



Risk Assessment

Policy & Procedure

Improving the quality of life for
people in Dorset, now and for the future



Contents

Page

1	1.	Introduction	
1	2.	Legal requirement	
1	3.	Policy Statement	
2	4.	Proactive approach	
2	5.	What is risk assessment?	
4	6.	The purpose of a risk assessment	
5	7.	Risk assessment process	
9	8.	Risk assessment procedure	
12		Frequently asked questions	Appendix 1
15		Risk assessment form	Appendix 2

This policy and procedure applies to all Dorset County Council employees. All school governing bodies will be encouraged to adopt this or a similar policy by which their staff may also be protected and supported. This recognises the joint responsibility of Governors and the County Council for the health, safety and welfare of all staff employed in schools.



1. Introduction

All staff have a right to be able to undertake their duties in a safe and healthy working environment. It is tempting to see this only in terms of the requirements of health and safety legislation and whilst this is important, managing health and safety effectively demands more than just observing the letter of the law. It requires the committed and informed co-operation of everyone involved in order to create a safe environment at work.

2. Legal Requirement

The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (Management Regulations) requires every employer to make a 'suitable and sufficient assessment' of:-

The risks presented by work activities to the health and safety of employees and other persons.

The aim of the assessment is to identify the measures needed to comply with legislation and to implement controls in order to minimise the risk.

3. Policy Statement

The County Council will ensure, in so far as is reasonably practicable, that it provides a safe and healthy working environment for all its employees.

The County Council will ensure that:-

- Managers/supervisors conduct suitable and sufficient assessment of risks to the health, safety and welfare of their employees and others affected by their activities
- All significant findings of the risk assessments are recorded and made available
- Written arrangements are in place to plan, organise, control, monitor and review any measures needed to deal with the significant findings resulting from the risk assessments undertaken

- Appropriate levels of information, instruction, training and supervision are provided as is necessary to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees and to enable risk assessments to be carried out.
- Competent persons are available to assist managers in fulfilling health, safety and welfare obligations.

A list of frequently asked questions is attached at **Appendix 1**.

4. Pro-active Approach

The assessment of hazards and risks can be used to identify potential high risk activities, tasks and/or workplaces.

The information gained from the risk assessment process should be used to assist individual Directorates with prioritising and targeting resources allocated to the management of risk.

5. What is Risk Assessment?

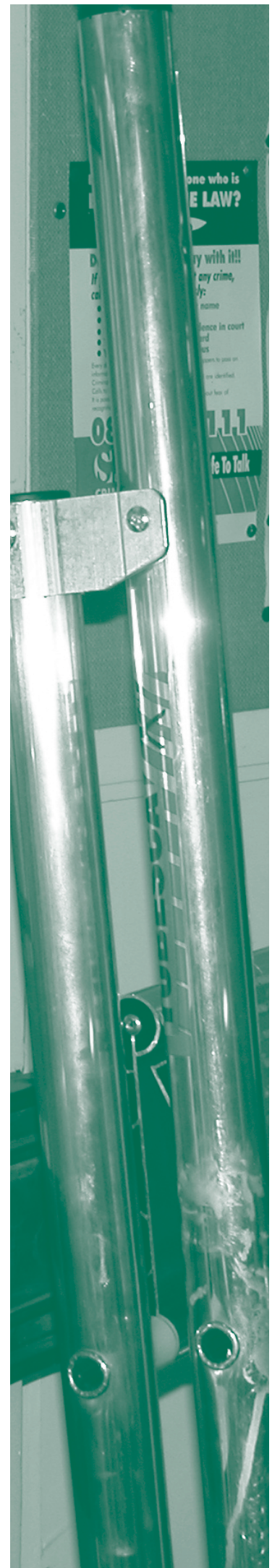
" An assessment of risk is no more than a careful examination of what, in your work, could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm"

