Risk assessment and control

This document forms part of Somerset County Council's Health and Safety Manual, which is available on the CHSU website and iPost.

Services may supplement this policy with their own specific guidance.

1 Purpose of Policy

Risk assessment is about identifying practical solutions that protect people from 'real risks', and regularly checking that these solutions are being implemented.

When we do this consistently and involve employees in the process, we cut the amount of work-related ill-health and injuries, comply with the law and develop a culture where people feel that their health and safety is taken seriously.

We talk about **'real risks'** because we must focus on controlling the significant risks that could cause real harm and suffering, but not waste time striving to eliminate all **trivial** risks. In other words, the process should be **proportionate** to the risks involved.

'Risk' isn't always a bad thing. After all, some controlled risk is often desirable in many of the beneficial activities we organise for our pupils and service users. We don't want to prevent these activities. Somerset County Council wants to safeguard and enrich lives, not stop them.

The purpose of this document is therefore to explain our responsibilities to assess and control significant risks, and to give help to make the process as straightforward as possible.

2 Responsibilities

2.1 Managers will:

- carry out assessments of significant risks in consultation with employees and safety representatives
- keep written / electronic records of assessments
- inform employees and safety representatives of the relevant results and ensure they receive any necessary training
- regularly ensure that the control measures outlined in risk assessments (i.e. safe systems of work) are being implemented, and are effective
- review the relevant assessments following any injuries or incidents
- ensure that risk assessments are only carried outby employees who are competent in the process
- ensure that safety arrangements are regularly monitored and reviewed
- Make special arrangements, where necessary, for vulnerable persons.

2.2 Employees will:

- Report to management (in confidence) any personal conditions which may put them at greater risk when carrying out work activities. For example, an employee with back problems should make their manager aware about this if there are manual handling activities as part of his/her job.
- comply with all instruction and training, including when using equipment and machinery
- not put their own health and safety at risk when carrying out work activities
- Report any health or safety problems relating to their work activities to a responsible person, along with any shortcomings they believe exist in the arrangements made to protect them.

2.3 The Corporate Health and Safety Unit will:

- Run regular corporate training courses for employees to help ensure their competence to perform risk assessments.

3. How to implement the policy

3.1 Key terms

A **hazard** is anything that may cause harm, such as chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, or a slippery surface. Using the SCC system for risk assessment, the **seriousness of potential harm** from the hazard is scored between 1 and 5.

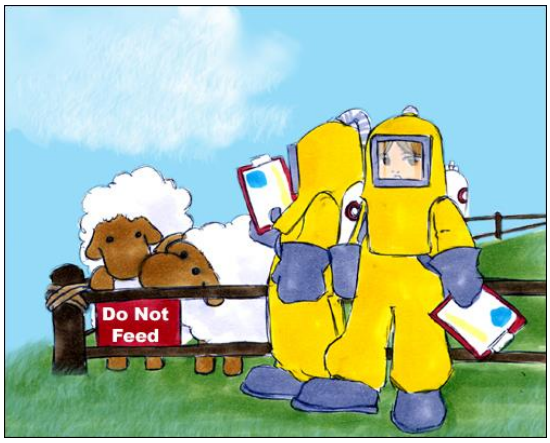
The **likelihood** is the chance that somebody could be harmed by a hazard. This is also scored between 1 and 5.

A hazard’s **risk rating** is a multiplication of the scores for seriousness of harm and likelihood of harm from that hazard.

Control measures are precautions taken to reduce either the chance of harm occurring, or to reduce its severity should it take place.

Health and safety climate represents employees’ perceptions about how seriously their health and safety is taken

3.2 What is "risk assessment?"



Risk assessment is about asking "**what if . . . ?**" For example:
"What if the coach breaks down on the way back from a school trip?"
"What if the rain makes the floor slippery?",
"What if a colleague can't cope with the demands of his job?"

You need to ask these six questions:

❶ **What could go wrong?**

❷ **Who might be harmed?**

❸ **How likely is it to go wrong?**

❹ **How serious would it be if it did?**

❺ **What are you going to do to help stop it going wrong?**

❻ **How are you going to check that your plans are working?**

What's important is that you have thought about these issues and recorded them.

