

Risk Assessment

Safety Management Procedure (SMP)

Document information

Document title	Risk Assessment (SMP)		
Owner	Corporate Health & Safety Unit		
Status	Final	Version	1
Effective from	August 2018	Approved on	June 2018
Last updated	May 2018	Last updated by	HSU/TH
Review date	May 2021		
Purpose	To give managers information and guidance on legal aspects of risk assessment and the Sandwell process.		

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1. Introduction

Health & safety law requires employers to assess risks in the workplace. This procedure gives an overview of how we meet this obligation in Sandwell.

A risk assessment is simply a careful examination of what, in your work could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether enough precautions have been taken or more should be done to prevent harm.

2. Definitions

Hazard: Is anything that has the potential to cause harm. Hazards fall into six broad categories. The categories and examples of hazards we may find in Sandwell include:

- **Physical** – poor housekeeping (e.g. trailing cable) and vibration
- **Mechanical** – equipment & machinery (e.g. meat slicer in kitchen)
- **Chemical** – paint, diesel fumes, bleach/cleaning products
- **Biological** – Infections from service users, working with animals
- **Environmental** – temperature, dust/fumes
- **Organisational** – workload, bullying, lack of communication

Risk: Is the chance, high or low, of somebody being harmed by the hazard, and how serious the harm could be.

Control measure: Is something that is already/put in place to minimise the level of risk of harm occurring.

Suitable and sufficient: risk assessments need to be appropriate to the task/person/activity being assessed and contain sufficient information/control measures given the level of risk identified.

“Reasonably practicable”: This means balancing the level of risk against the measures needed to control the real risk in terms of money, time or trouble. However, you do not need to act if it would be grossly disproportionate to the level of risk.

“Significant” risks: Significant risks are those that are not trivial in nature and can create a real risk to health and safety which any reasonable person would appreciate and would take steps to guard against. What can be considered as 'insignificant' will vary from site to site and activity to activity, depending on specific circumstances.

Risk matrix¹: Most service areas within the council will not need to use risk matrices. However, they can be used to help work out the level of risk associated with a particular issue. They do this by categorising the likelihood of harm and the potential severity of the harm. This is then plotted in a matrix. The risk level determines which risks should be tackled first.

¹ Sandwell councils risk matrix can be found at Appendix 1

“**Hierarchy of control**”: This is a looking at what we're already doing, and the control measures you already have in place. Ask yourself:

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

Some practical steps you could take include:

- trying a less risky option
- preventing access to the hazards
- organising work to reduce exposure to the hazard
- issuing protective equipment
- providing welfare facilities such as first aid and washing facilities
- involving and consulting workers

3. The law

The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations – these regulations are the main piece of legislation on risk assessment. Regulation 3 requires employers to undertake a ‘suitable and sufficient’ risk assessment of the risk to employees and others who may be affected by work activities. The assessments must be carried out by a competent person. Regulation 4 (and Schedule 1) set out ‘principles of prevention to be applied’ – basically a hierarchy of measures to control risk, starting with elimination of the hazard wherever possible

In addition to the general requirement to undertake risk assessment, the regulations include specific duties to assess the risk to **new or expectant mothers** and also to protect **young persons** at work (those age under 18, at work or on work experience).

In addition to the general duties set out in the management regulations, many other pieces of legislation include a specific requirement to carry out risk assessment:

- **The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH)** – require that all hazardous substances used in the workplace must have a COSHH assessment undertaken before they are brought into use.
- **The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order** – require the responsible person to: carry out a Fire Risk Assessment; take general fire precautions; implement protective measures; and, maintain a fire emergency plan.
- **The Manual Handling Operation Regulations** – require employers to – avoid the need for hazardous manual handling, **assess** and reduce the risk from any hazardous manual handling that cannot be avoided.
- **The Work at Height Regulations** – require employers to take measures to avoid the risks from work at height i.e. by undertaking a risk assessment
- **The Display Screen Equipment Regulations** – require employers to undertake an analysis of the workstation to assess and reduce risks
- **Control of Noise at Work Regulations** – require employers to assess the risks to employees from noise at work

- **Control of Vibration at Work Regulations** – require employers to carry out an assessment of the risk to health created by vibration at the workplace

