

# Independent Guide

## Risk assessment - what is included?



Independent workplace compliance

### Risk Assessment

A risk assessment is an important step in protecting your workers and your business, as well as complying with the law. It helps you focus on the risks which really matter in your workplace – the ones with the potential to cause real harm. In many instances, straightforward measures can readily control risks, for example ensuring that spillages are cleaned up promptly, so people do not slip, or that walkways are kept clear to ensure that people do not trip. For most, that means simple, inexpensive and effective measures to ensure that your most valuable asset – your workforce – is protected.

### What is a risk assessment?

A risk assessment is simply a careful examination of what, in your workplace, could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions, or should do more to prevent harm. Workers and others have a right to be protected from harm caused by a failure to take reasonable control measures.

### How do I know if I need a risk assessment?

If you employ more than five people you are required by a number of health and safety regulations to carry out a risk assessment. For example, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations requires you to carry out an assessment of the risk in your premises from exposure to legionella bacteria from your water systems.

### What should be included in a risk assessment?

#### Step 1

Identify the hazards

First, you need to work out how people could be harmed. When you work in a place every day it is easy to overlook some hazards, so here are some tips to help you identify the ones which matter:

- Walk around your workplace and look at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm.
- Ask your employees, or their representatives, what they think. They may have noticed things which are not immediately obvious to you.
- Check manufacturers' instructions or data sheets for chemicals and equipment, as they can be very helpful in spelling out the hazards and putting them in their true perspective.
- Have a look back at your accident and ill-health records – 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) as well as safety hazards.

#### Step 2

Decide who might be harmed, and how

For each hazard you need to be clear about who might be harmed; it will help you identify the best way of managing the risk. This does not 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? Remember:

- Some workers have particular requirements; e.g. new and young workers, new or expectant mothers, visitors and people with disabilities may be at particular risk.
- If you share your workplace, you will need to think about how your work affects others present, as well as how their work affects your staff.

#### Step 3

Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions

Having spotted the hazards, you then have to decide what to do about them. The law requires you to do everything 'reasonably practicable' to protect people from harm. You can work this out for yourself, but the easiest way is to compare what you are doing with good practice. Consider:

- Can I get rid of the hazard altogether?
- If not, how can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?



#### Assurity Consulting Limited

26 Redkirk Way Horsham West Sussex RH13 5QH  
t +44 (0)1403 269375 e info@assurityconsulting.co.uk  
w [assurityconsulting.co.uk](http://assurityconsulting.co.uk)

Registered in England and Wales Reg. No. 2227268  
Corporate Member of IWFM

# Independent Guide

## Risk assessment - what is included?



### Step 4

### Independent workplace compliance

Record your findings and implement them

Putting the results of your risk assessment into practice will make a difference when looking after people and your business. Writing down the results of your risk assessment, and sharing them with your staff, encourages you to do this. If you have fewer than five employees you do not have to write anything down, although it is useful to do so, so that you can review it at a later date if, for example, something changes. 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 cheap or easy improvements which 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 employees on the main risks which remain and how they are to be controlled;
- Regular checks to make sure that the control measures stay in place; and
- -Clear responsibilities – who will lead on what action, and by when.
- Remember, prioritise and tackle the most important things first. As you complete each action, tick it off your plan.

### Step 5

Review your risk assessment and update if necessary

Few workplaces stay the same. Sooner or later you will bring in new equipment, substances and procedures which could lead to new hazards. It makes sense, therefore, to review what you are doing on an ongoing basis. Every year or so, formally review where you are, to make sure that you are still improving, or at least not sliding back. When thinking about your risk assessment, remember:

- A hazard is anything which may cause harm, such as chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, an open drawer 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.
- -During the year, if there is a significant change, do not wait. Check your risk assessment and, where necessary, amend it. If possible, it is best to think about the risk assessment when you are planning your change – that way you leave yourself more flexibility.

### What areas should be risk assessed?

You are required to identify any significant risk presented by your workplace, working practices, products etc. Therefore, all of your activities, services, operations and premises need to be assessed. Most businesses will have a combination of location, task and job role risk assessments to ensure suitable assessment of risk is achieved. In addition, you also need to judge whether the current control measures are suitable and sufficient to either eliminate, or adequately control, the risks identified.

### Who should conduct a risk assessment?

A competent person with a suitable and sufficient knowledge of the activities, services, operations and premises would be ideal. It is also worth remembering that with risk assessment you get what you pay for. There are many companies at large offering very cheap risk assessments. However, the quality of the assessment and subsequent report is likely to reflect this cost. The price should reflect the expertise of the risk assessor and the time required to conduct the assessment and analyse the findings. Investing in a low cost risk assessment can mean you receive a substandard report., which is unlikely to convince the enforcement agencies that the risks have been identified and suitably assessed. A cheap risk assessment will not necessarily protect you. It could leave you liable and mean that you have to get another assessment completed before your compliance can be guaranteed. Some exposure and experience to health and safety legislation and principles would be sufficient for a person to be considered suitable.

### References

HSE Five steps to risk assessment.

**This guide is of a general nature; specific advice can be obtained from Assurity Consulting. Assurity Consulting is the UK's leading independent compliance consultancy specialising in workplace health, safety and environmental solutions. We have over 30 years' experience of helping customers of all sizes, from across all sectors, manage their compliance responsibilities, making sure that their organisation is compliant, their employees are safe, their processes are cost effective and their management team is in control.**



### Assurity Consulting Limited

26 Redkirk Way Horsham West Sussex RH13 5QH  
t +44 (0)1403 269375 e info@assurityconsulting.co.uk  
w [assurityconsulting.co.uk](http://assurityconsulting.co.uk)

Registered in England and Wales Reg. No. 2227268  
Corporate Member of IWFM