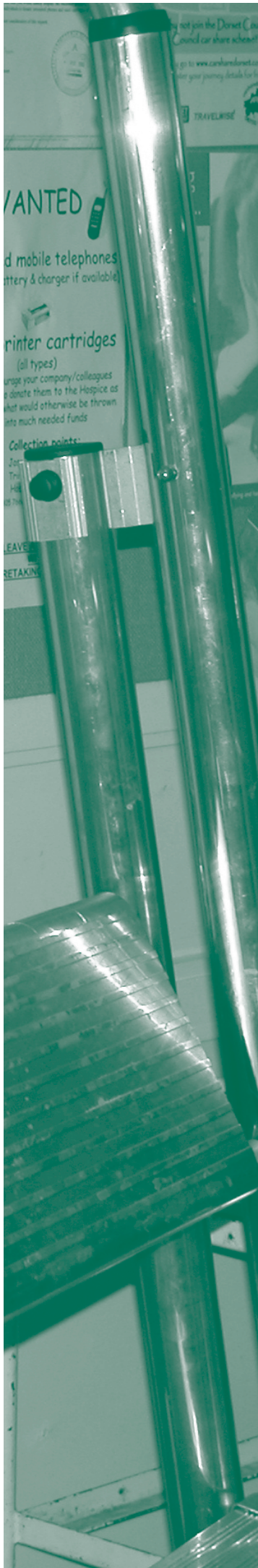
Health and Safety Executive 1994 – 5 Steps to Risk Assessment

The concept of risk assessment has been around for a while and can actually be traced back to the 1930s where Case Law established that the standard of care required fell into three headings:-

- Foreseeing the existence of risk
- Assessing the magnitude of the risk
- Devising reasonable precautions accordingly

It would not be practical or indeed desirable to seek to remove all hazards from life and it would be impossible to stop people taking risks, thus demonstrating clearly why the assessment and subsequent management of risk is such an important area of activity.





Managers/Supervisors are required to assess the appropriate level and effectiveness of the health, safety and welfare arrangements in their area of responsibility and demonstrate clearly that they have recorded all significant risks in respect of all activities under the control of Dorset County Council.

Risk assessment involves a systematic examination of all aspects of the work activity or tasks undertaken, to consider what could cause injury or harm, what preventative or protective measures are in place to prevent this and whether these are satisfactory and sufficient in principle as well as in practice.

It is essentially a five-stage process:-

1. **Identify the hazards***
2. **Identify who might be harmed and how**
3. **Evaluate the risk* - Assess the current controls - Decide what needs improving**
4. **Record your findings**
5. **Review the assessment**

* **HAZARD** is "a source of possible harm"

* **RISK** is "the likelihood of harm being realised"

In reality Managers/Supervisors are making everyday judgements of risk and therefore already carry out risk assessments. However, it is most likely to be currently done in an ad hoc way as a direct response to issues rather than actively considering the possibility of foreseeable hazardous events occurring.

6. The Purpose of a Risk Assessment

In simple terms, risk assessment is thinking about what could go wrong and deciding if enough has been done to prevent it. An assessment must enable staff within the County Council to plan, introduce and monitor measures to ensure that particular risks are eliminated altogether or controlled adequately at all times.

There is also a requirement to review and revise as necessary, any risk assessment if:-

- There is a reason to suspect the assessment is no longer valid.
- There has been a significant change in matters to which the assessment relates.

Risk assessment should enable officers within the County Council, as circumstances change, to check and improve the validity of their judgements about risk and the effectiveness of control measures. This will be difficult to accomplish unless the assessment is recorded and the logic used in making the assessment is clear and easily repeated.

Certain activities require a risk assessment specific to that activity to be undertaken in line with legislation. These include manual handling operations, workplace fire safety, use of hazardous substances and working with asbestos and lead.

Further guidance on the risk assessment requirements for these specific areas of safety will be produced by the County Health and Safety Team in due course.



7. Risk Assessment Process

The actual assessment of risk is just part of an overall approach that starts with the identification of tasks and hazards and ends with a detailed list of ongoing action that needs to be implemented, monitored and reviewed to ensure adequate control of risks.



There are two commonly used approaches to undertaking risk assessments the task approach and the hazard or risk-based approach. When planning the risk assessment process it is important to decide which of these two alternative approaches to take.

- ◆ **Task Approach:** Planning the risk assessment process on the basis of the tasks or activities actually being undertaken has the advantage that it accurately describes the task or activity that individual employees are undertaking.
- ◆ **Hazard or Risk Approach:** This approach has the advantage on focusing on a particular aspect of all the tasks and activities within the establishment or workplace. The main advantage is that the risk assessor will be able to investigate hazards and risks one by one and thereby become familiar with the appropriate health and safety standards applicable to the situation under investigation.

