OSHA is a statutory agency of
the Ministry of Labour and Small
and Micro Enterprise Development

A GUIDE TO RISK ASSESSMENT
Introduction

This leaflet aims to help you assess safety and health in the workplace.

A risk assessment is an important step in protecting your workers and your business, as well as complying with the law. It helps you focus on the risks that really matter in your workplace - the ones with the potential to cause real harm. In many instances, straightforward measures can readily control risks; for example, drawers are kept closed to ensure people do not trip. For most, that means simple, cheap and effective measures to ensure your most valuable asset - your workforce - is protected.

The law does not expect you to eliminate all risks, but you are required to protect people as far as 'reasonably practicable'. This guide tells you how to achieve that with a minimum of fuss.

This is not the only way to do a risk assessment, there are other methods that work well, particularly for more complex risks and circumstances. However, we believe this method is the most straightforward for most organizations.

What is a Risk Assessment?

A risk assessment is nothing more than a careful examination of what, in your work-place, could cause harm to persons, to enable you to decide whether you have taken sufficient precautions or need to do more to prevent harm. The aim is to make sure that no one gets hurt or becomes ill. Accidents and ill health ruin lives and adversely affect your business when output is lost, machinery is damaged, insurance costs increase, or you have
to attend court. You are legally required to assess the risks in your workplace. The important things you need to decide are whether a hazard is significant, and whether you have it covered by satisfactory precautions so that the risk is small. You need to check this when you assess the risks. For instance, electricity can kill but the risk of it doing so in an office environment is remote, provided that 'live' components are insulated and metal casings are properly earthed.

HOW TO ASSESS THE RISKS IN YOUR WORKPLACE:

The following five steps can be followed:

✓ STEP 1: Look for the hazards
✓ STEP 2: Decide who might be harmed and how
✓ STEP 3: Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
✓ STEP 4: Record your findings
✓ STEP 5: Review your assessment and revise it if necessary

Don't be overcomplicated. In most firms in the commercial, service and light industrial sectors, the hazards are few and simple. Checking them is common sense but necessary. You probably already know whether, for example, you have machinery that could cause harm, or if there is an awkward entrance or stair where someone could be hurt. If so, check that you have taken what reasonable precautions you can to avoid injury. If you are a small firm and you are confident you understand what's involved, you can do the assessment yourself, (you don't have to be a health
and safety expert!). If you are a larger firm, you could ask a responsible employee, safety representative or safety officer to help you. If you are not confident, get help from a competent source. But remember - you are responsible for seeing it is adequately done.

Hazard and Risk

Hazard means anything that can cause harm; (e.g. chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, etc). Risk is the chance, high or low, that somebody will be harmed by the hazard.

Five steps to Risk Assessment

STEP 1

Look for the hazards. If you are doing the assessment yourself, walk around your workplace and look afresh at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm. Ignore the trivial and concentrate on significant hazards which could result in serious harm or affect several people. Ask your employees or their representatives what they think. They may have noticed things which are not immediately obvious. Manufacturers’ instructions or data sheets can also help you spot hazards and put risks in their true perspective. So can accident and ill-health records.

STEP 2

Decide who might be harmed and how. Don’t forget:

- Young workers, trainees, new and expectant mothers, etc. who may be at particular risk.
- Cleaners, visitors, contractors, maintenance workers, etc. who may not be in the workplace all
the time.
- Members of the public, or people you share your workplace with, if there is a chance they could be hurt by your activities.

**STEP 3**

Evaluate the risks identified and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done. Consider how likely it is that each hazard could cause harm. This will determine whether or not you need to do more to reduce the risk. Even after all precautions have been taken, some risk usually remains. What you have to decide for each significant hazard is whether this remaining risk is high, medium or low.

First, ask yourself whether you have done all the things that the law says you have got to do. For example, there are legal requirements on prevention of access to dangerous parts of machinery. Then ask yourself whether generally accepted industry standards are in place.

But don't stop there - think for yourself, because the law also says that you must do what is reasonably practicable to keep your workplace safe. Your real aim is to make all risks small by adding to your precautions as necessary. If you find that something needs to be done, draw up an ‘Action List’ and give priority to any remaining risks that are high and/or those that could affect most people. In taking action ask yourself:

a) Can I get rid of the hazard altogether?

b) If not, how can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?

In controlling risks apply the following principles below, if possible in the following order:

- Try a less risky option
Prevent access to the hazard (e.g. by guarding)
Organize work to reduce exposure to the hazard
Issue personal protective equipment (PPE)
Provide welfare facilities (e.g. washing facilities for removal of contamination and first aid)

Improving health and safety need not cost a lot. For instance, placing a mirror on a dangerous blind corner to help prevent vehicle accidents, or putting some non-slip material on slippery steps are inexpensive precautions considering the risks. Failure to take simple precautions can cost you a lot more if an accident does happen.

But what if the work you do tends to vary a lot, or you or your employees move from one site to another? Identify the hazards you can reasonably expect and assess the risks from them. After that, if you spot any additional hazards when you get to a site, get information from others on site, and take what action seems necessary.

But what if you share a workplace?
Tell the other employers and self-employed people there about any risks your work could cause them, and what precautions you are taking. Also, think about the risks to your own workforce from those who share your workplace.