Risk assessments *should be*…

- a careful examination of what could cause harm to people[1], so that you can decide whether enough reasonable precautions have been taken or whether more should be done to prevent harm;
- proportionate to the risks involved;
- Integrated into every manager's activity planning process.

Risk assessments *are not*. . .

- about eliminating all risk,
- about covering trivial or unforeseeable risks
- Required for every activity: some low-risk activities can be managed by effective, documented systems of work instead.
- Effective - if left 'on the shelf' and not reviewed regularly.
- Effective - if the relevant people don't know about them, so make sure you've informed any people affected by the assessment what the outcomes are.

[1] 'People' includes Somerset County Council's employees and other persons who may be affected, such as service users and pupils

3.3 How to do a risk assessment: the 6 questions

❶ What could go wrong?

How could people be harmed? When you work in a place every day it is easy to overlook some hazards, so here are some tips to help you identify the ones that matter:

- Walk around your workplace and look at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm.
- Ask your employees and safety representatives what they think. They may have noticed things that are not immediately obvious to you. The more you involve people with this process, the more likely you will find they take it on board and 'own' it.
- Have a look back at your accident and ill-health records – these often help to identify the less obvious hazards.

Remember to think about long-term hazards to health (e.g. stress, back strains, high levels of noise) as well as safety hazards.

❷ Who might be harmed?

For each hazard you need to be clear about who might be harmed; it will help you identify the best way of managing the risk. That doesn't mean listing everyone by name, but rather identifying groups of people (e.g. 'pupils', 'service users', 'people working in the office' or 'passers-by').
In each case, identify how they might be harmed, i.e. what type of injury or ill health might occur. For example, 'cleaners may suffer injury to the back from using heavy cleaning equipment'.
Some workers have particular vulnerabilities that you will need to take into account. For example new and young workers, new or expectant mothers and people with disabilities may be at particular risk.

❸ How likely is it to go wrong? and

❹ How serious would it be if it did?

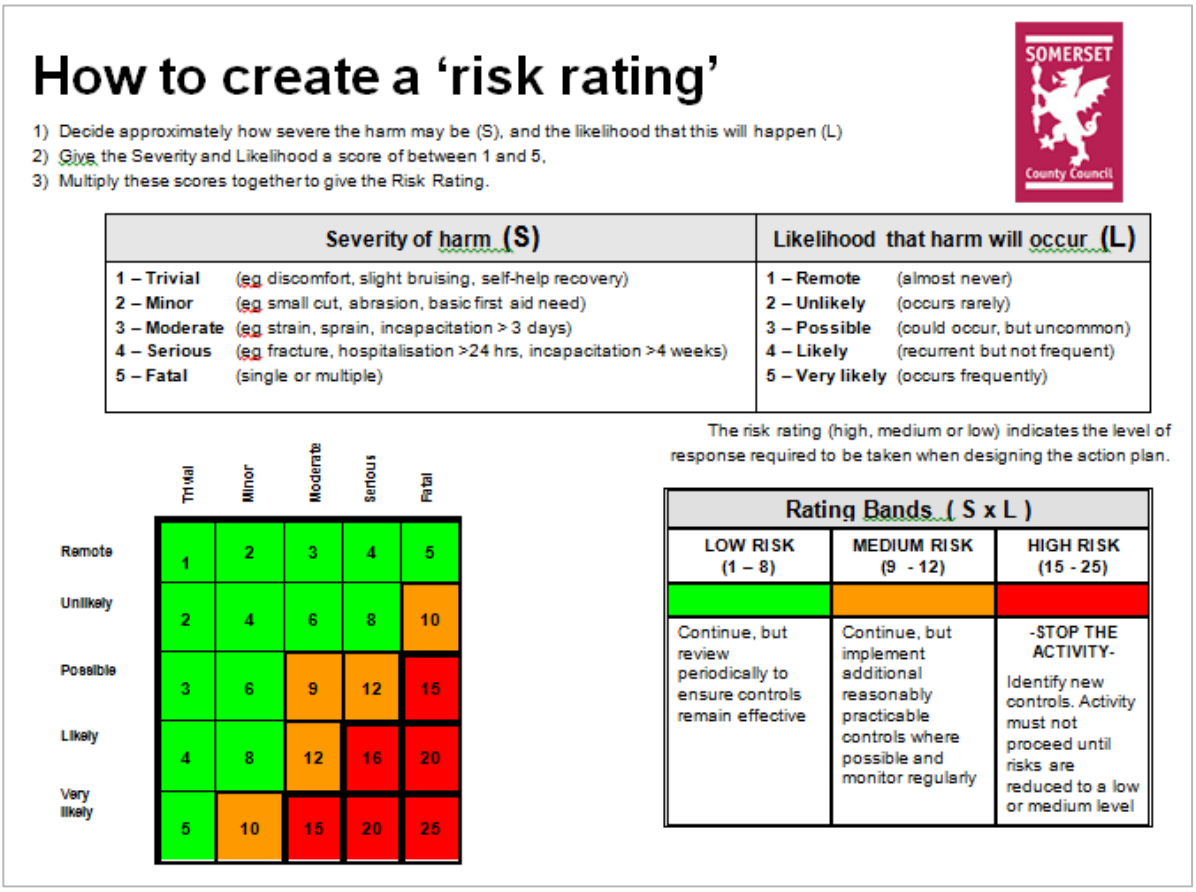
Score the answers to these two questions between 1 and 5, depending on the likelihood of harm and the potential seriousness of this harm. These two scores are multiplied to create a 'risk rating'. Look at Figure 1 on page 6 to see how to do this. You need to note down the present 'control measures' – i.e. what is currently being done to prevent things going wrong.

