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# A 5 STEP GUIDE

for employers, workers and  
their representatives on conducting  
workplace risk assessments





**A 5 STEP GUIDE**  
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and their representatives  
on conducting workplace  
risk assessments

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*A 5 STEP GUIDE for employers, workers and their representatives on conducting workplace risk assessments*

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## **This guide aims to help employers, workers and their representatives assess safety and health risks in the workplace**

A workplace risk assessment is one of the key tools for improving occupational safety and health conditions at work. Thus it plays an important role in protecting workers and businesses, as well as complying with the laws in many countries. It helps everyone focus on the risks that really matter in the workplace – the ones with the potential to cause real harm.

In many instances, straightforward measures can readily control risks, for example providing drinking water to prevent dehydration, window blinds to reduce temperature gain in buildings, ensuring spillages are cleaned up promptly so people do not slip, or cupboard drawers are kept closed to ensure people do not trip. For most, that means simple, cheap and effective measures to ensure workers, businesses most valuable asset, are protected.

A well conducted workplace risk assessment will contribute to the protection of workers by eliminating or minimizing work related hazards and risks. It should also benefit businesses through better organization of working practices potentially increasing productivity.

The ILO “Training Package on Workplace Risk Assessments and Management for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises” available at [http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/instr/WCMS\\_215344/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/instr/WCMS_215344/lang--en/index.htm) provides further information on this subject.

The methodology described in this guide is not the only way to conduct risk assessments, there are other methods that work well, particularly for more complex risks and circumstances. However, we believe this method is the most straightforward for the majority of organizations, in particular small and medium sized enterprises.

### **What is risk assessment?**

A risk assessment is simply a careful examination of what, in the workplace, could cause harm to people. It enables a weighing up of whether enough precautions are in place or whether more should be done to prevent harm to those at risk, including workers and members of the public.

Accidents and ill health can ruin lives as well as affecting businesses, for example if output is lost, machinery is damaged, insurance costs increase or other financial penalties. In many countries employers are legally required to assess the risks in their workplace so that they can put in place a plan to control these risks.

The concept of a workplace risk assessment is that it is a continual, ongoing process – like a film on a loop. It is not a snapshot of a workplace, which can be likened to a workplace inspection. Whilst it may be beneficial to use information from workplace inspections when undertaking risk assessments, we must be clear on the difference between risk assessments and inspections. A risk assessment should identify the hazard and the required control measures, an inspection should verify if the required control measures are in fact being used.

## How to assess the risks in the workplace

Follow the five steps in this leaflet:

### ■ **Step 1**

Identify the hazards

### ■ **Step 2**

Identify who might be harmed and how

### ■ **Step 3**

Evaluate the risk – identify and decide on the safety and health risk control measures

### ■ **Step 4**

Record who is responsible for implementing which risk control measures and the timeframe

### ■ **Step 5**

Record the findings, monitor and review the risk assessment and update when necessary

The key to risk assessments is not to overcomplicate the process. In many organizations, the risks are well known and the necessary control measures are easy to apply. Those conducting the risk assessment probably already know whether, for example, workers move heavy loads and so could harm their backs, or where workers are most likely to slip or trip. If so, check that reasonable precautions are in place to avoid injury and ill health.

If employers, in collaboration with workers and/or their representatives conducting the risk assessment are confident and understand what is involved then, working together, they can do the assessment. You don't have to be a safety and health expert. Of course, if those conducting the assessment are not confident, then help from someone who is competent will be required.

In all cases, employers must ensure that workers and/or their representatives are fully involved in the process. They will have useful information about how the work is done that will make the assessment of the risk more thorough and effective. But remember, in many countries employers are responsible for seeing that the assessment is carried out properly.

When thinking about the risk assessment, remember:

- a hazard is anything that may cause harm, such as chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, an unguarded machine, an open drawer, demanding and stressful work, etc.;
- the risk is the chance, high or low, that somebody could be harmed by these and other hazards, together with an indication of how serious the harm could be.



