

Risk assessment



You need to make sure that reasonable health and safety precautions are in place to protect your employees and others. To do this, you need to think about what might cause harm to people. You will then need to decide if the precautions already in place are adequate. If they are not, you may need to identify further action to prevent any danger. When done formally, this is known as a **risk assessment**.

Completing a risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork. It is about identifying sensible precautions. The level of detail required should be proportionate to the risk. This means that for smaller organisations presenting few or simple hazards, the risk assessment can be based on informed judgement and reference to appropriate guidance. For larger or complex risks, more in-depth assessment might be necessary. Also, for some hazards (such as, asbestos), you may be required to implement specific precautions. Your assessment should help you identify where this is the case.

Obviously, completing an assessment on its own won't prevent accidents happening. It is important that you take the precautions you identify as being necessary, making sure that they remain effective for as long as appropriate.

Legal requirements

Where you are an employer, you must complete a 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessment. This is a requirement of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. Here, they will need to meet specific requirements. In particular, they must identify the steps you need to take to comply with relevant health and safety regulations. You must consider the risks to your employees whilst they are at work and others who may be affected by your activities.

If you have five or more employees, the assessments must be recorded detailing any significant findings and those who may be especially at risk. They will need to be reviewed (and amended if necessary) where you suspect that they are no longer valid or where there has been a significant change in the matters to which they relate.

In addition to this, you may need to complete more specific risk assessments for certain hazards to meet other statutory requirements. Examples include hazardous substances (under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations) and display screen equipment (under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations). However, completing a general risk assessments is useful in identifying where something more specific needs to be done. For example, identifying hazardous substances on your premises should trigger the need to complete more specific assessments for those substances.

It is worth remembering that even if you are not an employer, but own or control premises, you may still have to complete some detailed risk assessments. This would be as a duty-holder under certain health and safety regulations. Examples here include asbestos and fire. Again, these will have to meet specific requirements and in some cases you may need specialist assistance to complete them.

On a final note, if someone is injured you may need to show that you have met your duty of care. In defence of a claim of negligence, it might be important to show that you have completed risk assessments, as required, to a satisfactory standard.

Making a start

ACTION	GUIDANCE
<p>1. Identify the hazards in your premises and those associated with your work activities.</p> <p>Decide who might be harmed and how.</p>	<p>Hazards are the things that can harm people. You could identify these by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ walking around your workplace. In some cases, it might be easier if you break premises or tasks down, considering them one at a time■ talking to your employees and others (e.g. volunteers) about any health and safety issues■ reviewing previous accidents, ill-health records or past concerns about health and safety■ checking manufacturers' instructions for equipment or data sheets for chemicals■ considering hazards presented by other activities, such as events, working away from your main premises■ taking account of non-routine operations (e.g. maintenance or cleaning operations)■ thinking about hazards that may have long-term ill-health effects (e.g. high levels of noise)■ considering those who might be particularly at risk (e.g. young workers, the public, volunteers etc.). <p>In deciding who might be harmed and how, you should identify the groups of people who may be especially at risk (e.g. employees, maintenance workers, contractors, visitors, new or young workers, migrant workers, new or expectant mothers, people with disabilities, temporary workers, homeworkers and lone workers etc.).</p>

