps to prevent further damage.

Trailing cables and hoses also pose a significant trip hazard. To avoid this, try to:

- place equipment close to electrical outlets where possible,
- site electrical outlets to avoid trailing cables.
- identify poorly sited gas or liquid supply points and reroute where possible,
- avoid the use of extension cables if possible,
- use retractable reels, and
- tape down temporary trailing cables.

Slippery surfaces must be identified as these are also high-risk areas. As a rule of thumb, high gloss or highly reflective equals high risk.

Consider changing or treating floor surfaces e.g. the addition of slip resistant materials, non-slip strips, or chemical treatment such as etching.

Pay particular attention to areas that may become slippery during winter weather. Grit or salt can be used to deal temporarily with snow or ice.

Ensure slip resistant footwear is provided and worn as needed.

Overused warning signs

Warning signs do not physically keep people away from wet floors. For programmed or routine floor cleaning, use a system that keeps pedestrians away from wet floors, e.g. physical barriers, cordons.

Warning signs must be removed when they no longer apply.

Fig 3.3 Warning sign with barrier

Workplace cleanliness

Procedures to ensure good housekeeping standards are vital. These may include:

- Keeping walkways through the workplace clear – no trailing cables, no obstructions
- Tidy as you go – don't leave tidying up until the end of shift
- Keep floors and access routes clear
- Keep messy operations away from pedestrian routes
- Dispose of packing material and other wrappings carefully. Do not leave them lying around the floor
- Inserts in papers and magazines may be slippery. Remove them promptly if they fall onto the floor

Fig 3.4 Poor housekeeping causes trips

For routine cleaning

- Cleaning staff must be properly trained and instructed
- Provide cleaning staff with slip resistant footwear and make sure they are worn
- Before cleaning, check the floor to see if cleaning is actually required
- As much as possible, dry cleaning (e.g. a microfibre brush for dust) should replace wet cleaning
- Clean floors at times when there will be little or no traffic
- Wherever possible cordon off the floor area being cleaned using a barrier
- Organise cleaning to provide dry paths through areas being cleaned
- When wet cleaning, remove excess liquid so that the floor dries as quickly as possible, and as much as possible clean the floor until dry

Shoes (safety footwear)

Employers should make sure personal protective equipment (PPE) is provided where risks cannot be avoided or reduced by other means. PPE must be provided free of charge to the employee. Consider the following:

- For indoor slip resistance, choose a shoe with a well-defined tread pattern and a flexible sole
- Consult with employees when choosing safety footwear as they are more likely to like and therefore wear them. Make sure they are comfortable and fit well
- Footwear marked ‘slip resistant’ may not perform well in your workplace, so try them out before you buy
- Footwear that performs well in wet conditions might not be suitable where there are food spills. The sole tread needs to be kept clear of waste. If they constantly clog up, the sole design is unsuitable for your workplace
- With clogs, ensure an ankle strap is in place and used properly
- If you use safety overshoes, check that they provide adequate slip resistance
- Routinely check the soles of slip resistant footwear and replace as required
- Choose footwear that is reasonably easy to clean and maintain
- Where safety footwear is required, avoid open-toed shoes, sandals, flip-flops, high heels and smooth soles

Fig 3.5 Safety footwear with slip resistant soles

04 Chemicals

Introduction

This information sheet gives employers and employees practical advice on how to assess the risks from the chemicals in their workplace and how to manage chemicals safely.

Almost all workplaces use chemicals which means employees can be routinely exposed to paints, sprays, inks, toners and adhesives not to mention a wide range of materials used in cleaning and maintenance such as detergents and oils.

Chemicals can be solids (e.g. dusts, fibres), liquids or mists (e.g. bleach) or gases / vapours (e.g. carbon monoxide, chlorine or ammonia). They can be individual substances like petrol or mixtures / products (e.g. paints, degreasers, ink and toners).

Any chemical, in either gas, liquid or solid form, that has the potential to cause harm is referred to as a hazardous chemical. Chemicals include those that are brought into the workplace and used for processing (e.g. solvents and cleaning agents) and those that are generated by a process or work activity (such as fumes from welding / soldering) or generated as waste or residue (such as carbon monoxide from engine or exhausts).

How can chemicals cause harm to health?

Chemicals can cause harm to health ranging from mild skin irritation to cancer when they come in contact with the human body. The effects of hazardous chemicals may be seen immediately after contact e.g. chemical burn, or many years after contact e.g. lung cancer following exposure to asbestos. Harm can also occur following a single short exposure such as the use of a chemical for a couple of hours or longer-term exposures from the daily use of a chemical.

Chemicals can come in contact with or enter the human body through inhalation (breathing in contaminated air), skin contact, ingestion (swallowed accidentally e.g. hand-to-mouth contact) or injection (from sharp objects such as needles).

Examples of the effects of hazardous chemicals include:

- skin irritation, dermatitis or skin cancer from frequent contact with oils,
- injuries to hands and eyes from contact with corrosive liquids such as acids / bases,
- asthma due to sensitisation to isocyanates in paints and adhesives,
- lung diseases following exposure to dusty environments such as wood or flour dust, and
- death or injury from exposure to toxic fumes, for example; chlorine, ammonia, carbon monoxide.

Some chemicals also present physical hazards such as the potential to ignite or support combustion of other chemical substances (an oxidiser) and others have the potential to explode (flammable solvents).

Assessing the risk of chemicals

1. Make a list (inventory)

Walk around your workplace and make a list of all the chemicals you bring in and those generated by work activities (dust, residues, waste).

