

MEMBER SERVICES

ADVICE NOTE 13: RISK ASSESSMENT

This Advice Note has been produced by NICVA to provide clear, concise information and a straightforward guide to risk assessment.

RISK ASSESSMENT – FIVE STEPS OF THE PROCESS

A risk assessment is a careful examination of what could potentially cause harm to people. It involves identifying the hazards present and then evaluating the extent of the risk they pose.

By carrying out a risk assessment, it should be easier to assess whether or not enough precautions have been taken to reduce the potential risk and assess whether or not more controls are needed to prevent harm.

Five steps of risk assessment:

(1) IDENTIFY HAZARDS

A HAZARD is anything that can cause harm, a RISK is the chance, high or low, that somebody will be harmed by the hazard.

Draw up a preliminary checklist of all significant hazards (ignore the trivial):

- Walk around the workplace, venue, grounds, etc, and look at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm.
- Ask employees, volunteers or users for their help in identifying hazards, bearing in mind that some hazards may seem familiar and some individuals may not be aware that they can cause harm.
- Look in the accident book as a guide to risks that individuals have already been exposed to.

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An example of a preliminary checklist for an office:

Hazard	Issues to consider
Display screen equipment	Level of use, comfort of staff, training
Electrical equipment	Visual checks, routine maintenance
Fire	Means of escape, fire alarm and fire fighting, housekeeping, storage, smoking
Slips, trips, falls	Maintenance, housekeeping, training
Others	Toilets, temperature, welfare

Once you have identified the hazards, then you need to look at associated issues that need further consideration and think about the people who might be harmed.

(2) IDENTIFY PEOPLE WHO MIGHT BE HARMED AND HOW

It is not necessary to identify individuals by name, think about groups of people. Bear in mind that the following groups are especially at risk:

Young	New employees/volunteers
Pregnant	Inexperienced volunteers/employees
Disabled	Lone workers
Contractors	Maintenance workers
Visitors	The public

(3) ANALYSE RISK

Now that you have identified all the significant hazards, consider how likely it is that each hazard could cause harm and determine the likelihood and severity of the risk.

Likelihood

High – ‘certain or near certain’

Low – ‘seldom’

Severity

Major – ‘death, major injury, etc’

Minor – ‘all other injuries, illness’

Likelihood: rating system

Some people tend to put too much emphasis on the likelihood of a risk; they should also consider the severity of the risk.

Rating 1 = Low

Rating 2 = Moderate

Rating 3 = High

Severity

The biggest risk is NOT the hazard that may happen most frequently.

Rating 1 = Minor

Rating 2 = Serious

Rating 3 = Major

Calculating risk

Multiply likelihood and severity. For example, the likelihood of office staff getting a paper cut is moderate but the severity of it would be minor, therefore in order to find the risk rating multiply 2 by 1 which gives you 2.

If it is a high risk, then it is a high priority.

Risk rating and priority

In the example of the paper cut the risk rating is 2 which is a low priority action as can be seen from the figures below.

1 = No action, low priority

2 = Low priority action

3 and 4 = Medium priority action

6 = High priority

9 = Urgent action

The only value of attributing a number is to help to assess the greatest risk.

Evaluate risk

When evaluating the risk, consider existing precautions in place:

- Do they meet the standards set by legal requirements?
- Do they comply with industry/organisation standards?
- Do they reduce risk so far as is reasonably possible?
- Do controls work in practice, are the procedures being followed?
- Do they represent good practice?
- Do you provide sufficient information and/or training?

If the risk is not adequately controlled, then draw up an action list of further controls or precautions needed.

Risk control hierarchy

You should use the following hierarchy to eliminate/minimize risk eg if it is not possible to eliminate hazard at once, you should reduce the hazard and so on down the hierarchy

- Eliminate hazard at source
- Reduce hazard at source
- Remove person from hazard
- Contain hazard by enclosure

- Reduce employee exposure
- Change systems of work
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) - if you can't reduce the risk, protect against it.

Inform other individuals and/or organisations about any risks your work could cause them and precautions being taken.

(4) RECORDS

You are required by law to keep a written record of the risk assessment if you have five employees or more and tell employees about the findings. However, it is recommended that all risk assessments should be written down, not only for good practice but also as the insurance company will ask for it in the event of a claim against your group.

The written risk assessment should be suitable and sufficient if it shows that:

- A proper check was made.
- You asked who might be affected.
- You dealt with all the obvious significant hazards, taking into account the number of people who could be involved.
- The precautions are reasonable and the remaining risk is low.

An example of a basic risk assessment, as taken from the Health and Safety Executive's guide to risk assessment, is attached as a guide for your organisation. Also attached is a more detailed assessment which may help you with this process.

(5) REVIEW

When reviewing the process, you need to consider:

- Does it work?
- Has it been effective?
- Is it up to date?
- Circumstances could change...

There could be a situation where one risk may conflict with another risk eg a health and safety precaution may override an equality consideration.

Need to decide/consider:

- Who will take action and when.
- How to inform employees, volunteers, etc.
- Effectiveness of control measures.
- Review for new hazards.

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FURTHER INFORMATION AND READING

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www.hseni.gov.uk
The Health and Safety Executive www.hse.gov.uk
Environmental Health Department, Local Council Offices