When scoring, remember that

- You are not trying to calculate a statistical probability but one mainly dictated by experience and common sense after having consulted with the relevant people.
- There is often no definitive 'correct' score.
- You are estimating the seriousness of the worst *typical* injury, not the worst *possible*.

Use the risk matrix below to help you work out how to score hazards and risks.

Figure 1 – SCC risk assessment matrix



How to create a 'risk rating'

1) Decide approximately how severe the harm may be (S), and the likelihood that this will happen (L)
2) Give the Severity and Likelihood a score of between 1 and 5,
3) Multiply these scores together to give the Risk Rating.

Severity of harm (S)		Likelihood that harm will occur (L)	
1 – Trivial	(eg discomfort, slight bruising, self-help recovery)	1 – Remote	(almost never)
2 – Minor	(eg small cut, abrasion, basic first aid need)	2 – Unlikely	(occurs rarely)
3 – Moderate	(eg strain, sprain, incapacitation > 3 days)	3 – Possible	(could occur, but uncommon)
4 – Serious	(eg fracture, hospitalisation >24 hrs, incapacitation >4 weeks)	4 – Likely	(recurrent but not frequent)
5 – Fatal	(single or multiple)	5 – Very likely	(occurs frequently)

	Trivial	Minor	Moderate	Serious	Fatal
Remote	1	2	3	4	5
Unlikely	2	4	6	8	10
Possible	3	6	9	12	15
Likely	4	8	12	16	20
Very likely	5	10	15	20	25

The risk rating (high, medium or low) indicates the level of response required to be taken when designing the action plan.

Rating Bands (S x L)		
LOW RISK (1 – 8)	MEDIUM RISK (9 - 12)	HIGH RISK (15 - 25)
Continue, but review periodically to ensure controls remain effective	Continue, but implement additional reasonably practicable controls where possible and monitor regularly	-STOP THE ACTIVITY- Identify new controls. Activity must not proceed until risks are reduced to a low or medium level

Here are some examples of possible scores, using this matrix. Local conditions and experience will obviously dictate the actual scores.

- *A slip on a concrete stairwell in wet conditions* may be **serious** (4), and **possible** (3). **4 x 3 = 12 (medium risk).**
- *A grazed knee in children's play* may be **trivial** in terms of severity (1), and **likely** (4). **1 x 4 = 4 (low risk).** This is not a 'significant' risk.

When you have scored all the significant hazards, use the scores to help you prioritise what is most dangerous and help you decide what control measures are required.
Hazards in the high risk category clearly need to be addressed immediately.

❺ What are you going to do to help stop it going wrong?

Now that you have your scores and a description of current control measures, you need to decide whether more needs to be done to reduce risks.

Remember that the law requires you to do everything 'reasonably practicable' to protect people from harm. A good way of working out what is 'reasonably practicable' is to compare with good practice elsewhere and see if there is more you should be doing to bring yourself up to this standard.
If more could be reasonably done to reduce the risks, discuss and then write down some extra control measures and judge by how much they will reduce the overall risk.
In doing this, consider:

- Can I get rid of the hazard altogether?
- If not, how can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?