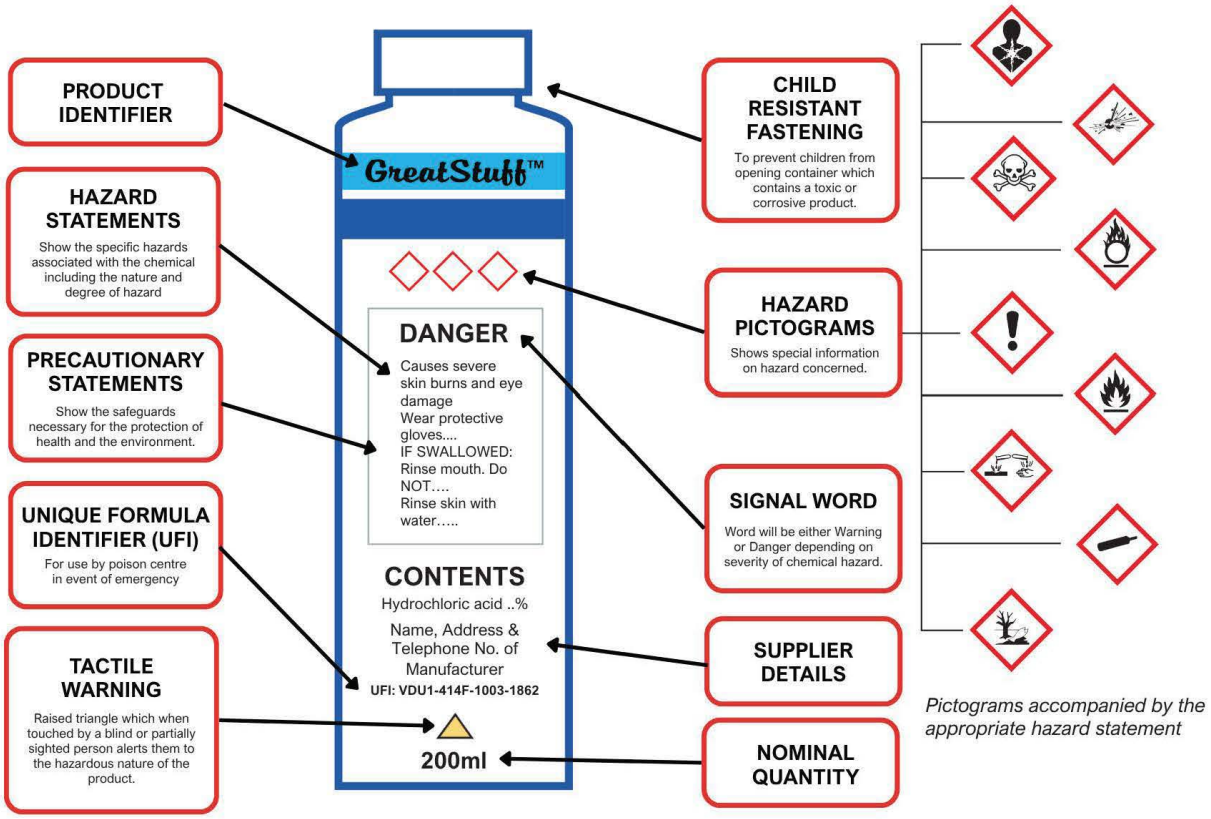
The following shows an example of a simple inventory:

Name of Chemical	How much? Where is it stored?	What is it used for?	Hazard information	Supplier details	SDS available?
Best Cleaner	5 x 1 Litre containers Stored in cleaning cabinet in kitchen	Cleaning kitchen area	Eye and skin irritation 	Acme Cleaning Ltd., 1 Acme Lane, Ind. Estate, Dublin 123	Yes
Unknown	Approx. 1L On top shelf of garage	Not currently used	No information	No information	No. Arrange for chemical to be safely removed

2. Identify chemical hazards

The most important sources of information on the hazards of the chemicals brought into your workplace are the **label** and **safety data sheet (SDS)**.

All chemical containers should be supplied with a label which clearly identifies the chemical and its hazards. Where a chemical is hazardous, the label should contain a signal word (danger or warning) and may include an associated pictogram and a hazard statement giving more detailed information on the hazard (e.g. causes serious eye irritation, causes skin irritation). It should also contain precautionary statements giving advice on safety precautions to be taken (e.g. keep out of reach of children, wear protective gloves / protective clothing / eye protection / face protection). Additional precautionary information may be provided in the safety data sheet.



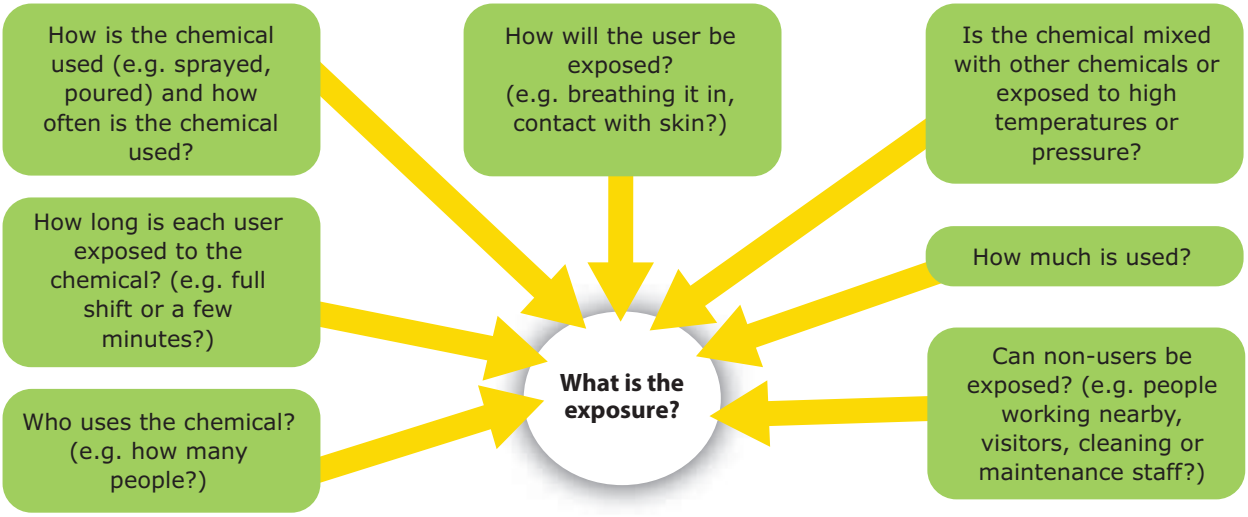
Pictograms accompanied by the appropriate hazard statement

A safety data sheet is a document that should be provided by the supplier with all hazardous chemicals. The safety data sheet is a key tool for risk assessment as it includes detailed hazard information, advice on safe handling, use and storage, and the emergency measures to be followed in case of an accident.

3. Assess exposure

Once you have identified your chemical hazards you then need to assess what the potential exposure is to your employees.

This involves looking at each chemical which you have identified as hazardous and considering the following questions:



4. Control your chemical risks

Once you have assessed the risk associated with your chemicals, control measures must be put in place in order to keep your employees, your workplace, and the environment safe.

You should first consider if you can eliminate the hazard by changing the process or removing the hazardous chemical. If you cannot eliminate the chemical(s) can you substitute the hazardous chemical with another, non-hazardous or less hazardous chemical? For example, you could replace isocyanate-based paints with water-based paints or you could use a less hazardous form of the same chemical (e.g. using a pellet rather than a powder form of the chemical could have a significant effect on reducing inhalable dust levels).

