

**‘Risk Assessment’. Was there ever a more misunderstood phrase? ‘Method statement’ maybe?**

Such is the lack of understanding of these processes that their simple meaning has often been lost as people worry about doing the wrong thing. Put simply, “a risk assessment is nothing more than a careful examination of what work activities can cause harm to people...It should be carried out by a competent person with a practical knowledge of the work activities being assessed.”

**The purpose of a risk assessment is to reduce the likelihood of accidents and ill health, which can ruin lives, affect business, damage machinery, increase insurance costs, and/or lead to prosecution.**

**The purpose is NOT to complete a form, or fill in a piece of paper. Nor is it to justify doing what has always been done before.**

It is to consider the risks to people and to take appropriate steps to reduce it. Clearly, where the risk is significant (death or major injury, for example) the steps to control the risk must be greater, and where the risks could be of minor injury, but to a great many people, again the controls must be greater to reflect the consequences of the risk.

A safe system of work (also often referred to as a method statement) is simply a record of how the outcomes of the risk assessment are going to be put into practice.

The requirement to carry out a risk assessment is held under the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999, Regulation 3.

It may be worth considering the following definitions:

**Hazard** – something (an object, a process, an activity) with the potential to cause harm.

**Risk** – to possibility or likelihood of that harm being realised

**Danger** – “A reasonably foreseeable cause of injury to a person acting in a way a human would reasonably be expected to act in a set of circumstances which might reasonably be expected to occur” (Justice Du Parq)

In most cases, we cannot control hazards, so our attention must focus on managing the risk to prevent the hazard causing the harm.

A couple of interesting points to consider:

- The regulations require that a ‘suitable and sufficient’ assessment of risk be carried out, but do not specify what ‘suitable and sufficient’ is, other than it should consider the foreseeable risks.
- Therefore, you are less likely to be criticised for completing an assessment, which ultimately was inadequate, than you are for not doing one, as you feared it would be wrong.
- The regulations do not require a specific form of recording of the assessment, only that a record is kept of the ‘significant findings’
- This means that an email discussion regarding the significant risks associated with a task or process and the appropriate risk control measures may be sufficient as both a risk assessment AND a method statement
- For other tasks (for example the use of machinery or processes), it may be more appropriate to make use of the UoE templates.

- Risk assessment should help you get the the 'end point' you want to. It should not prevent you achieving the work you wish, but should affect HOW you achieve it. If it does prevent you doing something due to risk, then the risk is not justified.

## So, what risks do we need to assess?

The risks present in the activities carried out within Estates could not be more varied e.g. Asbestos, Fire, Slips, Trips and Falls, Driving, Manual handling, Substances, Electricity, Gas, DES, Stress, Work at Height, Steam, Buried Service

We also need to consider the foreseeability of harm arising from an activity – we do not need to consider the 'fanciful' possibilities, but similarly, just because something, which might happen, has not done so before does not mean we do not need to assess the risk.

As HSE state: *"You do not need to include insignificant risks. You do not need to include risks from everyday life unless your work activities increase the risk."* Therefore, a level of common sense must be applied as to whether risks are foreseeable.

## 'But I've never done one before'

**EVERYONE** at Estates has successfully completed risk assessments on a daily basis. Every time you cross the road, you complete an assessment following exactly the same principals we have to apply to our assessments for our work within Estates. All assessments should follow the same simple 5-step hierarchy:

- Identify the hazard (that which could cause harm)
- Identify who could be harmed and how
- Consider the appropriate measures to control these risks
- Record the significant findings of this assessment (OK, so you do not need to write them down for crossing the road!)
- Activities, practices and the assessments should be reviewed periodically to consider development in working practices as well as the availability of possible solutions to eliminating or reducing the risks.



**AVOID.** Eliminate those at risk from the task. Consider using contractor (provide appropriate info)

**SUBSTITUTE.** Consider the use of a less harmful alternative. (i.e. water based paint rather than flammable, Scissors rather than knife)

**COLLECTIVE PASSIVE MITIGATION.** Controls which provide protection to many, without requiring those at risk to take further action are to be preferred (i.e. fully guarded working platform, fume cabinets etc)

**PRO-ACTIVE INDIVIDUAL MITIGATION.** Controls which provide protection to individuals only, and require users to take specific action require strict training and supervision (i.e. harnesses)

**TRAINING.** Reliance on training alone should not in itself be considered a control measure. Supervision will be required to ensure other controls are utilised

**PPE.** PPE should be considered as the 'last line of defence', and used with other controls in place.

Having carried out an assessment you are then in a position to decide on the safe system of work so that you can carry out the task safely.

It is vital that safety at each stage of a process or activity is considered – for example: Installation AND removal, cleaning, maintenance activities, potential clashes with other activities or processes etc.

When considering the risks and how best they can be managed, you should approach them in the following way:

- Can the risks be avoided (i.e. by carrying out the task some other way or from a safe place?)
- Can the dangerous be replaced by the less dangerous?
- Where risks remain, where possible, priority should be given to protecting everyone over just individuals
- Priority should be given to prevention rather than mitigation (reduction) of harm being realised
- In the absence of any other available control measures, those at risk should receive adequate information, instruction & training appropriate to the risks, and be supervised accordingly.
- Where risks remain, protective equipment should be provided (hard hats etc.)

In this way, one can consider the earlier simple example of crossing the road:

- Can you avoid crossing the road? (Perhaps go to the shop on this side, rather than crossing)
- If you must cross the road, could you do so where the risk is adequately reduced? (perhaps using a foot bridge or a pedestrian crossing)
- Where collective protection is not available, we rely on our training in a safe system of work to cross the road (stop, look, listen then look and listen again as you cross)

Or, when completing a COSHH assessment (As required by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1992)

- Can the use of the substance be avoided? (do we need to do a process in-house?)
- Can an alternative be used? (for example replacing a flammable liquid with a non-flammable alternative)
- Can the risks be controlled to provide collective protection (for example a fume cupboard)
- Can the risks be adequately controlled for the individual (for example PPE)
- Are those involved in the process adequately trained and equipped to deal with foreseeable risks for each stage of the process?

## **Recording.**

As noted above, often it is best to use the UoE templates but often for one off projects such as students work, it may be appropriate to discuss the issue and then simply record the outcome of this assessment process in the form of an email. This then meets the legal requirement to record the significant findings of the assessment, and documents where the hierarchy has been considered. Work.

The UoE template would of course allow the same assessment to be recorded, with each control measure being listed and the initial risk rating being classed as 'high' with the resultant rating after the controls being 'medium / low'.

The benefit of recording it in a seemingly less 'formal' way is that perhaps emphasises the actual process of assessment, rather than the seemingly regimented recording.

## **Conclusion.**

Therefore, when we consider the activities we want to undertake, we need to start by identifying the risks we might face and then working through how we can minimise the risk of anyone coming to

harm, only moving to a lower level on the hierarchy when we are SURE that the higher level is either not possible or justified

**In addition, remember, if the voice in your head says I WILL JUST TAKE A CHANCE IT'S ONLY A MINUTE THAT IS THE TIME TO STOP AND STEP BACK!!!!!!!!!!!!**

By following the above steps, we give ourselves the best possible chance of achieving our goals safely, and that is to the benefit of everyone

If you have any questions about the process, do get in touch with your line manager or with the the Estates Health and Safety Manager who will be happy to help and advice.