When controlling risks, apply the principles below, if possible in the following order:

- try a less risky option (e.g. switch to using a less hazardous chemical);
- prevent access to the hazard (e.g. by guarding);
- organise work to reduce exposure to the hazard (e.g. put barriers between pedestrians and traffic);
- issue personal protective equipment (e.g. clothing, footwear, goggles etc); and
- Provide welfare facilities (e.g. first aid and washing facilities for removal of contamination)
- Issue instructions to people to follow.

In many instances, straightforward measures can readily control risks, for example ensuring spillages are cleaned up promptly so people do not slip.

Improving health and safety need not cost a lot. For instance, placing a mirror on a dangerous blind corner to help prevent vehicle accidents is a low-cost precaution considering the risks. Failure to take simple precautions can cost you a lot more if an accident does happen.

❻ How are you going to check that your plans are working?

You need to make sure that risk assessments stay up to date. You do this by reviewing them on an ongoing basis. This involves

- checking that the control measures are adequate and effective;
- examining whether there have been any changes to how the job is done;
- learning from any accidents or near misses;
- Asking employees and safety representatives whether they have spotted any problems or can recommend any improvements.

It can be all too easy to forget about reviewing your risk assessment – until something has gone wrong and it's too late. So, set a review date when writing the assessment, and note it in your diary.
There's no definitive point at which a review needs to be done, it depends upon the risks involved and whether anything significant has changed.

If there has been a significant change, don't wait. Check your risk assessment and, where necessary, amend it. If possible, it is best to think about the risk assessment when you're planning your change – that way you leave yourself more flexibility.
If you find that there are quite a lot of improvements that you could make, big and small, make a plan of action to deal with the most important things first. Health and safety inspectors acknowledge the efforts of managers who are clearly trying to make improvements.
A good plan of action often includes a mixture of different things such as:

- a few cheap or easy improvements that can be done quickly, perhaps as a temporary solution until more reliable controls are in place;
- arrangements for training employees on the main risks that remain and how they are to be controlled;
- regular checks to make sure that the control measures stay in place; and
- Clear responsibilities – who will lead on what action, and by when,

Remember, prioritise and tackle the most important things first. As you complete each action, tick it off your plan.

3.4 Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is a risk assessment?

It is a method of identifying health and safety hazards and their associated risks to people. In the workplace this involves assessing the occupational health and safety risks to employees and others affected by business activities. A risk assessment should identify how the risks arise and how they impact on those affected.
The title of this policy is "*risk assessment and control*", to emphasise that the goal is to put in place sensible and practical health and safety measures to control significant risks, and to make sure they work in practice, reviewing them regularly.

Q. What's the purpose of risk assessment?

To consider any given situation which could harm, thoroughly.
You'll 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 current control measures are fully evaluated and any actions identified to reduce risks are appropriate. It may result in an action plan to put in place controls to reduce workplace risks to as low a level as possible.

Q. Why do I have to do a risk assessment?

Risk assessment is a legal requirement. Regulation 3 of the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations* requires us to assess and control the significant risks arising from work activities.
Risk assessment is an essential part of good health and safety management and makes good business sense. Apart from human suffering, there are numerous financial costs that result from poor health and safety in the workplace. These can include sick pay and arrangements for temporary staff, loss of earnings, costs of any damage after an accidents, poor reputation, compensation claims, insurance costs and prosecution and fines for failure to comply with the law.

Q. Whose risks am I legally responsible to assess?

The risks to the health and safety of:

- Your employees, to which they are exposed whilst they are at work.
- Any other persons who are affected by your work activities. These might include pupils, service users and members of the public.

Other regulations also require specific assessments regarding certain work activities, for example regarding hazardous substances, manual handling activities. Please refer to the specific H&S policy (links in section 4).

Q. OK, so I've got to do risk assessments to comply with the law. But they feel like a 'paper exercise' to me. How do they help me in my day-to-day work as a manager?