4. Risk assessment process

There are five general steps to consider when carrying out a risk assessment

1. **Identify the hazards** – Look at what in the workplace/people's work could cause harm. It is important to concentrate on the significant hazards and not the trivial. Hazards can be identified by carrying out walkabout inspections, reviewing past incident records, talking to employees, etc
2. **Identify who might be harmed and how** – examples of who might be harmed would include; employees, contractors, service users, pupils and members of the public, etc. How they might be harmed could include any physical injuries as well as ill-health. It is important not to forget people who may have particular requirements e.g. new or expectant mothers, young persons, persons with disabilities, etc.
3. **Evaluate the risks and deciding on the appropriate controls** - taking into account the controls that may already be in place. Using a risk matrix can be helpful for prioritising actions to control a risk. It is suitable for many assessments but in particular to more complex situations. However, it does require expertise and experience to judge the likelihood of harm accurately. Getting this wrong could result in applying unnecessary control measures or failing to take important ones.
4. **Record the risk assessment** – this should be done using the relevant council approved risk assessment forms (located on the H&S intranet pages). We must do everything reasonably practicable to protect persons from harm. Therefore, we must ensure we compare our control measures with any legislative requirements, industry specific good practices etc. Remember to use the hierarchy of control when considering suitable control measures.
5. **Review and update assessment** - sooner or later, we will bring in new equipment, substances and procedures that could lead to new hazards. So, it makes sense to review what we are doing on a regular basis, look at your risk assessment again and ask yourself:
 - Have there been any significant changes?
 - Are there improvements you still need to make?
 - Have your workers spotted a problem?
 - Have you learnt anything from accidents or near misses?

As a minimum Sandwell council expects general risk assessments to be formally reviewed on an annual basis **and** following any incidents/accidents.

5. Specific responsibilities

Managers

Managers are responsible for ensuring that suitable and sufficient risk assessments are carried out by a competent person, for their area of responsibility. In addition, they must ensure that the control measures are implemented and that the significant findings of the risk assessment are shared with the relevant employees.

Employees

Employees should be involved in the risk assessment process. They must also cooperate with their employer and ensure that they follow the control measures identified in the risk assessment e.g. wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE.)

6. Training

The law requires that persons carrying out risk assessments are competent² to do so. In Sandwell, we deem a competent risk assessor as one who has completed either IOSH Managing Safely or the in-house ½ day risk assessment training course.

7. Additional information

For additional information and guidance around topic specific risk assessments, please consult one of the other safety management procedures (SMP) on the health and safety [pages](#) of the intranet.

General information around the topic of risk management can be found on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) [website](#)

² Have sufficient, skills, knowledge, ability, training, experience

Appendix 1 – Sandwell Risk Matrix

Sandwell's general risk assessment forms include columns for recording a quantitative risk rating.

Calculating the risk rating

To obtain a risk rating we give a value (1 – 5) to the **likelihood** of the hazard causing harm. We then give a value (1 – 5) to the **severity** of harm that may occur. The values are determined using the table below.

Likelihood

1	Very unlikely
2	Unlikely
3	Likely
4	Very likely
5	Certain

Severity

1	No Lost time
2	Under 7-day injury or illness
3	Over 7-day injury or illness (RIDDOR)
4	Specified injury or illness (RIDDOR)
5	Fatality, disabling injury or illness

Likelihood	5	5	10	15	20	25
	4	4	8	12	16	20
	3	3	6	9	12	15
	2	2	4	6	8	10
	1	1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
		Severity				

When we have identified a value for both likelihood and severity, we then multiply the two figures together to give us an overall risk rating. E.g. Likelihood (2) x Severity (2) = Risk rating (4).

Risk based control plan

When we have our risk rating level, we then plot that number on the matrix table to determine what level of actions are required. In Sandwell, we use a simple High, Medium and Low risk based control/action plan (see table below)

High (15-25)	These risks are unacceptable; significant improvements in risk control are required. The activity should be halted with immediate effect until risk controls are identified/implemented that reduce the risk to an acceptable level
Medium (5-12)	Additional control measures should be identified and implemented to reduce the risks associated with the activity or workplace so far as reasonably practicable
Low (1-4)	Minimal control measures are required to be implemented to satisfy the level of risk. Maintain current arrangements for risk control