Where the above options are not possible, exposure to hazardous chemicals should be minimised and additional control measures must be put in place to remove or reduce the risks to employees:

- Engineering controls e.g. local exhaust ventilation (LEV), isolation / containment hoods or booths.
- Review of current work practices or procedures to reduce the frequency and length of exposure.
- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), e.g. eye protection, gloves, masks and respiratory masks (RPE). As these are the last line of defence, they should not be used without first considering the other controls above. (Information on the correct PPE and RPE is provided in section 6 of the SDS, but contact the supplier if unclear).
- Training for employees on the chemicals currently used in the workplace, what the chemical hazards are and the potential risks to their health, and how to handle chemicals safely.
- Hygiene arrangements e.g. separate meal and wash facilities, designated smoking areas or a no smoking policy.
- Storage arrangements so that chemicals are stored correctly, safely and securely. (Information on storage is available in section 7 of the SDS).
- A good level of housekeeping.
- Correct disposal of waste in line with the information provided in section 13 of the SDS.
- Emergency procedures in case of an accident, incident or spillage, e.g. eyewashes, showers, spill kits.

05 Manual Handling

Introduction

This information sheet gives practical advice on managing the risks associated with manual handling of loads.

There are two key requirements:

- Risk assess each manual handling task
- Put measures in place where needed to avoid or reduce the risks

What is manual handling?

Manual handling is a physical activity which takes place in every workplace. Manual handling can be a potential workplace hazard where the activity requires, for example, a person to handle very heavy loads or lift loads to an unsafe height.

This sheet gives practical information on useful changes that can be made to reduce the risk of injury caused by manual handling. It will show you how to review your current work activities and identify the potential issues in relation to manual handling. You can then introduce changes to work practices which will result in better ways of working and reduced risk of back injury.

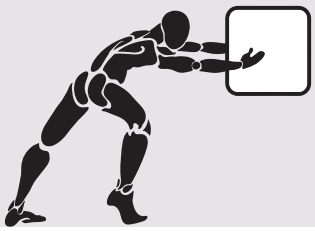
There are a number of stages involved:

- Look at the way the task is currently done.
- Collect information on load weights and risk factors (see table below).
- Consult with the employees who actually carry out the task – record the issues they have noticed and any possible solutions they can think of.
- List the issues that may need to be addressed.
- Make changes to improve the job.

A manual handling task may include one or all of the following risk factors:

Risk Factors

The lifting of the load requires repeated handling at a distance from the trunk.



Risk Factors

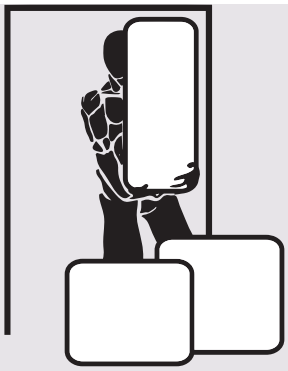
The lifting of the load requires repeated bending of the trunk.

The load is very large and difficult to grasp.

The handling repeatedly takes place at floor level or above shoulder height.

The physical effort can only be achieved by a twisting of the trunk.

The load is carried over a long distance and there is poor housekeeping, poor access or not enough space.



Note:

This may help to flag the manual handling tasks that need priority risk assessment.

Manual handling case study

Below is an example of how a work task which involves manual handling can be assessed and result in the development of a new system of work with less manual handling.

Figure 5.1 opposite shows a warehouse worker manually handling a large barrel. The worker hunches over and grips both sides of the barrel. Slowly and with great effort and strain the worker tilts the barrel back slightly, and then forward using the weight of their body.

Fig 5.1

Following a risk assessment of this manual handling task a number of risk factors are identified. The physical effort is too strenuous – the barrel is difficult to grasp, being both too heavy and too large.
Figure 5.2 opposite illustrates these risk factors.

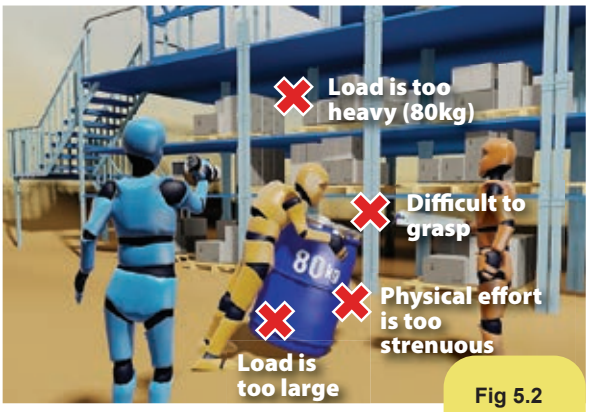


Fig 5.2

A new system of work is developed.
In **Figure 5.3** opposite the worker now approaches the barrel, which is mounted, on a specialised trolley. A safety clip holds the barrel securely in place, and the worker can wheel the barrel on the trolley easily, thereby reducing the risk of injury.

Fig 5.3

06 Maintenance

Introduction

This information sheet gives employers practical advice on managing maintenance activities and the main hazards associated with maintenance work.

Maintenance is carried out in all workplaces and it concerns everyone. Buildings and structures that are not maintained regularly eventually become unsafe not only for the people who work there, but also for visitors, customers and members of the public.

Machinery and equipment that is poorly maintained can be unsafe for operators and create risks for other employees. While maintenance is essential to ensure safe and healthy working conditions, the maintenance work itself can pose serious risks if not properly managed. Maintenance work may cause additional hazards (e.g. fire, machine guards removed, slips, trips and falls) which need to be risk assessed. Therefore maintenance work needs to be planned and the hazards identified before work starts.

Types of maintenance

There are two types of maintenance:

Corrective maintenance – when work is done to get a machine or system that has broken down working again e.g. repair or replacement of broken parts, building maintenance.

Preventive or planned maintenance – when work is carried out at set intervals e.g. as per the manufacturer's manual, to reduce the probability of breakdowns or to keep items in good working order e.g. replacement, lubrication, cleaning or inspection.

Careful planning of maintenance activities is crucial to minimise the risks for the maintenance workers themselves and for others.

1. Falls from height

Maintenance work often involves using equipment to reach roofs, gutters, building services and raised sections of plant and machinery. It can be all too easy to fall from these, or to drop objects onto people below. (See Figure 6.1)

Fig 6.1
Maintenance work involving work at height

2. "Live" plant and equipment

Isolation and lock off arrangements, and in some cases permits to work, are essential as cutting power to plant and equipment (isolation) and preventing start up (lock off) until maintenance work is complete allows the work to be done safely. (See Figure 6.2)

Fig 6.2
Lock off / tag out system

3. Disturbing asbestos

Some buildings may contain asbestos and the health consequences of disturbing this when drilling holes or replacing panels can be severe, as can the clean up costs involved.

4. Falls of heavy items

Heavy items sometimes have to be moved or disturbed during maintenance work. There may well be cranes, fork lift trucks or props available for use, but maintenance tasks can sometimes involve one-off situations and the handling of heavy loads isn't always properly planned.

Some other hazards associated with maintenance work include:

Chemical hazards such as:

- glass fibres,
- vapours, fumes, dusts (e.g. asphalt fumes, diesel exhaust, crystalline silica), and
- solvents.

