



A Guide to Risk Assessment



OSHA HOTLINE: 623-OSHA (6742)
www.osha.gov.tt

Introduction

This leaflet aims to help you assess safety and health issues in the workplace.

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 that really matter in your workplace – those with the potential to cause real harm. In many instances, straightforward measures can readily control risks, for example, drawers are kept closed to avoid injury. For most, that means simple, cheap and effective measures to ensure your most valuable asset – your workforce - is protected.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

All employers must conduct an annual risk assessment of their individual establishment as outlined in Section 13A of the Occupational Safety and Health Act Chap. 88:08 (OSH Act).

The full text of Section 13A can be found on Page 11 of this document.

The law does not expect you to eliminate all risks, but you are required to protect people as far as 'reasonably practicable'. This guide tells you how to achieve that using a five step approach.

This is not the only way to do a risk assessment. There are other methods that can be applied, particularly for more complex risks and circumstances. However, we believe this approach is the most straightforward for most organisations.

Hazard and Risk

A hazard is anything that can cause harm e.g. chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, etc.



A risk is the likelihood, great or small, that the hazard will cause harm, and its consequences.

What is a Risk Assessment?

A risk assessment is nothing more than a careful examination of what, in your work-place, could cause harm to persons, to enable you to decide whether you have taken sufficient precautions or you need to do more to prevent harm. The intent is to make sure that no one gets hurt or becomes ill.

Accidents, injuries and ill health ruin lives and adversely affect your business when output is lost, machinery is damaged, insurance costs increase, or you have to attend court. You are legally required to assess the risks in your workplace. The important things you need to decide are whether a hazard is significant and whether you have it controlled by satisfactory precautions so that the risk is small. You need to check this when you assess the risks. For instance, electricity can kill but the risk of it doing so in an office environment is remote, provided that 'live' components are insulated and metal casings are properly earthed.

HOW TO ASSESS THE RISKS IN YOUR WORKPLACE

The following five steps can be followed:

- **STEP 1:** Look for the hazards
- **STEP 2:** Decide who might be harmed and how
- **STEP 3:** Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
- **STEP 4:** Record your findings
- **STEP 5:** Review your assessment and revise if necessary



Do not be overcomplicated. In many firms the hazards may be obvious. Checking them is common sense but necessary. You probably already know whether, for example, you have machinery that could cause harm, or if there is an awkward entrance or stair where someone could be hurt. If so, check that you have taken what reasonable precautions you can to avoid injury. If your firm is small and you are confident that you understand what is involved, you can do the assessment yourself, (you do not have to be a health and safety expert!). If you are not confident, get help from a competent source. But remember, you are responsible for seeing it is adequately done.

Five steps to Risk Assessment

STEP 1

Look for the hazards. If you are doing the assessment yourself, walk around your workplace and look afresh at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm.

- Ignore the trivial and concentrate on significant hazards which could result in serious harm or affect several people.
- Ask your employees or their representatives for their thoughts. They may have noticed things which are not immediately obvious.
- Manufacturer's instructions or data sheets can also help you identify hazards and put risks in their true perspective.
- Accident and ill-health records can also be used.

STEP 2

Decide who might be harmed and how.

Do not forget:

- Young workers, trainees, pregnant and nursing employees etc. may be particularly at risk.
- Cleaners, visitors, contractors, maintenance workers, etc. who may not be in the workplace all the time.
- Members of the public, or people you share your workplace with, if there is a chance they could be hurt by your activities.

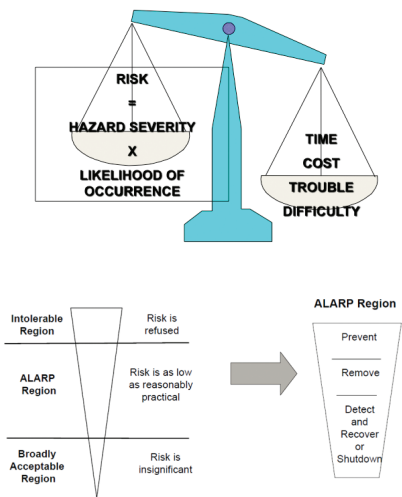
STEP 3

Evaluate the risks identified and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done. Consider how likely it is that each hazard could cause harm. This will determine whether or not you need to do more to reduce the risk. Even after all precautions have been taken, some risk usually remains. What you have to decide for each significant hazard is whether this remaining risk is acceptable or not.

