

1 What are the 5 steps of a risk assessment?

The five steps of risk assessment involve:

✓ ***Step 1: Identify hazards***

Hazard identification is crucial for the safety management team. Identifying hazards in the workplace allows for proper safety measures to be devised and appropriate action taken to reduce the chances of injuries, death and damages. Consultation with employees, walkabouts, manufacturer's instruction and check sheets are all important in identifying hazards in the workplace.

✓ ***Step 2: Who may be at harm of workplace risk***

After each risk has been identified, it must then be decided who may not be prone to harm. Not all workers will be exposed to the same risk factors. Some employees work specialized jobs where others have no access to, for example, poor ergonomics may be harmful to employees who work in the office as compared to field workers.

Employees may be aware of the risks, however visitors may not be knowledgeable about the risk they may incur at the organization they are visiting. Other employees may be exposed to more risk than others, for example, disabled employees, pregnant employees, older employees, as well as migrant workers as a result of language barrier.

✓ ***Step 3: Evaluate workplace risk and decide on precautions***

This step involves taking appropriate action to create a safe working environment for everyone. The likelihood and severity of risks identified must be evaluated, and thereafter precautions and the necessary control measures must be put in place. While contending that risk cannot be eliminated altogether, at the very least it can be mitigated, it is therefore imperative that action equivalent to the level of risk be taken. This translates that risks that are considered a bigger threat should be allocated extensive control measures than low-risk hazards.

The actions undertaken during this step could include restricting access to hazardous areas, testing less risky equipment and/or products, offering effective health and safety training and issuing protective equipment to employees, contractors and visitors.

✓ ***Step 4: Record and implement findings***

This step requires that findings of the risk assessment be recorded for review and referral in future. It is legally binding for companies with more than four employees in their employ to document the findings of risk assessments and take action to reduce the level of risk.

A documented risk assessment provides proof that hazards were identified, evaluated and that appropriate action was taken to reduce the level of risk. This evidence can shield the business from legal liability and serve as a guide or awareness amongst employees and contractors regarding the potential risks at the workplace.

✓ ***Step 5: Review your risk assessment and update where necessary***

Businesses experiences change and grow with time - it can be a change in equipment and machinery, new employees and new materials introduced. These notable changes at the workplace can make a risk assessment irrelevant. So it is of utmost importance to update your risk assessments because the more the workplace changes the more inclusive risk assessments need to be and should consider new potential hazards, review them and update them to accommodate significant changes that potentially occur in the work environment.

- **Is risk assessment a legal requirement?**

Yes, a risk assessment is a legal requirement. It is enacted in the constitution of South Africa that “everyone has a right to an environment that is not harmful to their health and well-being” employers are to conduct regular risk assessments to prevent potential harm to their employees.

- **What documentation is required for a risk assessment?**

- ✓ Job descriptions
- ✓ Training requirements
- ✓ Manufacturer’s instructions
- ✓ Incidents investigation reports
- ✓ Effectiveness of control measures documentations
- ✓ Checklists

- **What are the consequences of not conducting regular risk assessments?**

Failure to conduct risk assessments by organisations on a regular basis is tantamount to flouting their legal obligation to keep all involved safe in the workplace. More importantly lack of regular risk assessments means that hazards are not identified and therefore risk to the environment and employees cannot be averted. Section 38 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act contends that organizations in contravention with the legal legislation could be fined up to R150 000 or face imprisonment of up to two years for non-compliance.

Lack of compliance with safety laws by business owners leads to businesses incurring both direct and indirect costs as a result of incidents that occur at the workplace. Direct costs of not putting safety measures in place include; medical expenses, repairs to machinery, settlements et cetera. The indirect costs encompasses additional staff that needs to be paid to complete the job, corporate brand and reputation damage, low production output as well as low staff morale.

- **What ensures effective risk management?**

To ensure that risk is effectively managed, risk assessment must be done correctly. Post the five steps of risk assessment process performed by organisations, companies should act accordingly in managing the estimated risk. Risk management goes hand in hand with step 5 of the risk assessment process and that is managing and controlling the identified risk effectively. To determine whether the company's risk assessment process is effective or not they need to minimise the identified possible risk by being proactive rather than reactive.