Biological hazards such as:

- bacteria (e.g. legionella, salmonella), and
- mould and fungi.

Physical hazards such as:

- noise, vibration,
- excessive heat and cold,
- radiation (ultraviolet radiation, x-rays, electromagnetic fields),
- high physical workload, and
- difficult to reach items (bending, kneeling, reaching, pushing and pulling, working in confined spaces).

Risk assessment of maintenance

Before starting any maintenance work, a risk assessment should be carried out. Employees doing the work should be involved in this. Assessment of risk for maintenance work can be difficult because of uncertainties such as not knowing the actual condition of plant until it has been opened up, or not being able to decide on the repair work needed until an initial survey has been completed.

The contents of the risk assessments and the safe work procedures must be clearly communicated to the employees involved. Procedures need to be in place for unexpected developments. Part of the safe system of work should be to stop work when faced with an unforeseen problem and revising the risk assessment before work restarts.

Selecting contractors

Some of your maintenance work will be done in-house and some will require outside contractors. Contractors' employees must meet with a designated person on arrival at your workplace. To enable both in-house and contracted staff to work safely, you will need to brief them on the hazards associated with your workplace. They must also brief you on the hazards associated with the work they are going to be doing, and you will need them to follow safe work procedures.

Fig 6.3
External contractor at work

Communication

All information which is necessary to perform a task safely should be shared between all parties concerned. This includes not only the employees and contractors directly involved in the maintenance task, but also those likely to be affected by it or who may be working in the area. Important information includes the results of the risk assessment, safe work procedures, details of any necessary protective equipment and how to report problems.

Training

Contractors and maintenance employees must possess the knowledge and skills to carry out the work safely e.g. repairs on electrical circuits are only carried out by a registered electrician.

Maintenance employees must receive safety training including relevant information in the safety statement, risk assessments and safe working procedures. They must also be trained in the use of fire extinguishers where hot work is undertaken and must be made aware of all external gas, water and electricity cut off points.

Control measures

Control measures should be identified and implemented based on the results of the risk assessment. When hazards cannot be completely eliminated, the risk of harm should be minimised by other measures. Due to the variety of potential maintenance work hazards it is not possible to detail all potential controls, but they may include engineering controls, such as enclosing the process, local exhaust ventilation and safety guards, and safe systems of work including lock off procedures and permits to work. Below are some examples:

Hazard	Controls
Falls from height	Work at height is avoided where possible. If not possible, all work at height is planned and supervised, and employees are adequately trained.
	Where possible, an edge protection system is in place around a work area at height e.g. double handrail or parapet.
	Employees climbing and working at height are secured and protected against falls.
	If possible a mechanical lifting device is used to eliminate the need to climb, such as a "cherry picker" or a mobile elevating work platform (MEWP).
	Employees are made aware of the dangers and understand the importance of the protective equipment they have to wear, know how to use it properly and that it must be inspected, maintained and replaced as required.
"Live" plant and equipment Unexpected start-up of machines	Machines are isolated from electric, hydraulic and pneumatic power supplies before maintenance work starts.
	If adjustments are required to machines when parts are moving and pose a risk, these are only carried out when machines are at slow speed and / or under "hold to run" control.
	Guards are only removed to the extent work requires and are replaced as soon as maintenance is complete.
	Safe systems of work are in place including permits to work, lock off and tagging procedures.
	Safe systems of work are communicated and understood by employees.
Disturbing asbestos	Where maintenance work may involve disturbing asbestos all possible types and locations of asbestos have been identified by a competent person.
	Employees performing maintenance tasks are aware of the risks and know how to protect themselves and others.
	Asbestos removal and disposal is only carried out by trained, competent persons in accordance with relevant legislation.
	A clearance certificate is received from a competent person after asbestos removal is complete and before any other work starts.
Lifting / moving equipment or materials Falls of heavy items	The lift is planned from start to finish before the task starts.
	Mechanical equipment is used where possible to lift or move heavy loads.
	All lifting equipment and accessories are certified by a competent person and operator(s) of lifting equipment are trained.
	Unnecessary personnel are kept out of the lifting area.
	Equipment or materials are prevented from falling from a work area at height or while being lifted.

07 Electricity

Introduction

This information sheet will give employers practical advice on managing electricity in the workplace and what can be done to reduce the risk of electrocution (shock or burns) and electrical fires.

Electricity in workplaces is generally supplied at three distinct voltages: 110 volts, 220 volts and 380 volts.

The higher the supply voltage the higher the level of risk. However electricity at all voltages, if not managed in a safe way, can present significant hazards to those working with electrical installations or using electrically powered equipment. Therefore maintenance work needs to be planned and the hazards identified before work starts.

How can electricity kill or injure?

Electricity can kill or injure people in four different ways:

- Electric current passing through the body disrupts the operation of key organs such as the brain, heart, lungs and the nerve impulses that stimulate these organs. Even relatively low currents can scramble nerve cell signals so that the heart cannot beat properly, sending the heart into a condition known as fibrillation. A fibrillating heart flutters rather than beats, and is ineffective at pumping blood to vital organs in the body, which can cause serious injury or death.
- If higher voltages or longer exposure is involved, heat is generated within the body and tissues may be burnt. The effect is the same as damage caused by an open flame, except that electricity burns tissue beneath the skin, even burning internal organs causing irreparable damage or death.
- Muscles triggered by an external (shock) current will involuntarily contract, and there is nothing the person can do about it. If the person contacts a live conductor with his or her hands, the forearm muscles responsible for bending fingers will clench the fingers into a fist forcing the hand to grasp the wire firmly. The person will be completely unable to let go of the wire. This effect can only be stopped by cutting off the current.
- Finally, the heating effects of electricity can cause ignition of flammable or combustible materials leading to fire, which may cause death or serious injury.

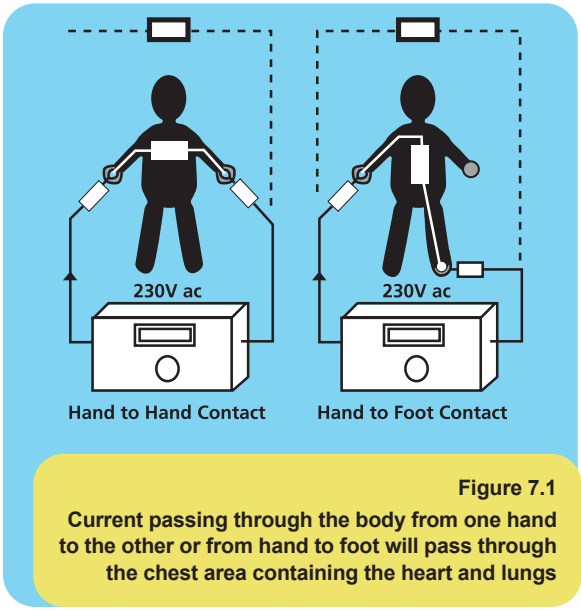


Figure 7.1
Current passing through the body from one hand to the other or from hand to foot will pass through the chest area containing the heart and lungs

Most of us have experienced some form of electric "shock", where electricity causes our body to experience pain. If we are lucky, that experience is limited to tingles or jolts of pain from static electricity build up discharging through our bodies. When we are working around electric circuits capable of delivering high power, electric shock becomes a much more serious issue, and pain is the least significant result of shock.