## STEP 1

### Identify the hazards

First assessors need to identify out how workers and visitors could be harmed. This is achieved by surveying the workplace and identifying the hazards. An unidentified hazard cannot be controlled. When you work in a place every day it is easy to overlook some hazards, so here are some tips to help identify the ones that matter:

- Walk around the workplace and look at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm. Ensure that all work activities are addressed, regular and irregular, in all areas, for example production, planned preventative maintenance and breakdown maintenance.
- Ensure workers or their representatives describe the dangers of the jobs they carry out and provide information as to how workplace accidents and ill health can be prevented. They may have noticed things that are not immediately obvious to employers or an external service.
- Trade associations can also provide advice so contact them.
- Check manufacturers' or suppliers' instructions or data sheets for chemicals as they can be very helpful in spelling out the hazards and putting them in their true perspective.
- Learn from examples of previous accidents and work-related ill health. These often help to identify the less obvious hazards.
- Remember to think about long-term hazards to health (e.g. high levels of noise or exposure to harmful substances), psychosocial hazards as well as safety hazards.

## STEP 2

### Identify who might be harmed and how

For each hazard identified, and there may be many, assessors need to be clear about who might be harmed and how; this will help ascertain the best way of managing the risk. That doesn't mean listing everyone by name, but rather identifying groups of people (e.g. 'people working in the storeroom' or 'passers-by').

In each case, identify how they might be harmed, i.e. what type of injury or ill health might occur. For example, 'shelf stackers may suffer back injury from repeated lifting of boxes'.

Remember:

- some workers have particular requirements, e.g. new and young workers, new or expectant mothers and people with disabilities may be at particular risk. Extra thought will be needed for some hazards;
- cleaners, visitors, contractors, maintenance workers etc., who may not be in the workplace all the time;
- members of the public, if they could be hurt by your activities;
- if the workplace is shared, think about how your work activities affect others present, as well as how their work affects your colleagues – talk to them; and
- ask workers if they can think of anyone that may have been missed.

## STEP 3

### Evaluate the risk – Identify and decide on the safety and health risk control measures

Having spotted the hazards, assessors then have to decide what to do about them. The law in many countries requires employers to do everything possible to protect people from harm. This can be achieved by comparing what is being done with good practice.

So first, look at the controls already in place and how the work is organized. Then compare this with good practice and see if there's more that could be done to improve the standard in the workplace. Assessors should consider:

- Can we remove the hazard altogether? I.e. eliminate the hazard by removing the need to work at height.
- If not, how can we control the risks so that harm is unlikely?

When controlling risks, follow the hierarchy of controls, if possible in the following order:

- try a less risky option (e.g. switch to using a less hazardous chemical); substitution of the hazard
- prevent access to the hazard (e.g. by guarding);
- organize work to reduce exposure to the hazard (e.g. put barriers between pedestrians and traffic), safe work methods;
- provide welfare facilities (e.g. first aid and washing facilities for removal of contamination); and
- issue personal protective equipment (e.g. clothing, footwear, goggles etc.) at no cost to the worker.

Improving safety and health need not cost a lot. For instance, placing a mirror on a dangerous blind corner to help prevent vehicle accidents, providing sack trucks or wheel barrows to move loads are low-cost precautions considering the risks. Failure to take simple precautions can cost businesses and workers a lot more, financially and in terms of pain and suffering if an accident or injury does occur.

Employers and workers conducting the assessments as a team helps to ensure that any proposed risk control measures will work in practice and won't introduce new hazards. Remember all workers, including managers, will need to be trained in the control measures that are adopted to guarantee that they are used correctly.

## STEP 4

### Record who is responsible for implementing which control measure, and the timeframe

If assessors have decided on additional control measures action has to be taken to ensure they are implemented. It is good practice to allocate responsibility of this to named individuals, as well as assigning a time frame for implementation. The date of implementation should also be recorded.

Completing the risk assessment is an important step, but it is acting on the findings of the risk assessment that will make the difference in eliminating or minimizing work related hazards and risks.

It is likely that assessors will have identified a number of new control measures that are required and businesses may not have the resources to implement all at once. Some additional control measures can be implemented immediately with limited resource e.g. ensuring housekeeping improvements, removing/rerouting trailing cables etc. Others will have to be prioritized and this should be based on the degree of risk.

