

## **R**isk Assessments

A Risk Assessment is a systematic method of looking at work activities, considering what could go wrong, and deciding on suitable control measures to prevent loss, damage or injury in the workplace. The Assessment should include the controls required to eliminate, reduce or minimise the risks. Risk Assessments are a fundamental requirement for all organisations. If a business does not know, or appreciate where the risks are, they may be putting employees, customers and the organisation in danger.

Employers must look at all work activities that could cause harm in order to decide whether they are doing enough to meet their legal obligations. This is a minimum requirement. If it is reasonably practicable to do so, employers should consider doing more than the legal minimum. The aim should always be to reduce the risks as much as is 'reasonably practicable'.

'Reasonably practicable' is a legal term that means employers must balance the cost of steps that they could take to reduce a risk against the degree of risk presented; When reckoning such costs, the time, trouble and effort required should be included and not just the financial burden.

This will depend on the organisation and may vary depending on the nature of the work. However, Risk Assessments must consider everyone who could be affected by that activity. As well as employees, others who could be affected must also be considered. This includes contractors, temporary workers, volunteers and the general public.

Some groups are considered more vulnerable, such as young persons under 18 and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. The legislation specifically asks employers to consider the risks posed to these groups and put in place additional controls if they are required.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations 1999 require all employers and the self-employed to assess the risks from their work on anyone who may be affected by their activities.

The Regulations require employers to carry out a systematic examination of their work activities and record the significant findings of the Risk Assessment. If an employer has five or more employees, the findings must be recorded in writing.

As well as the assessment of general work activities, there are a number of other pieces of legislation such as the Display Screen Equipment Regulations that require a specific Risk Assessment to be carried out.

Carrying out a Risk Assessment is just the first step. Once the Assessment has been carried out, it is important to make sure that everyone involved in the activity, or exposed to the risk, is made aware of the findings of the Risk Assessment.

*Sample Risk Assessments are available along with guidance at  
[www.hse.gov.uk/risk/assessment.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/assessment.htm)*