

Simply Safety: Risk Assessments

Risk assessments are an essential part of the process of making places safe.

They are the foundation of managing risks in the workplace and can help to prevent accidents and incidents that result in people being injured or plant and machinery and buildings being damaged. Risk assessments also help employers to identify training needs, defective equipment and unsafe activities.

Risk assessments are nothing more than a careful examination of what might happen.

Key Facts about Risk Assessments:

• What might cause harm or lead to an accident?

This could be electricity, working at height, the use of hazardous substances, workplace transport.

• Who might be harmed?

Many people could face the risk of injury: employees, visitors and members of the public or contractors. Don't forget the vulnerable such as young people or pregnant women.

• What are the risks?

Determine what might happen: an accident leading to injury, or damage to buildings or plant. Consider the severity of the outcome, a minor injury? A serious fire? The collapse of a building?

• What can you do?

Can the risk be eliminated completely? Are there any controls in place? Can the risk be reduced further e.g. by guarding a machine or changing to a less hazardous substance? Will training those exposed reduce the risk sufficiently? Or will some other controls be needed?

• Inform, Implement and Monitor

Tell employees about what you have found and what needs to be done. Fit extra guards, deliver training or change procedures as necessary. Then check to make sure that the controls have been carried out and are effective.

• Record it

It is useful to keep records of your findings. They will enable you to check things in the future and deal with changes in the business in a controlled manner. But you only need to record the more significant issues – not every risk assessment. And if you are a small business (less than 5 employees) recording is not required by law.

Lone Working

Introduction

Contrary to popular belief there is nothing in general health and safety legislation that prohibits an employee from working alone.

General Duties

Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act, 1974, places a general duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all his employees. Employees also have responsibilities under section 7 of the Act to take reasonable care of their own safety and that of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, 1999, require employers to assess all risks to the health and safety of their employees and anyone else. This risk assessment should identify what measures they need to take to comply with the law. This is where the risk of lone working should be considered.

Where Lone Working is not permitted

Certain hazardous working situations are stipulated in the law where more than one person should be in attendance. The second person is often required to act as a supervisor. Some examples are as follows:

- Where a young person is working on dangerous machinery until he/she has received full instruction and training under Regulation 19 of The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
- Where there is entry into a confined space, as defined by Regulation 1 of the Confined Spaces Regulations 1997. In an emergency the second person should raise the alarm and summon assistance or be capable of pulling the first person out of the danger zone, without entering it themselves.
- Except where an exemption has been issued, accompaniment is needed when unloading petroleum spirit at certain premises under the Road Traffic (Carriage of Dangerous Substances in Road Tankers and Tank Containers) Regulations, 1992.
- Electrical work at or near live conductors
- Supervision in diving operations
- Vehicles carrying explosives
- Fumigation work

Nearly a quarter of all deaths involving vehicles at work occur while the vehicle is reversing. The use of a properly trained banksman or guide is recommended when necessary to ensure reversing manoeuvres are conducted safely. Mechanical grave excavation could be an example here.

Where risk assessment shows it is not possible for work to be done safely by a lone worker, arrangements for providing help or back-up should be put in place.

Key Action Points

- Identify work situations where employees are likely to be working alone.
- Carry out a formal assessment of the circumstances under which the work will take place, taking into consideration the risk factors.
- Once concluded that it is safe to be working alone, implement precautionary measures
- Put in place arrangements to ensure employees are suitable for lone working both with respect to competence and medical fitness
- Set clear limits on what lone workers can and can't do
- Train lone workers to fully understand the risks and precautions required
- Monitor lone working by appropriate means such as periodic visits; regular contact by telephone/radio; or checks that lone workers have returned to base / home on completion of the task
- Provide lone workers with travelling first aid kits and mobile phones to summon help.

Factors to be Taken into Account

The only way to decide whether lone working should be allowed to take place is to carry out a formal risk assessment of the circumstances under which the work will take place.

Before an employer asks, or allows an employee to work alone, some of the factors to be taken into consideration are:

- What are the hazards and risks associated with the intended job and are these reduced to the lowest possible reasonably practicable extent and, in addition, have all staff likely to be involved:
- Received adequate information, instruction and training on the matter?

- What is the lone worker to do if a problem arises and there is nobody to ask? Are there written instructions for the task including contingency measures to deal with foreseeable problems?
- Are "lone worker alarms" needed to highlight the problems for lone workers to a third party?
- Are there any legal requirements for accompanied working?
- Is there a risk of violence, such as when working late at night, or when cash or other valuables are handled?
- What would be the effects on the plant or process, due to the illness or injury of the lone worker operating the plant?
- Are the individuals likely to be involved suitable persons to be allowed to work alone, both in terms of competence to carry out the work required and with respect to personal health and fitness?
- Would a second person be able to substantially contribute to reducing the risk of or preventing injury?
- Are there occasions when assistance would be required, such as during the manual lifting of heavy loads?
- In the case of illness or injury, where is the nearest first-aid box kept and the nearest hospital or access to medical personnel? How is help summoned?