ACTION	GUIDANCE
	<p>If you share your workplace with another employer, consider how your activities affects them and how theirs affect you and your employees. You may need to speak with them to make sure adequate precautions are in place.</p> <p>You should remember that risk assessments must be completed by someone who is competent. You should discuss this with those you have appointed to advise you on health and safety matters (i.e. your 'competent person' appointment under Regulation 7 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations). They should be able to advise you on the best approach to be adopted and who should complete them. You may have to provide information and training for those doing this.</p> <p>If you intend to use the services of a health and safety consultant, you should check that they are registered on the Occupational Safety and Health Consultants Register (OHSCR). Further information is available at www.oshcr.org.</p>
<p>2. Decide if your precautions are adequate, implementing any additional ones that might be required.</p>	<p>Having identified the hazards, you should then consider the adequacy of the precautions you have in place. You should also decide if there is more that you need to do. You can then record your findings.</p> <p>Before you begin, it is useful for you to identify any specific health and safety regulations and guidance that might apply to you. This is freely available at www.hse.gov.uk. Doing this will help you identify the standards you must meet to protect people from the hazards in your own workplace and activities.</p> <p>In most cases, understanding these will help you decide if you are doing enough. This is particularly true where there is a significant risk of injury e.g. from slip and trip hazards, working at height or using electrical equipment.</p> <p>It will also be important for you to consider where more specific assessments are required, identifying what needs to be done to complete them.</p> <p>In identifying suitable precautions, it may be possible for you to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ remove the hazard altogether ■ use a safer working method, substance or equipment ■ prevent access to the hazards ■ organise the activities to reduce exposure to the hazard ■ provide information, instruction, training and supervision ■ issue personal protective equipment. <p>You should involve your employees in deciding on suitable precautions. This will help ensure that these will work in practice and won't introduce any new hazards.</p>

ACTION	GUIDANCE
	<p>If you control a number of similar workplaces and activities, you can produce 'generic' risk assessments. These would consider the common hazards encountered and the precautions to be taken. However, in using these at each location it is important to check that they accurately reflect the working practices at each location and that the necessary precautions can be taken.</p> <p>Some trade associations, employers' bodies or other organisations have developed 'model' assessments. You may decide to apply these at your workplace. However, you should only do this where they are appropriate for your type of work or activity and you adapt them to reflect your own circumstances.</p> <p>When completing the risk assessments, you can generally ignore insignificant risks or those associated with life in general. However, where your activity adds to or significantly alters these, you will need to consider them. You are not expected to anticipate unforeseeable risks.</p> <p>Once you have completed your risk assessments, you should implement the precautions you have identified. Use your risk assessments to help with this, working through each action required and noting when each is completed.</p>
<p>3. Document and review your assessments.</p>	<p>If you employ five or more people, you must record the significant findings of your assessment and any group of employees who may be especially at risk.</p> <p>For smaller premises, it will be sufficient to note the main points down about the significant risks and what you concluded. Keep your comments simple, but bear in mind that you may want to show that you made a proper check. This would include showing that you dealt with all the obvious significant hazards, taking into account the number of people who could be harmed and that the precautions are reasonable. Further information, tools and templates are available at www.hse.gov.uk/risk/controlling-risks.htm.</p> <p>You must review (and amend) any assessment you make where you think it is no longer valid or there has been a significant change. You should record when this is done.</p>
<p>4. Ensure that you communicate the findings of your risk assessments to all employees.</p>	<p>In many cases, the precautions you have identified in your risk assessments will need to be taken by your employees. They will need to know how to work safely and protect others.</p> <p>You must provide them with easy to understand and relevant information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ the hazards they may face ■ the precautions they need to take ■ any emergency procedures they need to follow. <p>Your risk assessments should help you decide exactly what information and training is required in your particular circumstances. It should be proportionate and delivered in a timely manner.</p>

Making a start

ACTION	GUIDANCE
	You should keep records of any information or training you provide. These should contain detail relating to the persons who were trained (including their signatures to say that they have received and understood the training); when they were trained and by whom; an overview of the training that was provided etc.
5. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for completing risk assessments. Review these where necessary, particularly if you suspect they are no longer valid. Keep records of what you have done, making sure that they are kept up-to-date.	If you need to prepare a health and safety policy, you could record your arrangements as part of it. This could include your approach to completing risk assessments and the individual responsibilities for this. In the event of a claim, paperwork will be important. So, where you complete risk assessments, you should keep these documents and ensure they are suitably archived in an easily retrievable format.

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available on our [website](#).

Further guidance and resources are also available at: www.hse.gov.uk.

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the enforcing authority for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

Need to contact us?

For further advice Ecclesiastical customers can call our risk advice line on **0345 600 7531** (Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, excluding bank holidays) or email us at risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com and one of our experts will call you back within 24 hours.

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