STEP 4
Record your findings. If you have fewer than twenty-five employees you do not need to write anything down, though it is useful to keep a written record of what you have done. But if you employ twenty-five or more people, you must record the
significant findings of your assessment. This means writing down the significant hazards and conclusions. Examples might be 'Electrical installations: insulation and earthing checked and found sound' or 'Fume from welding: local exhaust ventilation provided and regularly checked'. You must also tell your employees about your findings. Risk assessments must be suitable and sufficient.

You need to be able to show that:

- A proper check was made
- You asked who might be affected
- You dealt with all the obvious significant hazards, taking into account the number of people who could be involved
- The precautions are reasonable, and the remaining risk is low.

Keep the written record for future reference or use; it can help you if an Inspector asks what precautions you have taken, or if you become involved in any action for civil liability. It can also remind you to keep an eye on particular hazards and precautions and it helps to show that you have done what the law requires. There is an example at the end of this guide, which you may find helpful to refer to but you can develop your own form if you prefer. To make things simpler, you can refer to other documents, such as manuals, the arrangements in your safety and health policy statement, company rules, manufacturers' instructions, your safety and health procedures and your arrangements for general fire safety. These may already list hazards and precautions. You don't need to repeat all that and it is up to you whether you combine all the documents, or keep them separately.
STEP 5
Review your assessment and revise it if necessary. Sooner or later you will bring in new machines, substances and procedures, which could lead to new hazards. If there is any significant change, the assessment must be reviewed to take into accountacy new hazard. [Ref: Section 13A(2)]. Don't amend your assessment for every trivial change, or still more, for each new job, but if a new job introduces significant new hazards of its own, you will want to consider them in their own right and do whatever you need to keep the risks down. In any case, it is good practice to review your assessment from time to time to make sure that the precautions are still working effectively.

STEP 1
Hazard
Look only for hazards, which you could reasonably expect to result in significant harm under the conditions in your workplace. Use the following examples as a guide:

- Slipping/tripping hazards (e.g. poorly maintained floors or stairs)
- Fire (e.g. from flammable materials)
- Chemicals (e.g. battery acid)
- Moving parts of machinery (e.g. blades)
- Work at height (e.g. from mezzanine floors)
- Ejection of material (e.g. from plastic moulding)
- Pressure systems (e.g. steam boilers)
- Vehicles (e.g. fork-lift trucks)
- Electricity (e.g. poor wiring)
- Dust (e.g. from grinding)
STEP 2
Who might be harmed?
There is no need to list individuals by name, just think about groups of people doing similar work or who may be affected, e.g. office staff, maintenance personnel, contractors, people sharing your workplace, operators, cleaners, members of the public or people that may be more vulnerable.
Pay particular attention to:
- Staff with disabilities
- Visitors
- Inexperienced staff
- Lone workers
- Young persons

STEP 3
Is more needed to control the risk?
For the hazards listed, do the precautions already taken:
- Meet the standards set by a legal requirement?
- Comply with a recognized industry standard?
- Represent good practice?
- Reduce risk as far as reasonably practicable?
Have you provided:
- Adequate information, instruction and training?
- Adequate systems or procedures?

If so, then the risks are adequately controlled but you need to indicate the precautions you have in place. (You may refer to procedures, company rules, etc.) Where the risk is not adequately controlled, indicate what more you need to do (the 'Action List').

STEP 4
Review and revision

Set a date for review of the assessment. On review, check that the precautions for each hazard still adequately control the risk. If not, indicate the action needed and note the outcome. If necessary, complete a new page for your risk assessment.

Making changes in your workplace for example, when bringing in new machines, substances and procedures may introduce significant hazards. Look for them and follow the above steps.

RISK ASSESSMENT FOR
Company Name:

Company Address:

ASSESSMENT UNDERTAKEN
By............................................................
(Insert name)

Signed:

Date:
### ASSESSMENT REVIEW

**Date:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>List significant hazards here:</th>
<th>List groups of people who are at risk from the significant hazards you have identified:</th>
<th>List existing controls or note where the information may be found. List risks which are not adequately controlled and the action needed:</th>
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Section 13A of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2004 (as amended):

(1) Every employer shall make a suitable and sufficient annual assessment of-

(a) the risks to the safety and health of his employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work; and

(b) the risk to the safety and health of persons not in his employment arising out of or in connection with the environmental impact of his undertaking,

for the purpose of identifying what measures are necessary for compliance with this Act or any other statutory provisions.

(2) Any assessment referred to in paragraph (a) or (b) shall be reviewed by the employer who made it if-

(a) there is reason to suspect that it is no longer valid; or

(b) there has been significant change in the matters to which it relates,

and where as a result of any such review, changes to an assessment are required, the employer or self-employed person concerned shall make them.

(3) Where the employer employs twenty-five or more employees, he shall keep a record in accordance with section 75

(a) the findings of the assessment; and

(b) any group of his employees identified by the assessment as being exposed to an occupational safety and health risk.
LEGAL OBLIGATION

All employers must conduct a risk assessment of their establishment as outlined in Section 13A of the Occupational Safety and Health Act No. 1 of 2004 (as amended).

The full text of Section 13A can be found on Page 11.
Getting help

For further information, please do not hesitate to contact us at:

**OSH Agency**

Level 4, Corner Duncan Street and Independence Square,
Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Tel: 623-OSHA (6742) or 623-1462; Fax: 624-6591;
Website: [www.ttosha.com](http://www.ttosha.com)

OSH is a statutory agency
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