Precautionary Measures

Where an employer concludes that it is safe to carry out lone working with the minimum of risk, it is very important to have some sort of precautionary measures to monitor safety.

These should be appropriate for the task and the environment. The Health and Safety Executive recommends that employers should devise a system to monitor the status of lone workers.

Such arrangements should include:

- A check-in arrangement where the worker periodically telephones a supervisor, or is visited at regular intervals;
- Provision of emergency call buttons/mobile phones or other similar devices to alert a responsible person;
- A surveillance system which can be introduced without infringing individual privacy.

The complexity of contingency plans should be based upon the consequences of an injury or illness, the frequency with which unaccompanied working is to be carried out, the duration of each working period, the time that it would take to raise the alarm and for assistance to reach the location.

Employers should take steps to check control measures are used and review the risk assessment from time to time to ensure it is adequate.

References

HSE Information Leaflet - Working Alone in Safety: Controlling the risks of solitary work Ref: INDG73(rev2) - HSE Books 09/09

HSE Information Booklet - Violence at Work: A guide for employers Ref: INDG69 (rev.) - HSE Books 04/06

HSE Information Leaflet - 5 Steps to Risk Assessment Ref: INDG163(rev2) - HSE Books 06/06

HSE Safe work in confined spaces: Confined Spaces Regulations, 1997: Approved Code of Practice, Regulations and guidance Ref: L101 02/09

Managing Contractors

Introduction

A lack of control of contractors can and does lead to many accidents and injuries not only to contractor's employees, but also one's own employees, tenants, residents and visitors. Accidents have resulted in both prosecutions and civil claims against the employing client business or against property owners and their managing agents in addition to the contractor. Clients, those who employ contractors, may not fully appreciate the extent of their duty towards the contractor. The following information relates to those statutory provisions of particular relevance to the control of contracted out services including general building work.

Legal Duties

The legal situation is spelt out in the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (sec 3) which requires employers (and the self employed) to ensure that:

- Their activities do not endanger persons not in their employ, and
- Information is given concerning potential health and safety hazards

Section 4 places duties on occupiers and/or owners of premises to ensure that:

- The premises, plant and substances contained in them are safe and without risks to health, and
- Reasonable measures are taken to provide safe access

In short, you must ensure that your contractor is not at risk from your business and your contractor must ensure that you, your employees, tenants, residents and visitors are not at risk from their activities.

Other more detailed legal requirements are contained in The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, The Occupiers Liability Act 1984 and the Workplace Regulations 1992. Where significant work takes place the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 (CDM07) will apply.

Key Action Steps

The **responsibility for controlling contractors rests with line management** (in our case the Council). The following checklist is useful in ensuring that all contractors on site are effectively managed:

- Planning and Communication
- Compile a list of approved contractors. Update such a list regularly and ensure that all involved in the selection, appointment and management of contractors know of its existence. If possible use a Peterborough City Council approved contractor as these have been vetted already.
- Examine contractor arrangements with regard to health and safety, insurance and employee training before contracts are placed
- Appoint a company nominee for each project to liaise with contractors
- Establish communication between your management and the contractor's staff at pre-contract stage
- Before they come onto site make contractors aware of your health and safety policy, contractor induction/information, access control procedures, fire drills/emergency arrangements, accident reporting requirements and welfare/first aid facilities.

Method Statements

Ensure contractors prepare these prior to start of work

Ensure the needs and requirements of tenants, residents and visitors are included

Contractor Management on Site

- Include contractors' operations in all safety audits/inspections, paying special attention to access and egress
- Inform your staff and residents where contractors are working in their particular area, identifying any overlaps which may adversely affect health and safety
- Contractor's employees should be trained to recognise site dangers. Misuse of your equipment or facilities should never be allowed. Similarly, hazardous substances should be used safely.
- Contractors should provide safe plant and equipment and all necessary PPE

Selection of Contractors

The term "contractor" does not merely refer to building contractors. In its widest sense it includes any individual or company who enters premises to fulfil a contractual obligation agreed with the business occupying the premises, the property owner or their managing agent.

The selection of contractors must take into account their ability or competence to complete the work and their management of health and safety. The assessment of a contractor's competence is a vital first step in the process of selecting suitable contractors. This has been given prominence in the latest revision of CDM07. Many organisations have a policy of only using contractors from an 'Approved List' of firms whose capability, quality and health and safety performance are already known. The selection procedure should also include a check that the contractor has adequate employers' liability and public liability insurance cover. (The approved Peterborough City Council contractors have been through this process)

Planning

Many accidents involving contractors have happened because of a failure to plan the job properly i.e. to take account of health and safety aspects which are likely to arise. A risk assessment needs to be made and communicated to all involved. For high risk operations such as working at heights, the contractor should be asked to prepare and then work to a written method statement.