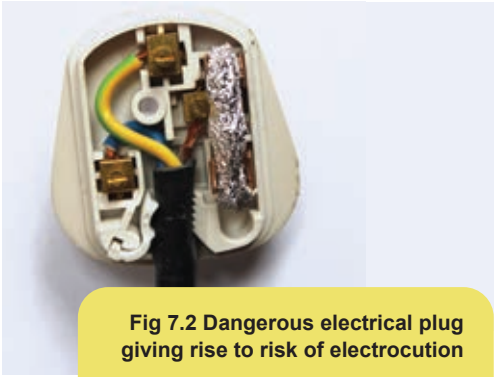


Fig 7.2 Dangerous electrical plug giving rise to risk of electrocution

How do electrical installations start fires?

Any electric current passing through an item can generate heat. Usually this temperature increase is intended and is used for electric heating, lighting, welding and drying. However if electrical connections are loose, electrical outlets are overloaded or damaged, or if there is a short circuit, heat can be generated to the point where ignition occurs and a fire may start.

Another risk in the case of electrical fires is that they can be particularly tricky to put out; using water to put out the fire can cause electrocution. Many fire extinguishers are not suitable for use on electrical fires. Until the power has been shut off, only extinguishers containing non-conducting extinguishing agents should be used.

Extinguishers which are suitable for use on electrical fires are:

- Carbon Dioxide
- Dry Powder
- Halon Replacement (Be careful not to select a halon extinguisher which is banned because of its toxic effect on the environment)

Select these extinguishers for buildings or rooms that mainly house electrical apparatus or plant.

How can I prevent danger from electricity?

Putting in place a system for checking electrical appliances, leads and sockets on a regular basis and reporting any defects, e.g. scorch marks or frayed leads, will help in identifying any potential problems. Replace or repair any damaged or worn item immediately. Depending on the equipment or installation involved, repairs or extensions should be done by a competent electrician who should test and certify the works when they are complete. It is advisable to have the entire installation periodically checked and certified by a competent electrician and a record of this test should be maintained by the employer in control of the installation.

A means of cutting off power to electrical installations, e.g. fuses or trip switches, must be provided and employees should be made aware of their location.

Fig 7.3 Potential ignition source from electrical equipment

Fig 7.4 Installations like these can lead to inadvertent contact and electrocution

What are residual current devices (RCDs)?

An RCD protects against serious electric shock if there is an electrical fault in your workplace.

An RCD must be fitted in the distribution / fuse board.

Circuits requiring RCD protection include:

- Socket outlets
- Immersion heaters and electrical shower circuits

RCDs detect 'leaking' electricity from a circuit (e.g. a damaged cable) and respond by disconnecting the electricity supply from that circuit.

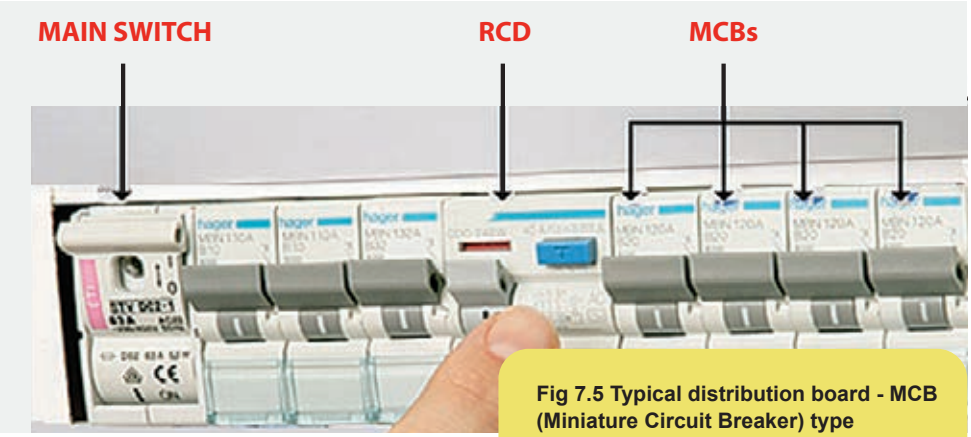


Fig 7.5 Typical distribution board - MCB (Miniature Circuit Breaker) type

Check that your RCD is working correctly by pressing the test button marked 'T' or 'Test'. Remember this will cut the power to all socket outlets so make sure no essential work is being done at the time.

Fig 7.6 Different types of RCD

If it is working, power to the socket outlets will immediately switch off. If the RCD fails to trip, it should be replaced immediately by a registered electrical contractor.

What are the requirements for ongoing inspecting and testing?

Testing and certification should only be carried out by a competent person.

Every new installation and every major alteration or extension to an existing installation, after completion and before being made live, must be inspected and tested. However, certain types of test may only be done after an installation has been made live. All the appropriate information, including diagrams of connections, wiring diagrams, charts, tables, schedules and equipment ratings, must be available to the person(s) carrying out the work.

Precautions must be taken to ensure the safety of persons and to avoid damage to the installation and equipment during inspection and testing.

Where the installation is an extension or alteration of an existing installation, it must be verified that the extension or alteration does not impair the safety of the existing installation.

08 Workplace Transport

Introduction

This information sheet gives employers and employees practical advice on workplace transport and on how to eliminate or reduce the risk of harm or damage occurring.

What is workplace transport?

Workplace transport involves the use of vehicles and mobile plant or machinery within a workplace. It includes a wide range of vehicles such as cars, motorbikes, delivery vans, large goods vehicles and forklift trucks.

What do I have to do as an employer?

Transport hazards including vehicles must be identified and risk assessed. Vehicles provided for use in the workplace should be suitable for the task, have a safe means of access to and from the vehicle and must be maintained in a safe condition.

When selecting vehicles or mobile work equipment, you must consider the work conditions, the characteristics and hazards in the workplace and the specific hazards posed by the use of the chosen vehicle. There are specific requirements in relation to maintenance, inspection and testing of certain vehicles.

How do I carry out a risk assessment for workplace transport?

To control workplace transport risks, the workplace, the vehicle and the driver must be appropriately managed.

Assessing and managing the workplace

When assessing the workplace think about the movement of vehicles and pedestrians. Plan traffic routes that consider the work activities, the traffic type, and the volume and circulation of vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Take account of vehicles that visit the workplace e.g. delivery vans, HGVs, couriers, tankers, emergency vehicles, forklift trucks, visitor and employee vehicles. Remember to include pedestrian traffic such as employees, other people's employees, visitors and contractors.

