

Risk Assessments:

5 Steps to a Safer Workplace

The HSE 5-step risk assessment process, what workers need to know, when a written assessment is required, review obligations and your right to see it.



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HSE · MHSW Regs 1999



England, Scotland and Wales

ukworkrights.co.uk

In Northern Ireland, similar duties come from Northern Ireland's own health and safety law. Contact HSENI (Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland), not the HSE.

Why risk assessments are required

- The **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** require every employer to carry out risk assessments for all work activities
- Employers with **5 or more employees** must record the significant findings in writing
- A risk assessment is not a form-filling exercise — it's a genuine assessment of **what could go wrong and what steps to take**
- Risk assessments must be **suitable and sufficient** — not just a tick-box
- They must be **reviewed when circumstances change** or when they are no longer valid
- Workers and their representatives have the right to be **consulted** on risk assessments
- You have the right to clear information on the risks to you identified by the risk assessment and the measures in place

▲ A BAD RISK ASSESSMENT IS NOT COMPLIANCE

A risk assessment that fails to identify significant hazards, or fails to implement adequate controls, is not legally compliant — regardless of how many pages it has.

HSE's 5-step risk assessment

- 1 Identify the hazards**
What could cause harm? Walk around the workplace, talk to workers, review accident records, consider all activities and who might be affected.
- 2 Decide who might be harmed and how**
Think about employees, contractors, visitors, members of the public. Consider vulnerable groups — new workers, young people, pregnant workers.
- 3 Evaluate risks and decide on controls**
How likely is harm and how severe? What controls are in place? What more is needed? Apply the hierarchy of control — eliminate, substitute, engineer, administrate, PPE.
- 4 Record findings (5+ employees)**
Document significant hazards, who is at risk and the controls in place. Keep it simple and practical — not a bureaucratic exercise.
- 5 Review and update**
Review when: significant changes occur, after an accident or near-miss, if controls may no longer be effective. There is no fixed legal review date: review it if there is reason to suspect it is no longer valid or there has been a significant change.

KEY CONCEPTS

Hazard

Something with the potential to cause harm — a chemical, a trailing cable, a slippery floor

Risk

The likelihood of harm actually occurring and how severe it would be

Control

A measure taken to eliminate or reduce the risk to an acceptable level

Suitable

Appropriate for the specific hazard and group of people who might be harmed

Sufficient

Goes far enough to identify and control the significant risks — not every conceivable risk

Review

Active check that controls are still working — not just filing the form and forgetting it

Frequently asked questions

Q Does every task need a separate risk assessment?

Not necessarily. A single risk assessment can cover a range of similar activities. The important thing is that it is suitable and sufficient — it identifies the hazards relevant to each activity and the people at risk.

Q Can workers carry out their own risk assessments?

Yes — particularly for dynamic risk assessments in the field. But workers must be trained and competent to do so. The employer retains overall responsibility for ensuring assessments are adequate.

Q What is a dynamic risk assessment?

An on-the-spot assessment carried out in real time when circumstances change unexpectedly — common in emergency services, social care, construction and maintenance. Workers must be trained to recognise hazards and apply appropriate controls in the moment.

Q Can I see the risk assessment for my job?

You are entitled to clear information on the risks it identifies and the measures in place. Employers must give workers clear information on the risks identified by the risk assessment and the measures that control them. If you've been refused access to a risk assessment relating to your role, raise it with your safety rep or HSE.

Delivery notes & attendance record

Before you start

Use a real task from today rather than a generic example. The goal is that people see risk assessment as something they do, not paperwork someone else files.

Questions to ask the team

1. What are the top three risks in the job you are doing today?
2. Have you read the risk assessment for it?
3. Has anything changed on site that the assessment does not cover?
4. What would you change about how we work if it were your call?

The law behind this talk

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 reg. 3 (suitable and sufficient assessment; record it if you have 5 or more employees)

Employers must give workers comprehensible information, instruction and training on the risks they face — Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2(2)(c) and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 reg. 10. Keep the record below as evidence that you did.

Attendance record

Topic

Date

Site / location

Delivered by

Actions agreed

Next talk due

Attendees

Name

Signature

Use the Print handout button to print this record. General guidance only, not legal advice. This toolbox talk is generic material and is not a substitute for a suitable and sufficient risk assessment by a competent person. Employers remain responsible for their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

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Risk Assessments

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hse.gov.uk

ACAS

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acas.org.uk

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citizensadvice.org.uk

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hello@ukworkrights.co.uk

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