The level of detail in a risk assessment should be proportionate to the risk.

Do not labour over minute details or hazards which have improbable risks or a minor outcome, e.g. it is possible to get a nasty cut from the edge of paper, but should you do a risk assessment? Remember that your ultimate objective is to be able to evaluate risk, prioritise and probably most importantly, take action, including being able to demonstrate and evidence that you have done this.

The two fundamental questions that need to be considered when planning the risk assessment process are the people who will be involved and the information that will be needed.

Managers and their staff have “ownership” of the task, i.e. they are involved with the task and with the people carrying it out, they are responsible for the tasks and activities in terms of service provision and they will know more than the outsider about the way the task is actually being carried out.

Risk assessment, whenever possible, should be a team exercise involving different levels of personnel as this will achieve the best results by ensuring that all aspects of the work activity/task are considered. It will also help reinforce the feeling of ownership and be an important step towards the establishment of workplace efforts to develop a positive safety culture.

The hierarchy of control measures.

A list of control measures, ordered according to effectiveness at reducing risks, is given below. The easiest approach to deciding which are the best control measures to use for each particular risk, is to begin by considering the most effective measure, and then moving down the list to consider the next option only if the more effective option cannot be implemented.

- **Eliminate**
The best way to reduce a risk is to remove the hazard altogether. For example using a trolley instead of lifting and carrying eliminates a manual handling hazard.
- **Substitute**
The second most effective measure is to substitute the hazard for something less risky. For example cleaning products with bleach are covered by the COSHH requirements - an alternative product without bleach might do the same job.





- **Contain**

Preventing access or containing a hazard is usually done by means of barriers - for example a guard over a sharp blade or keeping hazardous chemicals in a locked cupboard. This is an important measure where removing the hazard altogether is not feasible.

- **Reduce exposure**

Reducing exposure to a hazard, means you are reducing the likelihood of harm occurring, and therefore reducing the risk. For example VDU users can lower the risk of Work Related Upper Limb Disorders (formerly Repetitive Strain Injury) by doing other tasks every so often.

- **Personal Protective Equipment**

The law requires that PPE is supplied and used at work wherever there are risks to health and safety that cannot be adequately controlled in other ways (PPE at Work Regs.1992). This is because it is better to control the risk at source rather than to protect from the outcome. Another problem is that people often either refuse to wear PPE or don't use it properly if they find it cumbersome (requiring further measures to ensure its proper use) and so it should therefore be a last resort when risks cannot be controlled any other way.

Supporting control measures.

- **Training and supervision**

Information, instruction, training and supervision are important to ensure that correct procedures are followed and that people are aware of the risks when working with hazards. This reduces the likelihood of harm occurring, although these measures are usually only effective in conjunction with other controls, which tackle the risks at source.

- **Welfare facilities**

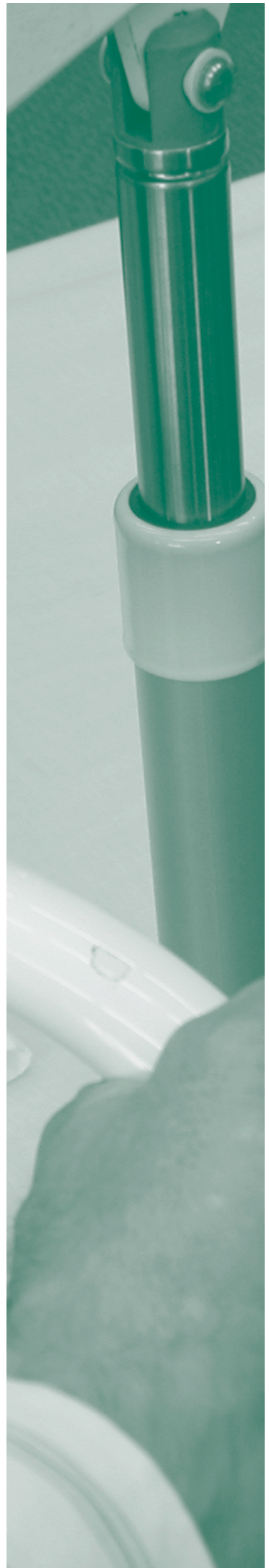
Welfare facilities (e.g. for washing or first aid) can control the extent of harm that occurs in the event of an accident. Risks must be tackled at source however, with controls in place to prevent accidents occurring in the first place. Welfare facilities should be present in all workplaces, but only as a back-up in the event of an emergency, where all other measures have failed.