All traffic entering the workplace must be directed and controlled where possible.

Vehicle Traffic Routes

- Review access and entry into the workplace.
- Control pedestrians and vehicles entering the site e.g. using barriers or access gates.
- Check that drivers have adequate visibility and that it is not affected by landscaping, especially at junctions.
- Eliminate the need for reversing where possible. Consider one way systems and drive-through loading and unloading areas or turning points.

- Keep traffic routes away from hazardous areas and entrances or doorways used by pedestrians. Avoid sharp or blind bends and steep slopes on traffic routes. If blind spots or sharp bends cannot be avoided, provide mirrors to improve vision.
- Check overhead for height restriction such as overhead electrical cables and put up warning signs.
- Keep traffic routes free of obstructions as far as possible. Clearly mark those that are unavoidable and provide impact protection e.g. on lamp posts, pipe work and columns.

Pedestrians

- Separate pedestrians from vehicles e.g. by using separate footpaths or walkways.
- Provide pedestrian crossing points which have good visibility for both the driver and the pedestrian. Barriers or rails can direct pedestrians to crossing points and stop pedestrians crossing at blind spots.
- Provide barriers at entrances and exits of buildings to stop pedestrians walking directly into traffic.
- Provide separate vehicle and pedestrian entrances, with vision panels on all doors.
- Consider prohibiting or limiting vehicle traffic in busy pedestrian areas.
- Provide safe areas for drivers whilst vehicles are being loaded.

Signs and Road Markings

- Mark and signpost all vehicle and pedestrian traffic routes, both internally and externally. Mark or signpost information e.g. restricted / no parking areas, pedestrian crossings, traffic lanes, directions, junctions, stop lines, changes in gradient, kerbs, bollards, speed limits and sharp bends.

Fig 8.1 Pedestrian walkway

- All road signs should comply with the Department of Transport Traffic Signs Manual.
- All signs must be easy to understand e.g. use pictograms.
- Check that signs and markings are clearly visible at both day and night, when wet or dry and that artificial lighting does not affect visibility. Use reflective or illuminated signs where work is carried out outside of daylight hours.
- Place signs in locations that allow people time to see and understand them and take appropriate action.
- Place signs at the workplace entrance to indicate the main site rules e.g. traffic routes, speed limits.

Lighting

- Provide lighting on all traffic routes and in yard areas, without causing a risk of glare.

Traffic Control/Speed

- Put in place appropriate speed limits for the workplace. Different areas of the site may require different speed limits.
- Monitor and enforce the speed limit once in place e.g. CCTV can assist in measuring speed between two fixed points.
- Consider measures to limit vehicle speed e.g. using rumble strips, speed humps. Make sure they are clearly visible – they may need to be well-lit and / or reflective.

Parking

- If space allows, well-lit parking spaces should be provided for vehicles using the workplace.
- Work and private vehicles should be separated if possible.
- Loading and unloading should be carried out in a designated area away from overhead obstructions.

Housekeeping and Maintenance

- Regularly clean and maintain all vehicle and pedestrian traffic routes, markings, lighting, mirrors and signs.
- Keep pedestrian footpaths clear of materials that may cause slips, trips or falls such as mud or ice.
- Provide spill kits and written procedures for dealing with spills.

Assessing and managing vehicles

- If purchasing a vehicle or mobile work equipment, check that they are safe and suitable for their purpose and do not create an additional hazard when introduced into the workplace. The vehicle and mobile work equipment must be the correct type and size for the work activities and the workplace. Consult with vehicle drivers and operators prior to the selection and purchase of any workplace transport.
- Make sure that there is a safe means of access to the cab and any other parts of the vehicle that employees may need to get to, and that there is safe, comfortable seating.

Fig 8.2 Safe vehicle transport

- Make sure that dangerous parts such as exposed exhaust pipes, chain drives and power take off (PTO) shafts are adequately guarded and that the guards are maintained in good working order.
- Drivers should be able to see clearly all around their vehicle. If visibility is limited, have extra visibility aids fitted e.g. mirrors, CCTV.

- Make sure vehicle attachments are suitable for the task, compatible with the vehicle and regularly checked for wear and tear.
- Make sure that safety features such as horns, lights (including reversing lights) and seatbelts are provided and maintained. Alarm systems that sound if the driver attempts to leave the vehicle without applying the handbrake should also be considered.
- Make sure that the steering and braking systems are suitable and effective.
- Check that the vehicle is capable of taking the full weight and size of everything that it may be required to carry and that drivers are protected against possible shifting loads. Anchor points must be provided for securing loads properly.
- Raised vehicle bodies must be securely propped using a prop designed to carry the vehicle weight.
- Adequately maintain vehicles and mobile work equipment throughout their working life and keep records. Keep the manufacturer's instruction handbook for the lifetime of the vehicle or mobile work equipment and make it available to drivers, operators and maintenance staff.
- Drivers / operators should be trained to carry out basic safety checks before each use of their vehicle. Basic safety checks would normally include checking tyres, windscreen wipers, washers, lights, indicators and warning devices. Make sure drivers know how to report defects promptly, and make sure they are fixed promptly.
- Vehicles should be kept clean in order to ensure good visibility for the driver and also to help detect any loose, worn or defective parts.
- Thorough examination(s) by a competent person are legally required for certain types of vehicles and work equipment e.g. tailboard goods lift and forklift trucks must be thoroughly examined every 12 months.
- Regular preventative maintenance, in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations, should be carried out at set intervals. All repairs, modifications, maintenance and servicing must be carried out by a competent person.

Fig 8.3 Safe parking

Assessing and managing vehicle drivers and operators

- Select employees as drivers / operators by evaluating their age, attitude, experience, driving record and physical fitness.
- Train and authorise drivers. Keep written records of all training and authorisations.

- Make sure that drivers have adequate instruction, training and information to operate the vehicle(s) and any attachments that they use.
- When selecting contractors to carry out workplace transport operations on your behalf obtain relevant safety documentation such as method statements, safety statements and training records in advance so that they can be reviewed.
- Provide contractors with copies of site rules, maps, directions, hazard information and requirements for personal protective equipment in advance of their arrival on site.
- If using owner operators, specify your company standards for the vehicle safety features such as mirrors, CCTV and seatbelts.
- Hold briefings for regular customers and contractors in order to familiarise them with your workplace and your traffic management system.
- Induction training for new employees should include information about traffic route layouts, who is authorised to drive, particular hazards, speed limits and parking procedures.
- Drivers must be trained in safe driving practices, basic safety checks, proper use of safety features, how to report defects, how to secure loads and how to access and egress vehicles safely.
- Provide drivers with a driver's handbook which details the safe systems of work and provides all the site and company policies and rules relevant to driving.
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) where appropriate e.g. high-visibility jackets, safety boots and gloves.
- Monitor drivers, and challenge and investigate unsafe behaviours.