- First, ask yourself whether you have done all the things that the law says you have to do. For example, have you prevented access to dangerous parts of machinery as required by the law?
- Then ask yourself whether generally accepted industry standards are in place.

Do not stop there – think for yourself, because the law also says that you must do what is reasonably practicable to keep your workplace safe. Your real aim is to make all risks small by adding to your precautions as necessary. If you find that something needs to be done, draw up an 'Action List' and give priority to any remaining risks that are high and/or those that could affect most people.

(ALARP)



In taking action ask yourself:

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

In controlling risks apply the following principles below, if possible in the following order:

- Try a less risky option.
- Prevent access to the hazard (e.g. by guarding).
- Issue personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Provide welfare facilities (e.g. washing facilities for removal of contamination and first aid).

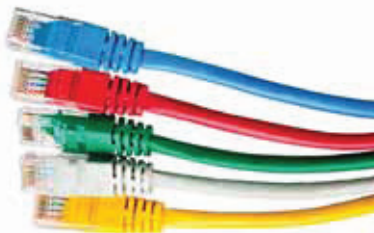
Improving health and safety need not cost a lot. For instance, placing a mirror on a dangerous blind corner to help prevent vehicular accidents, or putting some non-slip material on slippery steps are inexpensive precautions considering the risks. Failure to take simple precautions can cost you a lot more if an accident does happen.

But what if you share a workplace?

Tell the other employers and self-employed people there about any risks your work could cause them, and what precautions you are taking. Also, think about the risks to your workforce from the activities of those who share your workplace.

STEP 4

Record your findings. If you have fewer than twenty-five employees you do not need to write anything down, though it is useful to keep a written record of what you have done. However, if you employ twenty-five or more people, you must record the significant findings of your assessment. This means writing down the significant hazards and conclusions. Examples might be 'Electrical installations: insulation and earthing checked and found sound' or 'Fume from welding: local exhaust ventilation provided and regularly checked'. You must also tell your employ-



ees about your findings. Risk assessments must be suitable and sufficient.

You need to be able to show 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.

Keep the written record for future reference.

It can help you if an Inspector asks what precautions you have taken, or if you become involved in any action for civil liability. It can also remind you to keep an eye on particular hazards and precautions and it helps to show that you have done what the law requires. There is an example at the end of this guide, which you may find helpful to refer to but you can develop your own form if you prefer. To make things simpler, you can refer to other documents, such as manuals, the arrangements in your safety and health policy company rules, manufacturers' instructions, your safety and health procedures and your arrangements for general fire safety. These may already list hazards and precautions. You do not need to repeat all that and it is up to you whether you combine all the documents, or keep them separately.

STEP 5

Review your assessment and revise it if necessary.

Sooner or later you will bring in new machines, substances and procedures, which could lead to new hazards. If there is any significant change, the assessment must be reviewed to take into account any new hazard. {Ref: Section 13A(2)}. Do not amend your assessment for every trivial change.



However, if a new job introduces significant new hazards of its own, you will want to consider them in their own right and do whatever is necessary to minimise risks. In any case, it is a good practice to review your assessment from time to time to make sure that the precautions are still working effectively. Remember that the OSH Act requires an annual assessment to be undertaken.

The following is an example of the five-step process:

STEP 1 Hazard

Look only for hazards which you could reasonably expect to result in significant harm under the conditions in your workplace. Use the following examples as a guide:

- Chemicals (e.g. battery acid)
- Dust (e.g. from grinding)
- Ejection of material (e.g. from using a grinding wheel)
- Electricity (e.g. exposed conductors)
- Fire (e.g. from flammable materials)
- Fumes (e.g. welding)
- Low temperature (e.g. frozen food processing plant)
- Manual handling (e.g. lifting heavy objects)
- Moving parts of machinery (e.g. blades)
- Noise (e.g. loud noise in a bottling factory)
- Poor lighting (e.g. dimly lit office environment)
- Pressure systems (e.g. steam boilers)
- Slipping/tripping hazards (e.g. poorly maintained floors or stairs)
- Vehicles (e.g. fork-lift trucks)
- Work at height (e.g. from scaffolding)

STEP 2 Who might be harmed and how?