The control measures should be monitored to ensure that they are effective and implemented correctly.

Review

Risk assessments are not a once-and-for-all activity, they should be 'living documents' that are reviewed and amended:

- after an accident, incident or significant near miss.
- after any significant changes have been made, e.g. change of staff, new working method or equipment.
- at least annually.



8. Risk Assessment Procedure

Risk assessment is a structured approach that aids decision making and effective allocation of resources.

- Identification of the hazards
- Identify who might be harmed and how
- Evaluation of the risks / Measures to control the risks
- Record the findings
- Monitor and review

The assessment must enable staff and managers to plan, introduce and monitor measures to ensure that particular risks are eliminated or controlled adequately at all times.

Using the risk assessment proforma attached at **Appendix 2**, the specific areas of an assessment can be completed.

- ◆ Identification of the hazards
 1. A hazard is anything with the potential to cause harm.
 2. Whilst hazard identification should be thorough, it is generally advisable to ignore the trivial and concentrate on the significant hazards.
 3. It is essential that employees are consulted as they will often have a clearer idea of the hazards associated with their tasks and/or workplace.
 4. Staff perception of hazard and risk is important, particularly in relation to their own specific area of work.
 5. Record each hazard and state how the particular risk associated with the hazard has been identified
- ◆ Decide who is at risk – remember to include non-employees
- ◆ Consider any controls currently in place to minimise harm from identified hazards/risk (see section 7 'hierarchy of controls')
- ◆ Evaluation of the level of residual risk

There is no prescribed method for evaluating the risks and it could be done by simply categorising a risk as low, medium or high based upon personal judgement and/or experience.

However, a more objective and accurate method of evaluating risk is to consider the **severity** and **likelihood** relating to identified risks:

- Severity requires an assessment of the worst outcome in terms of injury or ill health relating to the given hazard and/or risk
- Likelihood requires an assessment of the probability of that injury or ill health actually occurring. Consideration may also have to be given to the number of people exposed to the hazard, and should include non-employees

This will facilitate risk prioritisation, e.g the greater the severity of the harm and the more likely the risk is to occur, then the greater the risk.

	Hazard risk severity		Likelihood of occurrence
1	insignificant - minor or 1 st aid injury	1	unlikely to occur - no history
2	significant - injury, but unlikely to be serious	2	possible - history exists
3	serious - injury - > 3 day injury	3	likely - has occurred before
4	major - major or fatal injury	4	highly probable - occurs nearly every time

Overall risk rating and prioritisation

Categorising risk is important to help concentrate action required to deal with risky activities and/or processes. Once the risk score has been established, the guide below can be used to decide the order of priority for further action to reduce risks.

◆ Additional measures to control the risks

The outcome of the evaluation of risk should be an action plan, based on the risk scores, to implement 'risk controls'.

Risk controls should follow the hierarchy of risk control as in section 7



Risk rating/score	Action priority	Timescale
12 - 16 very high	Unacceptable risk Requires immediate attention and/or cessation of activity until action to reduce risk is carried out	Immediate
Residual risk		
6 - 9 high	Urgent Requires attention as soon as possible	Immediate
3 - 4 medium	Requires action To be dealt with as soon as possible after high priorities	Within 4 weeks
1 - 2 low	Action if necessary Where action is possible, without significant costs or difficulty	Within 6 months

Monitor and review

The last consideration is monitoring and reviewing of the risk assessments. Although this is the final stage in the five-stage process (section 4), it is an ongoing process that ensures your assessment remains valid.

A continual monitoring, review and improvement cycle will help ensure consistently high health and safety standards. The ultimate aim of risk assessment is to implement measures to remove or reduce the risks.

In particular, they should be reviewed as and when circumstances change or there is reason to suspect that the existing risk assessment is no longer valid.

Unchanged risk assessments should be subject to review at least annually and integrated into team meetings and other internal management systems as required.

