

Risk assessment

The principle of risk assessment is fundamental to the management of health and safety in the workplace. Legislation places a legal duty on employers to assess the risks to the health and safety of their employees (and others) that arise out of their work.

There is also a requirement in other sets of regulations for employers to carry out risk assessments in relation to specific threats to health or safety in the workplace, such as the use of hazardous substances, manual handling and working at height. However, this does not put an obligation on employers to carry out two risk assessments for the same hazard. If the general risk assessment covers the specified hazards, that risk assessment alone will be sufficient.

Simple work activities with few hazards, which present a low risk, should need only simple assessments. If a risk assessment is to be effective, it is essential that the person who carries it out is competent in all aspects of the task that is being assessed.

When carrying out risk assessments, employers must consider not only the wellbeing of their own employees, but also anyone else who may be affected by that work activity. This includes, but is not restricted to, the following.

- The employees of other contractors or the self-employed.
- Site visitors (such as delivery drivers).
- Members of the public, including children.
- The client, customers or other occupiers of the property.

Particular provision is made in the regulations for the protection of young persons in the workplace. You must also carry out an individual risk assessment when a worker informs you in writing that they are pregnant, breastfeeding or have given birth in the last six months. The final two groups of employees who require an additional risk assessment due to their increased risk are disabled and lone workers.

Alongside formal risk assessments, groups of workers in high-risk or volatile work situations should carry out a dynamic risk assessment. This is a real-time assessment of the risks that, in these situations, can change rapidly and unexpectedly. Employees should be aware of the principles involved, as they are often best placed to identify risk and impose controls.

The duty to undertake risk assessments is placed on all employers, irrespective of the number of persons they employ, but where five or more persons are employed, the significant findings of the assessment must be recorded (either in writing or electronically).



Essential points to consider

- Main (or principal) contractors may wish to see written risk assessments from any contractor they intend to employ, regardless of the number of employees.
- Carrying out risk assessments need not be difficult or unduly time-consuming: the effort should be proportionate to the degree of perceived risk.
- There is no official content or particular way to structure a risk assessment: it is for each employer to decide what works best for their organisation.
- It is vital that written risk assessments, method statements and permits to work are presented in an easy-to-understand format for those who are actually doing the work.

Principles of risk assessment

- **Identify the hazards** (things with the potential to cause harm) that arise out of the work activity being assessed.
- **Assess the risks** posed to the health and safety of any person(s) likely to be affected by the hazards.
- **Identify the individuals** or groups of people who are at risk.
- **Eliminate the hazards** (where possible), thereby removing the risk of injury.
- **Identify and implement** appropriate measures to control the remaining risks.
- **Effectively monitor and review** control measures for the work activity, and amend them if they are no longer valid or effective.

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