Make a plan of action to deal with the most important things first.

A good plan of action often includes a mixture of different things such as:

- a few low-cost or easy improvements that can be done quickly, perhaps as a temporary solution until more reliable controls are in place;
- long-term solutions to those risks most likely to cause accidents or ill health;
- long-term solutions to those risks with the worst potential consequences;
- arrangements for training workers on the main risks that remain and how they are to be controlled;
- regular checks to make sure that the control measures stay in place.

## STEP 5

### Record the findings, monitor and review the risk assessment, and update when necessary

Record and display the findings, writing down what assessors have identified and decided in Steps 1 – 4. This record should be made available to workers, supervisors and labour inspectors.

There is no set format for recording the findings. The template given as an example in this guide is designed to show the logical steps in a risk assessment and it is also convenient for recording the findings in a simple and readily accessible format.

Arrangements will be needed to monitor the effectiveness of the control measures and one way of doing this is through workplace inspections. Indeed assessors may identify in step 3 the need to conduct daily/weekly/monthly workplace inspections as one of the required control measures.

Few workplaces stay the same. Sooner or later, new equipment, substances and procedures may be brought in and this could lead to new hazards. It makes sense, therefore, to review what is being done on an ongoing basis. Every year or so formally review whether the assessment is still valid, this will help to make sure occupational safety and health standards are still improving, or at least not sliding back.

Look at the risk assessment again. Have there been any changes? Are improvements still needed? Have workers identified other issues? Have accident or near miss investigations identified weaknesses in occupational safety and health management? Make sure the risk assessment stays up to date.

During the year, if there is a significant change, don't wait. Check the risk assessment and, where necessary, amend it. It is best to think about the risk assessment when planning changes – this helps to ensure new hazards are not introduced and appropriate control measures are in place.

## Further information

If you get stuck, don't give up. There is a wealth of information available to help you.

More information about risk assessments can be found on the following sites:

- <http://osha.europa.eu/en/practical-solutions/risk-assessment-tools>
- <http://www.ccohs.ca/ccohs.html>
- [http://www.inrs.fr/hm/evaluation\\_des\\_risques\\_professionnels.html](http://www.inrs.fr/hm/evaluation_des_risques_professionnels.html)
- <http://www.insht.es/portal/site/Insht/menuitem.1f1a3bc79ab34c578c2e8884060961ca/?vgnextoid=d8388dd6caa62110VgnVCM100000dc0ca8c0RCRD&vgnnextchannel=75164a7f8a651110VgnVCM100000dc0ca8c0RCRD>
- <http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm>

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**Risk Assessment template**

**Enterprise:**

**Section/Unit:**

**Date:**

**STEP 1  
What are the hazards?**

Spot hazards by:

- walking around the workplace;
- asking workers what they think;
- checking manufacturers' instructions;
- contacting your trade association.

Don't forget long-term health hazards.

**STEP 2  
Who might be harmed and how?**

Identify groups of people.  
Remember:

- some workers have particular needs;
- people who may not be in the workplace all the time;
- members of the public;
- if the workplace is shared think about how the work affects others present.

Say how the hazard could cause harm.

**STEP 3  
What are you already doing?**

List what is already in place to reduce the likelihood of harm or make any harm less serious.

**What further action is necessary?**

Make sure that risks have been reduced 'so far as is reasonably practicable'.  
An easy way of doing this is to compare what is already being done with good practice. If there is a difference, list what needs to be done.

**STEP 4  
How will the assessment be put into action?**

Remember to prioritize. Deal with those hazards that are high-risk and have serious consequences first.

Action by whom	Action by when	Done
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**STEP 5 Review date:**

- Review the assessment to ensure OSH management is still improving, or at least not sliding back.
- If there is a significant change in the workplace, remember to check the risk assessment and where necessary, amend it.

**Assessment Completed by:**

**Signature:**

**Labour Administration, Labour Inspection  
and Occupational Safety and Health Branch**

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