Appendix 1

Risk Assessment - frequently asked questions

Q. What is a risk assessment?

- A.** A risk assessment is a method of identifying health and safety hazards and their associated risks to people. In the workplace this involves assessing the occupational health risks to employees and others affected by the undertaking of the business. A risk assessment should identify how the risks arise and how they impact on those affected.

Q. What is the purpose of risk assessment?

- A.** You will use the information gathered from your risk assessment to make decisions on how to manage risks in the workplace. Doing this in an informed, rational and structured manner, will ensure that the action taken to reduce risks is appropriate. So the purpose of risk assessment is to produce an action plan to implement the measures necessary to reduce workplace risks to as low a level as possible.

Q. Why must I carry out a risk assessment?

- A.** Risk assessments are a legal requirement under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. It enables us to identify the measures needed to comply with health and safety law.

Risk assessment, as an essential part of good health and safety management, makes business sense. Apart from the human suffering, there are numerous other financial costs that result from poor health and safety standards in the workplace. These can include sick pay and arrangements for temporary staff, loss of earnings, costs of any damage to stock or equipment involved in accidents, poor reputation, compensation claims insurance costs and prosecution/fines for failure to comply with the law.

Q. Whose risks am I legally responsible to assess?

- A.** The risks to the health and safety of your employees, to which they are exposed whilst they are at work.

The risks to the health and safety of any other persons, arising out of, or in connection with, the undertaking of your business.



Q. How do I carry out a risk assessment?

A. A risk assessment in the work place should involve identifying the hazards present and evaluating the extent of the risks involved. A hazard is anything with the potential to cause harm, a risk is the likelihood of potential harm from that hazard being realised. The extent of the risk will depend on:

- the likelihood of harm occurring from the hazard;
- the potential severity of that harm;
- the number of people which might be affected by the hazard and;
- whether there are any existing measures to control the risk and how effective these are.

The Health and Safety Executive recommends the following five steps to risk assessment as a guide:

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

Q. How often should a risk assessment be carried out?

A. A risk assessment should be carried out whenever there is significant change in the circumstances surrounding your business. This includes large changes in workforce, the type of work being carried out, change or introduction of equipment used and change/alteration of premises.

Certain activities also require a risk assessment specific to that activity, to be undertaken. These include manual handling operations, use of hazardous substances, operations producing noise, working with asbestos and lead, workplace fire safety.

Q. How often should a risk assessment be reviewed?

A. A risk assessment must be reviewed whenever there is a change in circumstance in the workplace, but where a completely new risk assessment is not necessary. This would include things like taking on new or young members of staff, or if a member of staff becomes pregnant, as well as any new activities, equipment or changes to the premises/work environment.

If an accident or a near miss occurs in the work-place, a risk assessment review is a necessary step to ensure that the accident does not occur again.

If there is any other reason to suspect the risk assessment is no longer valid it should be reviewed.

It is good practice to review assessments regularly to ensure they are still accurate and adequate controls are keeping occupational health risks to a minimum.

Q. Why should I record a risk assessment?

- A. You are legally required to record the significant findings of your risk assessment. A health and safety advisor will ask to see evidence of a risk assessment when carrying out both routine inspection and investigations following a serious accident. A clear and properly recorded risk assessment helps to show that you have done what the law requires.

Recording a risk assessment helps to ensure any important hazards are not overlooked as well as helping to avoid any unnecessary repetition in the assessment process/review. A record also serves as a reminder of the priority hazards and precautions to keep an eye on and any standards to be reached or maintained as well as what action has been, or still needs to be, taken.

Q. How long will a risk assessment take?

- A. A risk assessment in itself needn't take a long time, but remember that any time and resources spent on risk assessment is well invested, as keeping good standards of health and safety in the workplace makes good business sense. Preventing incidences of occupational ill-health and accidents before they happen helps to avoid staff absence as well as lowering the financial costs of sickness pay, damage to stock/ machinery, poor reputation, low morale and potential compensation claims.



risk assessment

Workplace	Date of Assessment
Assessment completed by (Name)	Due for review
(Designation)	

Hazard/risk e.g. slip/trip hazards, electricity, equipment/activity related hazards	Who is at risk?	Current controls in place are they adequate? Is the risk reduced as far as possible?	Level of residual risk Low, medium, high or very high?	Additional measures to control the risks



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