- **Who is responsible for the completion of a risk assessment?**

There is no designated individual responsible for completing risk assessment. It is a collective effort determined by the scope of the risk assessment, the level of training and the structure of the risk assessment team. Multiple people needs to be involved in the process, from the employer to the employee category of staff. This will ensure that the process is objective and is structured accordingly.

Skills of team members might include:

- The individual should be able to conduct an assessment in an unbiased manner
- Fully comprehend the methodology used for the risk assessment
- Be able to effectively communicate and liaise with a diverse group of people
- Be able to give direction as well as focus to the risk assessment team and their activities

- Have the inclination and the ability to conduct ethical and honest assessments
- Have good organizational skills to be able to facilitate risk assessment visits on site

The risk assessment team should include the following members:

- Formally trained risk assessor
- Line supervisor
- Employees from the department
- Engineer representative
- Maintenance representative
- Safety officer
- Incident investigator
- Outside contractor
- OHS consultants

- **Three main types of risk assessments, each with different functions:**

Baseline Risk Assessment

A baseline risk assessment prioritises the type and size of potential hazards that could have a major impact on the whole organization. It is performed as a benchmark that should identify major and significant risks, these risks then take precedence and should be evaluated against the effectiveness of risk control systems currently in place.

Baseline risk assessment can be regarded as the primary and broader risk assessment of an organization. This type of risk assessment is used to determine a risk profile for the organization.

Issue-Based Risk Assessment

Issue-Based Risk Assessment pertains to the operational activities, processes and systems-based functions of the business. This type of assessment deals with specificity, it focuses on a particular task, activity or a process by identifying risks in the aforementioned categories. Issue-Based Risk Assessment is usually associated with the management of change. Risk profiles determined at Baseline Risk Assessment shape the trajectory of issue-based risk assessments as the need for them are identified at the baseline risk assessment and conducted only when there is a need for them.

Continuous Risk Assessment

It is important for Continuous Risk Assessment to be conducted on a regular basis at the workplace. Given their importance, they should be integrated into the Health and Safety

management system. This type of risk assessment also constitute daily hazard and risk awareness as well as immediate risk control and mitigation.

All three types of risk assessment have the following desired outcomes:

Systematic – A clear methodology should be selected regarding procedure and steps to be followed

Rigorous – An effectively applied risk assessment should at all times render reasonable and consistent results

Structured – The risk assessment needs to be structured in a format that can easily be understood

Repeatable – The results generated from the risk assessment should be the same when applied in future

Consultative – The risk assessment is a collective effort and should not solely be conducted by management. It should include consultation with a cross-section of employees, e.g. Safety Officer, SHE Representatives, Operator, Supervisor.

Defensible – The organization should be able to account for risk rating, identified risk in relation to site operations and the methodology adopted to safeguard against it.

Auditable – In the event of a third party auditing the organization, the organization should be in a position to provide sufficient risk assessment information for fair assessments.

- **Example of risk management measures**

Eliminate or Substitute

Switch the machine off or outsource the job

Reduce or control at source

Make the machine safer through maintenance e.g. lubricate the noisy part of it, install a silencer or switch from steel mounts to rubber ones.

Isolate

Either the person can be physically isolated from the hazard or the machine can also be physically removed from people if it can be operated at a considerable distance from them.

Contain

Build an enclosure for the machine, e.g. surround it with an acoustic enclosure or build the individual an acoustic haven.

Procedures, Safe Systems of Work, Information, Instruction, Training, and Supervision

Ensure that there is a system of work in place that staff can follow e.g. a rotational routine that reduces the number of hours that workers are exposed to the machine.

Ensure that the staff are well informed with regards to potential risks and that they comprehend the system of work they must follow.

Ensure that the staff is trained on how to operate the machine and that supervision is provided when it is necessary.

Protective Personal Equipment

PPE should be looked at as the last resort as it only protects the individual and does not minimize or eliminate risk as opposed to controlling at the source where everyone is protected.

Remember

The control measure that is considered most effective is by avoiding risk altogether, this is done by keeping the hazard away from people it may harm.