Fig 8.4 Personal protective equipment

09 Display Screen Equipment

(Working with Computers and Laptops)

Introduction

This information sheet gives employers practical advice on using display screen equipment safely and how to identify and minimise risk.

In most workplaces there are employees that spend a significant amount of time at a computer workstation. The workstation includes the screen, keyboard, mouse, desk or work surface, chair and surrounding area. These employees may be exposed to risks that could lead to temporary eye strain, tiredness or pain in the hands, arms or back.

Addressing these potential risks can reduce employee sick days and help employees to do their work better as they will be less likely to have symptoms such as tiredness and pain.

When do the Display Screen Regulations apply?

- If the employee has no choice but to work at a computer workstation.
- If the employee normally uses the computer workstation for continuous periods of more than one hour.
- If the computer workstation is generally used by the employee.

Do I need to conduct a computer workstation risk assessment?

Yes, computer workstations must be assessed to identify possible risks that may lead to eyesight problems or physical difficulties.

Case study on a computer workstation

As a first step you should consult with the employee at the workstation to collect information on the work they do there. Let the employee comment during the course of the assessment.

Figure 9.1 shows an example of a poor computer workstation setup.

Figure 9.2 shows a list of issues to be addressed. These must be written down.

Figures 9.3, 9.4 and **9.5** show a computer workstation that has been assessed and has had improvements put in place, including adjusting the monitor to the correct height, improving the lighting and providing an adjustable seat, document holder, and footrest.

Fig 9.1

Fig 9. 2

You will need to revisit the workstation if there were issues to be addressed. Consult with the employee and check that the issues highlighted in the risk assessment form have been addressed. When everything is satisfactory, you and the employee should sign off on the risk assessment form.

Is it acceptable to allow employees to assess their own workstation?

No, employees can be involved in the risk assessment of their own workstations, but it is not enough to have employees use a self-appraisal worksheet or a software package to assess their own workstations. As an employer, you must be actively engaged in completing a physical risk assessment of individual workstations.

Fig 9.3

Do I need to provide an eye and eyesight test?

You must inform employees that they are entitled to have an appropriate eye and eyesight test, which must be paid for by you, the employer. Where an eye test reveals that a particular lens is required for working at a computer workstation, you must pay for the minimum requirement frames and lenses. Employees have the right to an eye and eyesight test before taking up work at a computer workstation as well as at regular intervals, for example every three years.

Do the Display Screen Equipment Regulations apply to laptops?

No, under these regulations the keyboard must be tiltable and separate from the screen so as to allow staff to find a comfortable working position that avoids fatigue in the arms or hands. A laptop does not have a separate keyboard.

What is recommended for laptops?

Employees should not work at a laptop directly for long periods of time.

It is recommended that the laptop be connected to a separate monitor and keyboard. The workstation can then be assessed.

Fig 9.4

How often should employees take a break from working at a computer workstation?

Work at computer workstations should be interrupted periodically by breaks or changes in activity. Try to make sure that a single continuous period of work at a screen does not exceed one hour.

The flow of work should be designed to allow natural breaks to occur. It is important to note:

- rest breaks or changes in the pattern of work should be taken before fatigue sets in,
- the employee should not sit in the same position for long periods and should make sure to change posture as often as practicable, and
- short, frequent rest breaks are better than longer breaks taken occasionally.

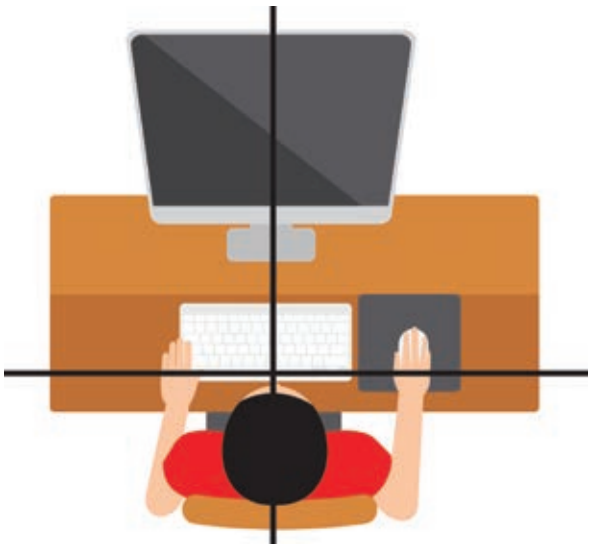


Fig 9.5

10 Psychosocial Hazards (Stressors)

Introduction

The term ‘psychosocial’ relates to the combined influence that psychological factors and the surrounding social environment have on a person's physical and mental wellness and their ability to function.

From a workplace perspective, ’psychosocial’ refers to the hidden workplace.

For example, social and cultural norms or the way people interact with each other, or the system of work.

- ‘Psych’ refers to the mindset of the individual(s).
- ‘Social’ refers to the work environment – that is, the work culture, communication, or how work is done.

Psychosocial hazard identification assesses risks and how they are controlled and managed.

It is important to understand how to control psychosocial hazards or stressors which can lead to conflict, distress, poor physical health or occupational illness, and long-term absence from work.

This Information Sheet gives practical advice on what psychosocial hazards are, and the roles and responsibilities of employers and employees in relation to managing psychosocial hazards.

Typical Psychosocial Hazards

Typical psychosocial hazards in the workplace include:

- Bullying
- Conflicting demands and lack of role clarity
- Lack of control over the way work is done and / or the work rate
- Lack of support from colleagues and / or management
- Poor communication or lack of communication
- Shift work

- Job insecurity
- Remote working
- High dependency clients
- Poorly managed organisational change
- Lone working

A good psychosocial environment enhances performance and wellbeing. Certain work types and / or working environments (i.e., lone working, remote work, shift-work and repetitive work), can contribute to psychosocial risk.

What do I have to do as an employer?

Psychosocial hazards can be managed in a systematic way and involve consultation, as other workplace safety and health risks.

Employers have a responsibility to manage known psychosocial hazards. They should:

- identify psychosocial hazards through carrying out a risk assessment,

- put in place control measures for all identified hazards,
- keep records and documents of procedures and policies,
- ensure policies and procedures are brought to the attention of employees,
- ensure managers / supervisors are competent / trained to appreciate how to best deal with psychosocial hazards and keep records of issues arising. Please note that records may be informal or formal, and this will help identify trends so that action can be taken in a timely manner, and
- provide protective support such as Occupational Health or Employee Assistance Personnel (EAP). Please note that an EAP is a mitigating measure, but of itself is not enough to make for a control.