There is no need to list individuals by name, just think about groups of people doing similar work or who may be affected, e.g. office staff, maintenance personnel, contractors, people sharing your workplace, operators, cleaners, members of the public or people that may be more vulnerable.

Pay particular attention to:

- Staff with disabilities
- Visitors
- Inexperienced staff

- Lone workers
- Young persons
- Pregnant and nursing employees

STEP 3 Is more needed to control the risk?

For the hazards listed, are the following precautions already taken:

- Meet the standards set by a legal requirement?
- Comply with a recognized industry standard?
- Represent good practice?
- Reduce risk as far as reasonably practicable?

Have you provided:

- Adequate information, instruction and training?
- Adequate systems or procedures?

If so, then the risks are adequately controlled but you need to indicate the precautions you have in place. (You may refer to procedures, company rules, etc.)

Where the risk is not adequately controlled, indicate what more you need to do (the 'Action List')

STEP 4

Record your findings. Are you able to verify:

- Date and time of the assessment
- Person(s) conducting the assessment
- Significant findings
- Precautions taken to reduce risk
- Remaining risk
- Review and revision date.

If you employ more than twenty-five (25) people you need to be able to demonstrate a risk assessment. If you have less than twenty-five (25) people, although you are not compelled to, it is a good practice to keep a written record of what you have done.

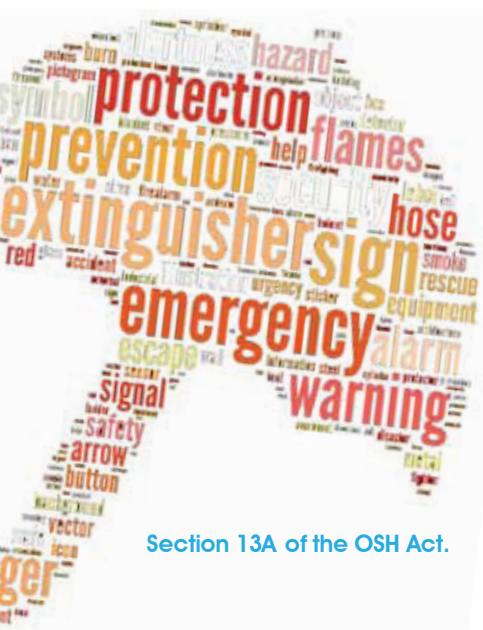
STEP 5 Review and revision

Set a date for review of the assessment. On review, check that the precautions for each hazard still adequately control the risk. If not, indicate the action needed and note the outcome. If necessary, complete a new page for your risk assessment.

Making changes in your workplace for example, when bringing in new machines, substances and procedures may introduce significant hazards. Look for them and repeat steps one to four.

List significant hazards here:

[illegible][illegible][illegible]



Section 13A of the OSH Act.

- (1)** Every employer shall make a suitable and sufficient annual assessment of:

 - (a)** The risks to the safety and health of his employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work; and
 - (b)** The risk to the safety and health of persons not in his employment arising out of or in connection with the environmental impact of his undertaking,

For the purpose of identifying what measures are necessary for compliance with this Act or any other statutory provisions.
- (2)** Any assessment referred to in paragraph (1a) or (1b) shall be reviewed by the employer who made it if:

 - (a)** There is reason to suspect that it is no longer valid; or
 - (b)** There has been significant change in the matters to which it relates, and where as a result of any such review, changes to an assessment are required, the employer or self-employed person concerned shall make them.
- (3)** Where the employer employs twenty-five or more employees, he shall keep a record in accordance with section 75 of –

 - (a)** the findings of the assessment; and
 - (b)** any group of his employees identified by the assessment as being exposed to an occupational safety and health risk.



Duke Place, Level 4 & 5
50-54 Duke Street, Port of Spain
For further information:
Tel: (868) 299-0300 Fax: (868) 623-5905
OSHA HOTLINE: 623-OSHA (6742)
www.osha.gov.tt

OSHA is a statutory Agency of the Ministry of Labour
and Small and Micro Enterprise Development
August 2014