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A Guide to Risk Assessment

Important Information – please read this paragraph first.

Before you get any further into this guide, be reassured that it is intended to provide background information on how to carry out the risk assessments in an easy and logical manner. The program on this website will lead you through simple stages to complete your risk assessment, giving you access to advice if and when you need it. This guide can be printed if you need it for reference whilst carrying out your risk assessments.

Undertaking risk assessments need not be a difficult or complicated process. The effort that you will need to put in will depend largely on the nature and scale of the hazards that you decide are present at the place of work. Your efforts in putting together the risk assessment should be in proportion to the level of risk.

“The assessment of risk must be carried out with care if it is to be effective”

So why do you need to do risk assessments?

The short answer is to stop people from being injured or becoming ill through their work. Carrying out risk assessments is a requirement of health and safety law, although there are other good reasons for carrying them out:

- It makes good economic sense. Lower accident rates mean less time off work for employees, lower insurance premiums and possibly getting repeat work from satisfied clients.
- We all have a moral duty to ensure that our actions are not responsible for harming the health or safety of other people

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If you fail to carry out your risk assessments and something goes wrong the Health and Safety Executive could become involved and you could be fined or even imprisoned.

What is a risk assessment?

Risk assessment is a simple process that involves:

- taking a close look at the work you do and deciding whether the way that you carry out that work could affect anyone's health or safety:

And if you do consider that someone could be harmed.

- Introducing safeguards to ensure that the chances of it happening are eliminated or reduced to an acceptable level.

In practice, it is something that you may already do automatically to one degree or another, without thinking of it as a risk assessment or writing anything down.

For risk assessments you simply apply basic principles; assess the dangers (hazards) and then introduce control measures to reduce the chances of accidents happening to an acceptable level – preferably zero by eliminating the hazard.

How do I assess the risks?

Carrying out risk assessments is broken down into five easy steps, which this programme will take you through;

(Extract from HSE leaflet INDG163 (rev 1) Five steps to risk assessment

Step 1: Look for the hazards

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Step 2: Decide who might be harmed

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

Some terms used in this guide.

An explanation of terms you will come across whilst using this program.

- Hazard – anything that can cause anybody harm
- Risk – the chance of harm being done.
- Likelihood – the odds that something will happen.
- Severity – how serious the occurrence is likely to be.
- Competence – the appropriate training and experience.

Summary

Carrying out risk assessments is not difficult; it just takes a little thought. You will need to assess the job systematically to:

- Decide what things on site can cause harm (to health as well as safety);
- Decide what are the chances of them causing harm and how severe the incident is likely to be;
- Try to eliminate the things with the potential to cause harm;
- Control the risks from those hazards that you cannot eliminate;
- Decide who is likely to be injured, tell them what the risks are and what you have done to control them;
- Record your findings by compiling a Risk Assessment;

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- Periodically review the risk assessment to establish that it is still valid and, if not, revise it and communicate it again to all concerned;
- Communicate the findings to the people affected *before* they are at risk of harm.

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