Clear Responsibilities

The work to be done, the areas in which the contractors can operate, together with what can and cannot be done, should be clearly defined. This is normally done in the form of 'Site Rules for Contractors' usually printed as a leaflet or a "permit to work". This should be kept as simple and 'user friendly' as possible and it is essential that the contractors on site actually doing the work are aware of the contents. Getting signed receipts on issue of these leaflets is strongly recommended.

Training

Even if they are fully competent specialists, contractors will still need some training or induction if they are to appreciate any special features and hazards they may come across whilst working at your premises. Individual records of training/induction given should be kept.

Monitoring of Contractors

The client or employer, that is the business occupying the premises, the property owner or their managing agent, is responsible for monitoring the health and safety performance of the contractor as the work progresses. The level of monitoring will be dictated by the nature and location of the work but performance can be monitored by:

- The continual vigilance of all staff, to ensure all hazards are promptly reported and rectified
- Routine inspection as work progresses

Contractor Appraisal

When the contractor has finished the work, an important decision has to be taken: In the light of your experiences, would you offer the particular contractor work in the future?

A simple appraisal form could be used to record the findings. It should be made clear to all contractors that each contract will be subject to appraisal and failure to meet safety requirements WILL affect the chances of future work, and that satisfactory health and safety performance is a pre-requisite for remaining on the "Approved List" and/or be considered for future contracts.

References

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and ACoP L21.Managing Contractors - A Guide for Employers. HSG159

HSE books 01787 881165

Use of contractors INDG 368 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg368.pdf

Help and Guidance

Hazard: Something with the potential to cause harm. Examples include:

Physical: Vehicles, noise, electricity, working at height, substances under pressure

Chemical: Solids, liquids and gasses that have the potential to cause harm e.g. asbestos, isocyanate containing paints, hydrocarbon solvents

Biological: Legionella infested cooling towers, Moulds, infected animals

Ergonomic: Badly designed workplaces/workstations e.g. checkouts and tills, computer workstations

Risk

In the process of assessing and controlling hazards it is necessary to determine the risk. Risk is a combination of the likelihood that something might happen together with the possible outcome or harm that might result.

Who could be harmed?

Any assessment of risk requires the identification of those that could be harmed by the hazard. Both the number e.g. is it just one person, a group of the entire factory and type of persons e.g. employees, visitors to the premises or members of the public, need to be determined.

Likelihood of it happening

This can be difficult to judge. You will need to determine how often a job is carried out, how often people come into contact with the hazard .

- Low (1): The activity is undertaken infrequently or there is strict control of working practices, use of equipment etc.
- Medium (2): The activity takes place on a regular basis, perhaps every month
- High (3): The activity takes place frequently say daily or weekly. Or the equipment is in continuous use.

Severity of Harm

Try to evaluate the severity of the potential harm using the following scale:

- Low/Slight (1): Minor cuts or bruising, or superficial injuries
- Medium (2): Major Injuries such as serious sprains and minor fractures, burns, other injuries that require a hospital visit
- High/Extremely Harmful (3): Death or very serious injuries e.g. fractures of an arm or leg, amputations

Risk Ranking

This is obtained by multiplying the likelihood by the severity of risk. It will be a number from 1 to 9, with the higher the ranking the more significant the risk and the more important it is to take action.

Personal Protective Equipment

Where there are potentially hazardous substances present in the workplace you should take steps to control the exposure of employees.

Ideally exposure should be eliminated by replacement with less hazardous substances. If this is not possible then engineering controls should be introduced to reduce exposures to safe levels. Examples of engineering controls are:

- The use of local exhaust ventilation and extraction to collect dusts and fumes, removing them from the workplace
- The use of soundproof enclosures to reduce workplace noise levels

If such controls have yet to be installed, are not possible or do not provide sufficient protection then personal protective equipment (PPE) will be necessary. **But** the use of PPE must always be regarded as a last resort.

There are some key issues that need to be taken into account when considering the use of PPE:

- Employees should be involved in the selection of suitable PPE
- PPE selected should be suitable for the risks
- Ergonomic issues, fit and general usability must all be considered
- Procedures for maintenance, cleaning and replacement must be set up
- Employees must be trained in the use of the PPE
- Employers must take all reasonable steps to ensure the PPE is used

The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 seeks to ensure that where risks cannot be controlled by other means, PPE is correctly selected and used. Any use of PPE must be controlled. It is essential to obtain confirmation from employees that they have received the PPE together with training in its use, cleaning and maintenance. Simply handing out PPE will not provide a defence against a future claim that hinges on whether PPE was suitable, available or used.