



SUBJECT: 5 Risk Assessment Mistakes

RECIPIENTS: All Council Services (including schools)

ISSUE DATE: Jan 2015 REF: HSB52

The 5 WRONG Steps to Risk Assessment

Considering that risk assessment has been around for so long, it is alarming how even large operations and specialists can make mistakes about the constructive approach to it. Here are some of the more common mistakes, with some steps to take to avoid them.

Mistake 1: Done only for legal reasons

Of course, for all but the smallest of operations, there is a legal requirement. But the prime reason for carrying out risk assessments is that they are a key tool in how you manage safety; without assessments, you cannot adequately manage the risks.

Mistake 2: Done from the desktop

Some advertisements for software that claim risk assessments can be done from the desktop. No, you have to view the operations and discuss what actually happens (not just what should happen) with the people involved. Sometimes things will turn up that alarm you.

Mistake 3: Covering only control measures in place

Of course, you need to know these, but far more important is what controls *should* be in place, but aren't. What you should get out of your risk assessments should include:

- What actions do we need to take to get in control?
- What actions do we need to take to stay in control?

The first one is obvious, but people often miss the second. For example, if a hazard is avoided by having guards interlocked to the control system so that the equipment is prevented from running when a guard is open, then you need to periodically check that these interlocks still work. This is even more important when you have trips or alarms which only come into effect when a fault occurs.

Mistake 4: No management plan

What tends to happen is that you just have individual risk assessments, with no view of the big picture. What you really need as an output of your risk assessments is a list of actions, in descending order of risk so that you can tackle the big issues first. So, your management plan should be to address the highest scores first and work on moving the risks towards the green (low risk) end of your risk matrix.

Mistake 5: No ranking

Because you need an overview of all your risks, you need to rank them so that the serious risks are at the top of your list. A simple risk matrix scoring system can be used because it emphasises the more serious outcomes. Example below:

		Likelihood				
		Not expected to occur	Very Unlikely - could happen; prob. never will	Unlikely - could happen but only rarely	Likely - could happen occasionally	Very Likely - could happen frequently
Consequence	Minor Temporary	0	1	2	3	4
	Major Temporary	0	2	4	6	8
	Minor Permanent	0	4	8	12	16
	Major Permanent	0	12	24	36	48

Things to remember when carrying out a risk assessment:

There is no set way to carry out a risk assessment. Whichever method you use, include the following:

- Identify the operations and who might be at risk, how often and for how long.
- Include all who might be “within range” of the hazard.
- For each aspect of the operation (eg physical contact, noise, chemicals, etc.,) identify the control measures in place and the risk score that remains with the controls in place.
- Identify any steps required to verify that the control measures continue to work.
- Where the risk is high, identify actions that can be taken to reduce the risk.
- Where a risk cannot be eliminated, identify how the risk can be reduced to a reasonably practical level. For example, with forklift trucks, you cannot eliminate the risk but you can reduce it by vehicle-pedestrian segregation, using only trained and competent drivers, etc.
- Transpose actions into a prioritised list and update the risk scores as you implement the actions.
- Periodically review assessments to verify that nothing has changed.

If you follow these steps and avoid those common mistakes, it will lead to an improvement in the assurance of safety with your Service Area.

Further information:

[HSE- Risk Management Web Page](#)
[HSE- Controlling Risk in the Workplace](#)

[LCC Health & Safety Manual Index](#)

REF SOURCE: SHP ONLINE

If you require further assistance or clarification on the subject please contact:

Your Health & Safety Adviser (see George section: Corporate > Information for Working > Risk Management > H&S Advisers)