

GUIDANCE NOTES

RISK ASSESSMENTS

WHEN SHOULD A RISK ASSESSMENT BE CARRIED OUT?

A risk assessment should be done when:

- there is uncertainty about how a hazard may result in injury or illness
- the work activity involves a number of different hazards and there is lack of understanding about how the hazards may interact with each other to produce new or greater risks
- changes at the workplace occur that may impact on the effectiveness of control measures.

A risk assessment can be either written or discussed (Take 5) depending on the level of associated risk. A higher and more complex risk would need a documented risk assessment.

A risk assessment is mandatory under the WHS Regulations for high risk activities such as entry into confined spaces, work that has the potential for falls, working at heights, plant, hazardous chemicals and live electrical work.

Work out how severe the harm could be. To estimate the severity of harm that could result from each hazard consider the following questions:

- What type of harm could occur?
- What factors influence the severity of harm that occurs?
- How many people are exposed to the hazard?
- How many could be harmed?
- Could one failure lead to other failures?
- Could a small event escalate to a much larger event with more serious consequences?

Work out the likelihood of harm occurring. The likelihood that someone will be harmed can be estimated by the following questions:

- How often is the task done – does this make the harm more or less likely?
- How often are people exposed to the hazard? How close do people get to it?
- Has it ever happened before, either in your workplace or somewhere else? How often?

Gather as much information as possible about the hazard/s and choose the appropriate risk assessment tool. The level of risk will increase as the likelihood of harm and its severity increases.

Determine the level of risk by:

- evaluating the likelihood or probability of harm occurring
- estimating the severity of the potential consequences.