

Occupational Health and Safety Risk Management Guidelines

Occupational Health and Safety risk management is the process of recognising situations which have the potential to cause harm to people or property, and doing something to prevent injuries occurring. The risk management process consists of well-defined steps, that when taken in sequence lead to informed decisions about how best to avoid or control the impact of these risks. The risk management process involves:

Step 1: Hazard identification – identifying things in the work environment which have the potential to cause harm.

Step 2: Risk assessment – determining how likely it is that that harm could occur, how serious the harm may be and who may be exposed.

Step 3: Risk control (eliminating or minimising the risk) - deciding what needs to be done to eliminate or minimise the risks associated with the identified hazards.

Step 1: Hazard Identification

A hazard is anything that has the potential to cause harm. Hazards may be physical (manual handling, cuts and abrasions, etc) chemical, biological (exposure to blood and bodily substances) or psychological (impact of rostering, interpersonal conflict, lack of appropriate skills or training, etc).

Hazard identification looks at the whole system of work and may include:

- Reviewing past incidents and accidents.
- Discussing safety issues with staff in the area.
- A Workplace inspection.
- Reviewing other available information such as manufacturers manuals, Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) etc to identify recommended safety precautions.

Step 2: Risk Assessment

The risk associated with a hazard is the likelihood that the potential to cause harm will be realised. That is, how likely it is that someone could be harmed by the hazard and how serious the injury or illness could be. When assessing the risk consideration must be given to:

- Likelihood
- Severity
- Number of people who may be affected

This is done by reviewing any available information about the hazard, including data, previous experience, internal policies and procedures and any legislative or guidance material produced in relation to such hazards.

The hazard identification process may result in a list which includes many hazards. Some will be more likely to eventuate than others, and the consequences for some will be more severe than for others. In the risk assessment stage a plan will include identification of priorities to make the workplace safer. The plan should focus on fixing the greatest risks first.

If the hazard is obvious and the risk of injury is high, the plan should identify a mechanism to control the risk immediately in some way, as an interim measure. Following this additional research may be required to identify the most appropriate control in order to eliminate the risks altogether or, if this is not practicable, to minimise the risk.

Likelihood

- How likely is it that someone would be that badly affected?
- very likely — could happen any time
- likely — could happen sometime
- unlikely — could happen, but very rarely
- very unlikely — could happen, but probably never will.

Level	Descriptor	Description
A	Almost certain	The event is expected to occur in most circumstances
B	Likely	The event will probably occur in most circumstances
C	Possible	The event should (might) occur at some time
D	Unlikely	The event could occur at some time
E	Rare	The event may occur only in exceptional circumstances

Severity (also referred to as consequence or impact)

For each hazard, think about whether it could:

- kill or cause permanent disability or ill health
- cause long term illness or serious injury
- cause someone to need medical attention and be off work for several days
- cause someone to need first aid
- caused a minor injury or near miss but no treatment was required

Level	Descriptor	Example detail description
4	Insignificant	Event had the potential to cause injury or harm but did not. no damage, and little or no disruption to the workplace
4	Minor	Event that led to minor injury and may have required first aid treatment on site; no lost time
3	Moderate	Compensable injury – time lost and medical treatment required; Moderate damage, Moderate disruption to the workplace.
2	Major	Employee/s suffered significant injury and may have required hospitalisation; Significant damage, significant disruption to the workplace and financial loss
1	Catastrophic	Death; major disruption to the workplace, major financial loss

Risk Analysis Matrix - Level of Risk

The matrix positions each risk with respect to its likelihood and consequence and allows us to develop informed decisions about which risk to manage as priorities.

Likelihood	Consequences				
	ISR4 Insignificant	ISR4 Minor	ISR3 Moderate	ISR 2 Major	ISR 1 Catastrophic 1
A (Almost certain)	M	H	E	E	E
B (Likely)	L	M	H	E	E
C (Possible)	L	L	M	H	E
D (Unlikely)	L	L	L	M	H
E (Rare)	L	L	L	L	M

LEGEND

- E = urgent, extreme risk, immediate action required. Executive Director Involvement required
- H = High risk, Executive Director attention required and senior management responsibility to be specified
- M = moderate risk management responsibility must be specified
- L = low risk, manage by routine procedures

Step 3: Risk Elimination or Control

The focus of the risk control phase is to remove or fix any hazards or, if this is not reasonably practicable, to minimise the risk of harm to the lowest practicable level.

When considering appropriate controls risks should be minimised using the Hierarchy of Control which provides advice about the best mechanisms available to control risks. The hierarchy identifies that elimination of the hazard and associated risks is the preferred option. However, this control is not always possible or reasonably practicable. The next best control would be to substitute the hazardous with something less hazardous, followed by isolating the hazard from the workers and others.

Elimination	Get rid of the hazard out of the workplace. i.e. designing the problem out. This is the best option, if it can be done.
Substitution	Use something less hazardous. For example water based chemicals rather than solvent based ones.
Isolation	Use barriers to shield or isolate the hazard. For example guards on machines, enclosures for noisy machinery.
Engineering controls	Design and install equipment to counteract the hazard. For example installing an exhaust ventilation system to extract dangerous fumes or dust.
Administrative controls	Arrange work to reduce the time people are around the hazard.
Personal protective equipment	Have people wear protective equipment and clothing while near the hazard. For example, ear plugs or earmuffs.

The hierarchy clarifies that hazards should be controlled by means other than the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) wherever possible. PPE should only be relied on when there is no other solution and in most instances should be used as a supplement to other control measures.

In addition risk controls must not rely solely or primarily on information, training or instruction to control the risk, unless it can be demonstrated that other risk controls are not practicable. However risk controls may need to be supplemented by information, training and instruction about the changes made. For some risks several risk controls may need to be implemented to eliminate or reduce the risk to the lowest practicable level.

Action Plan

An action plan must be developed which documents the Risk Management process, the identified controls, who is responsible for implementing them and the timeframe for implementation.

Review and Improve

Once controls have been implemented the risks should be reviewed and consideration given to any potential to further reduce the risks.

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