



FACT SHEET 1

Requirements of a formal risk assessment

A risk assessment is an examination of different areas of the workplace that could cause illness or injury to your employees. By conducting a risk assessment you can see whether or not you have taken sufficient measures to protect your workers against work place hazards.

A risk assessment must be "suitable and sufficient" and conducted by a "competent person", this could be conducted by yourself if you work in a smaller organisation and are confident you meet the above criteria.

You are legally required to assess risks in your workplace and implement plans to control the risks. You are not expected to eliminate all risks but you are expected to protect anybody in your workplace as far as is 'reasonably practice'.

There are FIVE steps to assessing the risks in your workplace:

Step 1: IDENTIFY HAZARDS - a hazard is anything that could cause harm

Step 2: DECIDE WHO MIGHT BE HARMED AND HOW

Step 3: EVALUATE RISKS AND DECIDE ON PRECAUTIONS

Risks have to be evaluated to decide how high the chance of a hazard harming somebody is. How seriously somebody could be harmed by the risk should also be assessed

Step 4: RECORD FINDINGS AND DECIDE ON PRECAUTIONS

Step 5: REVIEW YOUR ASSESSMENT AND UPDATE IF NECESSARY

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE HAZARDS

It is important not to overlook hazards so remember the following points which should help you identify workplace hazards:

- Have a look at your workplace, what can you see that could cause harm?
- Get colleagues and employees to identify hazards they may have spotted that you might have missed.
- Follow safety guidelines on any equipment or products you have in the workplace.
- Check your accident book which could help you identify further workplace risks
- Don't forget hazards such as exposure to noise!

STEP 2: DECIDE WHO MIGHT BE HARMED AND HOW

Remember the following points:

- Are there any employees who have particular requirements, eg those with disabilities or expectant mothers
- Consider members of the public, are your activities likely to affect them?
- If you occupy a shared workplace, how will others present be affected?



STEP 3: EVALUATE THE RISKS AND DECIDE ON PRECAUTIONS

You have seen the hazards, now what do you do about them. Remember the law stipulates that you have to do everything 'reasonably practicable' to protect your employees from coming to harm. A good way of checking if you are doing enough is to compare your policies with best practice (websites such as www.hse.gov.uk offer a good source of best practice).

When deciding on precautions consider the following:

- Can I eliminate the risk altogether?
- If you cannot eliminate the risk, how can you minimise the risk of harm?

Is it possible to apply any of the following when controlling risks?

- Use a less risky alternative (eg use a less hazardous chemical)
- Restrict access to the hazard altogether
- Reduce exposure to the hazard
- Use personal protective equipment
- Provide welfare facilities (eg a first aid kit)

STEP 4: RECORD AND IMPLEMENT YOUR FINDINGS

A risk assessment does not have to be perfect but must be 'suitable and sufficient'. You need to show that:

- Proper checks were made
- You found out who might be affected
- You dealt with all significant hazards and took into account all those that could be affected
- The precautions are reasonable and the remaining risk is low
- You involved staff or staff representatives

(The HSE website offers a good guide to both long and short term solutions that can be used to deal with the important things first)

STEP 5: REVIEW YOUR RISK ASSESSMENT AND UPDATE IF NECESSARY

It is more than likely that over a period of time your workplace will change in more ways than one, with this risks may change too, it is therefore important to review your risk assessments every so often to ensure that the are still up to date and applicable. Once a year is suggested as a good length of time to review your risk assessments.