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H & S Guidance - Risk Assessment

INTRODUCTION

The Management of Health and Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations 1999 require all employers and self-employed persons to assess the risks to workers and any others who may be affected by their undertaking. Many employers already carry out what might be considered to be risk assessments on a day-to-day basis during the course of their work - they will note changes in working practices, recognise faults as they develop and take necessary corrective actions. Regulation 3 of MHSW however requires that employers should undertake a systematic general examination of their work activity and record any significant findings of that risk assessment. Risk assessment also fits into a four-part process for risk control, through the setting of performance standards, as follows:

1. Hazard identification.
2. Risk assessment.
3. Risk control - the selection of suitable measures to eliminate or control risks.
4. Implementing and maintaining control measures.

Useful definitions
Hazard: Something with the potential to cause harm.
Risk: The likelihood that the harm from a particular hazard is realised.

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RISK ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE

There are no fixed rules about how a risk assessment should be carried out; it will depend on the nature of the undertaking and the type and extent of the hazards and risks. Plenty of guidance is available to assist you with the process (see references). The process should be practical, participative and systematic and cover risks, which are reasonably foreseeable. For small undertakings with few or simple hazards a suitable and sufficient risk assessment can be a straightforward process based on personal



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judgement, experience and knowledge. In larger or more complex cases, specialist knowledge may be required.

In particular, a risk assessment should:

- ensure that all relevant hazards and risks are addressed, with the aim of identifying significant risks in the workplace, .i.e. identify the hazards (by observation, using sources of information such as legislation or published guidance, trade publications, accident or ill-health records, manufacturers' or suppliers' information), assess the risks (including residual risks) from the identified hazards, ensure all aspects of the work activity are reviewed
- address what actually happens in the workplace, including non-routine operations
- ensure that all groups of employees and others who might be affected are considered
- identify groups of workers who might be particularly at risk: pregnant women, nursing mothers and young persons are specifically mentioned in the regulations as more protection may be required to prevent them suffering ill health or accidents if their work is not amended to take account of increased vulnerability. More advice on this issue is contained within guidance publications (see references section).
- take account of existing preventive or precautionary measures.

The level of detail should be broadly proportionate to the risk. In some cases, employers may make a first rough assessment, to eliminate from consideration those risks on which no further action need be taken, before conducting fuller assessments.

Employers controlling a number of similar workplaces may produce a basic 'model' risk assessment reflecting core hazards and risks.

This may then be applied at each workplace but only if broadly appropriate to the type of work and if it can be adapted to particular work situations.

RECORDING THE ASSESSMENT

Employers with five or more employees must record the significant findings of their risk assessment. It needs to be part of an employer's overall approach to health and safety and where appropriate should be linked to other relevant health and safety



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documents (e.g. policy statement). This record would normally be in writing but can also be recorded electronically as long as it is retrievable. Various written formats have, and can, be used; employers should select or develop a format appropriate to their needs. Assessments need to be suitable and sufficient, not perfect. Leaflet IND(G)163 '5 steps to risk assessment' includes a pro-forma risk assessment sheet aimed at firms in the commercial, service and light industrial sectors.

PREVENTIVE AND PROTECTIVE MEASURES

In deciding upon the preventive and protective measures, the following principles should be applied:

1. It is always best if possible to avoid a risk altogether.
2. Combat risks at source.
3. Wherever possible, adapt work to the individual.
4. Take advantage of technological and technical progress.
5. They should form part of a coherent policy and approach.
6. Give a priority to those measures which protect the whole workplace.
7. Workers need to be involved, and understand what they need to do.
8. A 'safety culture' should be developed within the organisation.

EXAMPLES OF RISK ASSESSMENTS

Booklet HSG(183) contains excellent case study examples of risk assessments carried out in an office, a motor vehicle repair shop and a warehouse (amongst others) under the headings of setting the scene, preparation, touring the workplace and completing the risk assessment

CHECKLIST - RISK ASSESSMENT

- Have you a system to undertake risk assessments that is structured, comprehensive, involves the workforce and which provides for periodic review of assessments at appropriate intervals?

YES/NO



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- Have you identified all relevant hazards presented by your work activities?
YES/NO
- Have you assessed the risks arising from the identified hazards, including any residual risks?
YES/NO
- If you employ more than five employees, have you recorded the significant findings of your assessment?
YES/NO
- Subsequent to the risk assessment process, do you follow established principles when deciding on any necessary preventive and protective measures?
YES/NO

REFERENCES/FURTHER DETAILS

Book L21 - Approved Code of Practice for the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (HSE)(2000) ISBN 0 7176 2488 9 (£8.00)

Leaflet IND(G)163 '5 Steps to risk assessment (HSE)(1998).
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf

HS(G)137: Health risk management - a practical guide for managers in small and medium sized enterprises. (HSE) (1995) ISBN 0-7176-0905-7.

HS(G)65 - Successful health and safety management (HSE)(1997)(0 7176 1276 7)(£12.50).

Book - Essentials of health and safety at work (HSE) (1994)(0 7176 076-0716X)

Booklet HSG(183): 5 Steps to Risk Assessment - Case Studies (HSE) (1998) 0-7176-1580-4 (£6.75)



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Booklet C30 (8/99)(HSE) 'Adventure Activities Centres: five steps to risk assessment'. £4.50 ISBN 0-7176-2463-3

'New & Expectant Mothers at Work: A Guide for Employers' (HSE)

Young People at Work: A Guide for Employers (HSE)

'Managing Health and safety on Work Experience: A Guide for Organisers' (HSG199)(2000)(0 7176 1742 4)(£6.50)