Risk assessments are at their best when they are 'live' documents that are regularly reviewed. They then stay relevant and are often referred to.
Take two examples to show the difference, Team A and Team B:

Team A

Risk assessments were initially written in consultation with the team concerned, and are reviewed on a systematic basis at staff meetings. Staff also often suggest improvements whenever they find shortcomings or when circumstances change. Everybody knows where the assessments are kept, are trained on their contents at induction, they refer to their contents regularly and use them as safe systems of work.

Team B

Risk assessments are written by one manager without discussing with anyone else. The documents are filed away. They are not discussed at meetings or reviewed. As far as the manager is concerned, he has 'done his risk assessments' and therefore complied with the law.
But has he? These risk assessments are unlikely to be seen as 'suitable and sufficient' as the manager has merely paid lip-service to the process and not involved people. They are probably out-of-date and may not cover all the likely risks.
The 'health and safety climate' in Team A is likely to be better than Team B. Not only are the risks more likely to be controlled safely and productively but people are more likely to feel involved and motivated.

Q. What if the work I do varies a lot, or I (or my employees) move from one site to another?

Identify the hazards you can reasonably expect and assess the risks from them. This general assessment should stand you in good stead for the majority of your work. Where you do take on work or a new site that is different, cover any new or different hazards with a specific assessment. You do not have to start from scratch each time.

Q. What if I share a workplace?

Tell the other employers and self-employed people there about any risks your work could cause them, and what precautions you are taking. Also, think about the risks to your own workforce from those who share your workplace.

Q. Do my employees have responsibilities?

Yes. Employees have legal responsibilities to co-operate with their employer's efforts to improve health and safety (e.g. they must wear protective equipment when it is provided) and to look out for each other.

Q. What if one of my employee's circumstances change?

You'll need to look again at the risk assessment.
You are required to carry out a specific risk assessment for new or expectant mothers (see HS 017 "New and expectant mothers at work") as some tasks (heavy lifting or work with chemicals for example) may not be appropriate.
If an employee develops a disability then you are required to make reasonable adjustments.
People returning to work following major surgery may also have particular requirements.
If you put your mind to it, you can almost always find a way forward that works for you and your employees.

Q. How often should I review my risk assessments?

Review whenever:

- An employee's circumstances change and it affects their ability to do their job safely.
- There are new activities, equipment or changes to the premises.
- You take on staff who are vulnerable because of their age or any medical conditions. For example, young workers (aged under 18).
- If an accident or a near miss occurs in your workplace.
- There is any other reason to suspect the risk assessment is no longer valid.

Q. Why do I have to record my risk assessments?

You are legally required to record the significant findings of your risk assessments.
An enforcement officer will often ask to see evidence of a risk assessment when they inspect or investigate.
A clear and well-recorded risk assessment helps to show that you've done what the law requires.
Recording a risk assessment helps to make sure any important hazards aren't overlooked as well as helping to avoid any unnecessary repetition in the assessment process or review.
A record also serves as a reminder of the principle hazards, standards to be maintained and what action has been - or still needs to be - taken.

Q. Can I use 'generic' risk assessments?

'Generic' or non-specific assessments are often useful as templates for general activities. They can be a useful way of reducing the administrative burden by taking away the need to produce separate assessments each time an activity takes place. However, if they are being used, they must be reviewed against actual conditions to check that they are still relevant.

4 Links

4.1 Risk assessment information for those using EEC Safety Suite users.

- EEC Safety Suite (formerly known as 'Flamefast'):

https://www.eeclive.co.uk/public/Plogon.asp?AID=14.
If you have any technical problems, or wish to add any additional risk assessments, phone Terry Reader at EEC Safety Suite on 01204 300944. For all other queries please contact the CHSU on 01823 355089.

4.2 Risk assessment forms and templates for non-EEC Safety Suite users.

- Standard risk assessment form (HS F04):

http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/

- Risk assessment for new and expectant mothers (HS F17)

http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/

- Manual handling Assessment Form (HS F026a)

http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/

4.3 There is a specific risk assessment form used by the Learning Disabilities Provider Service in relation to service users, which can be found at:

http://enterprise.somerset.gov.uk/ssintranet/Learning_Disabilities/LD_Provider_Service_Information/Risk_Assessment/

4.4 External links

- HSE pages about risk assessment. Includes examples of how to fill in an assessment, guidance, principles of sensible risk management.

http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk

- This document describes HSE's decision-making process.

http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/theory/r2p2.htm