

Method Statements

A Method Statement is a document detailing how a particular process will be carried out. They are particularly useful in health and safety risk assessment, project planning and quality management. The general principle of ensuring a safe system of work applies to all work activity and as such a method statement is an ideal way to prove that the risks associated with a particular activity has been carefully considered and appropriate controls implemented. However, for lower risk activities it may be sufficient to rely on a combination of operator competence and comprehensive risk assessment in achieving a safe system of work.

The purpose of a method statement is to ensure that work is carried out in a particular sequence especially where safety or quality are critical. There are a few examples where their definitive requirements are laid down by statute or other regulatory standard. Where they exist, they are predominantly for high-risk activities such as licensed asbestos removal, demolition and steel erection. In these cases, not only is a method statement a legal requirement, but also its structure and format are pre-determined.

A safety method statement is a method of control that is used after a risk assessment has been carried out. The method statement should always be very specific and is used to control the operation and to ensure that all concerned are aware of the hazards associated with the work and the safety precautions to be taken.

Method statements are frequently used on construction sites. For a particular section of similar work, they detail its boundaries, materials and plant requirements and temporary works designs. Construction method statements should also contain information concerning the order and method of construction with reference to work procedures. On some sites, they can be a contractual requirement, requiring submission to the principal contractor, client or engineer for approval prior to the commencement of works.

Method statements should be written by a competent person familiar with the work processes. This is the best way to demonstrate that the hazards and risks associated with a particular task or series of tasks have been properly considered and evaluated. Method statements should outline the appropriate risk control strategies that are required to be implemented in order to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the workforce and others affected by the works.

A method statement can only be prepared once the potential hazards have been identified and the risks assessed. This therefore requires the completion of a properly considered risk assessment for each activity, or series of activities, which identifies not only the hazards, but also the required controls measures that are necessary to manage the residual risks.

The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) provides training courses and qualification programmes that give clear guidance on the use of method statements in projects and operations. www.ciob.org.uk