Any issues and complaints should be dealt with fairly, consistently, and transparently and records must be kept in line with GDPR data requirements.

What do employees have to do?

Employees' responsibilities include:

- Follow the policies or procedures in place for dealing with psychosocial hazards.
- Carry out the work that they were trained for.
- Bring to their employer's attention issues that make them unable to manage or do their work.
- Behave in a reasonable, respectful, and proper way, treating everyone with dignity and respect while at work.
- Co-operate with any investigation or assessment regarding a colleague's behaviour, and truthfully responding to any such enquiries put to them.
- Report any unacceptable and / or dangerous behaviours such as bullying or conflict.

How do I carry out a risk assessment for psychosocial hazards?

A risk assessment identifies what could cause harm to people. It allows you to put in place control measures for eliminating or reducing the risk of harm in your workplace.

In the case of psychosocial hazards, a risk assessment should identify and manage high risk hazards which a reasonable person would consider harmful. Not all aspects of all workplaces can be captured in every risk assessment, but each place of work should have an assessment done.

Key areas to consider when assessing psychosocial hazards and risks are:

- the type of work being done, for example exposure to graphic content / difficult customers / threatening behaviours (harm / violence) / long hours driving / using heavy machinery,
- the work system - for example shift work / remote work,
- the type of complaint(s) made, and
- the workplace culture - this can be assessed through survey or looking at absences or complaints to identify a trend.

For more information on risk assessments and psychosocial audits visit www.workpositive.ie

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What are the main stressors assessed in a psychosocial risk assessment?

The main categories to consider are:

- Demands
- Controls
- Supports
- Relationships
- Roles
- Change

Demands - the type and the amount of work given to a person based on their training, general suitability, and capacity for these demands.

Controls - what has been done for example policies and procedures developed, training given, or changes made to systems of work.

Supports – what supports have been put in place to combat psychosocial hazards (for example training, support from colleagues, managers having clear procedures and policies in place, occupational health supports and employee assistance programmes).

Relationships - managing workplace relations is important and this is done through competent managers, a safe and supportive work culture, policies and procedures, and training.

Role – employees being informed of and understanding their job role and boundaries, and other employees having a reasonably clear idea of that role. This provides clarity as to what people are required to do.

Change – any change occurring in the workplace must be adequately communicated to employees in a way which allows them process and understand the impact of change on their duties and responsibilities.

By identifying psychosocial hazards in the workplace (for example strained relationships or patterns of bullying), employers can put in place controls. This can include having an Anti-Bullying Policy in place, facilitating a session on communication, making available the Anti-Bullying Policy to all employees, and providing a way for people to discuss any issues arising between individuals or within a group or between teams/groups. With a small input or change at an early stage, the likelihood of further difficulties can be reduced.

The hazard of Bullying at Work

Workplace Bullying is 'repeated inappropriate behaviour, by an individual or a group, against another person or group, which a reasonable person would consider to be undermining of an individual's rights to dignity and respect at work.'

Particular care is needed around people's understanding of the term bullying. A small percentage of workplace conflict meets the criteria of bullying. Where a complaint of bullying arises, clear procedures will allow effective management of the issue. All cases should be assessed and monitored, so that the complaint and potential conflict has been resolved and good relations restored, as far as is reasonably practicable. Records should be kept.

Certain assumptions need to be understood to assess bullying complaints.

These include that:

- All people at work are entitled to be treated respectfully.
- There is a standard which most people understand as to what this behaviour looks like.
- Those in charge of places of work have a duty to know that those they manage behave reasonably to others.
- If a complaint is made, a consistent standard of behaviour should be applied to assess each complaint.
- Remedies should be put in place by the employer where behaviours are identified as unreasonable – even if they have not been identified as bullying.
- Improper behaviour at work is the responsibility of the employer to manage.
- Where behaviours are identified as bullying, records should be kept.

When managing workplace bullying consider the following controls:

- Provide regular sessions on appropriate interpersonal communications at work and at induction.
- Provide adequate and competent management and supervision.
- Highlight changes in workplace practices in a timely fashion so that employees have the opportunity to engage and discuss.

- Those found to have bullied must have their behaviour controlled. This can be done through a mixture of methods – for example, monitoring, behaviour management, training, and clear instruction.
- Please note that the disciplinary process is outside the remit of the Health and Safety Authority - but the employer has a duty and must ensure that the identified hazardous behaviour is stopped, and evidence must be provided for this. Please refer to the IHRC for further information on the disciplinary process.

Link out to HSA Code of Practice on Bullying

Link out to hsalearning.ie training on bullying

Link out to IHRC for further information on the disciplinary process for Bullying

Definitions and Further Information

Psychosocial

Psychosocial relates to people, individuals, and groups at work. This term relates to the interaction between psychological factors (i.e. internal to the individual) and social factors (i.e. individual interaction with the external environment). It mainly focuses, for occupational purposes, on the influences of social factors on an individual, especially their perception, interpretation, behavioural and cognitive reaction to these social factors.

However, there is also an important influence from the individual to the social, in that it is partly the people at work who create the climate which then, itself, influences the individual.

Psychosocial Hazards

Hazards of a psychosocial nature will include aspects of a business, place of work and systems of work, which a reasonable person would find challenging to the point of being potentially harmful. They do not include every item at work which can be annoying or difficult. A psychosocial hazard is bounded by certain legal particulars. Certain aspects of the work environment are not managed and increase the likelihood for harm to individuals at work. These are often cited as social factors at work which could include the work environment, training and management, equipment, and hazardous relationships.

Risk

The chance or likelihood that someone will be harmed by the hazard.

Work Related Stress

Work Related Stress (WRS) is stress caused or made worse by work. It refers to when a person perceives their work environment to be overly taxing, so that their reaction involves feelings of an inability to cope, which invoke fear in that individual. This may be caused by perceived or real pressures, deadlines, and threats within the working environment. For a work-related stressor to be removed, it may require a change to the work environment, or it may require a change that the individual needs to make - for example how they understand the work environment, or how they react to it.

Workpositive.ie

A free on-line and confidential psychosocial risk assessment resource Workpositive.ie is hosted by the Health and Safety Authority and the State Claims Agency. When used it will give a written, recorded assessment at a given time of the psychosocial hazards that exist at a place of work and a snapshot of the overall work environment. Depending on the size of the company, users can compare between departments and teams and across functions.

WORKPOSITIVE

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Further Information and Guidance:

Visit our website at **www.hsa.ie**, telephone our contact centre on **0818 289 389** or email **contactus@hsa.ie**

Use BeSMART, our free online risk assessment tool at **www.besmart.ie**

Check out our range of free online courses at **www.hsalearning.ie**

HSA

An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta
Health and Safety Authority

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ISBN 978-1-84496-293-8

An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta
Health and Safety Authority

HSA0518