

Hazards and Risk Assessments Overview

A hazard is defined as something with the potential to cause harm and covers ill health, injury and damage to property. A risk is the likelihood of that harm actually taking place.

Risk assessment is about identifying hazards and the level of risk associated with them, then prescribing measures to control or reduce those risks. Emphasis must be given to the risks with the highest level i.e. a combination of the likelihood of an event, and its potential consequences. Very serious consequences should be given greater priority, even if the chance of these happening is small compared with risks which might be more likely but with less dire consequences.

Assessments must consider the risks to non-employees, i.e. they must include volunteers, contractors, visitors to premises, passers-by on site, etc. In many instances, there is a need for a particular focus on the special risks to vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, people with disabilities or pregnant workers and nursing mothers.

Risk assessment must take into account a number of factors:

- How likely is it that something will go wrong?
- If it did go wrong how serious would the result be?
- How often does the risk arise: daily, every time a particular tool is used, annually?
- How many people would be affected?
- Are the effects immediate or will they only appear a long time after the event (chronic)?
- What does the law dictate, e.g. specific regulations covering this hazard?

Written risk assessments do not need to be complicated documents. In most of the situations in which volunteers are placed, the hazards and risks are easy to identify, as are the preventative measures necessary. Even so, there is a need to review them regularly, since new circumstances may arise.

A risk assessment table

It is often easiest to produce a table listing the risks and their possible consequences as shown in the example below.

Hazard	Likelihood	Impact	Control Measures
Trip slip or fall	Moderate	Injury to individual	Wear safety footwear, keep worksite clear and cover risk in safety talk