

H&S Information Sheet #4

Risk Assessment

Suitable and Sufficient

The process of risk assessment is critical to the prevention of work-related harm. Regulations require employers to carry out a “suitable and sufficient assessment of risk” to employees **or anyone else** who may be affected by their work activities. The HSE expects employers to assess the risks in their workplace before any new work is begun.

A suitable and sufficient risk assessment:

- identifies the significant risks
- identifies and prioritises the measures that need to be taken to comply with the duties under H&S law
- is appropriate to the nature of the work
- remains valid for a reasonable period

In particular, a risk assessment should:

- **ensure that all relevant hazards and risks are considered**
- **address what actually happens in the workplace or during the work activity**
- **ensure all groups of workers and others who may be affected are considered**
- **identify groups of workers who may be at particular risk**
- **take account of existing preventive or precautionary measures**

The level of detail should be broadly proportionate to the risk. Extensive paperwork is not needed to confirm the limited extent of an unlikely and inconsequential event.

Assessment Process

The assessment process will often require a team approach with expertise being drawn from a number of sources such as:

- managers or supervisors
- the employees carrying out the tasks
- specialist advisors (H&S or Medical)
- external advisors where expertise does not exist internally

For most charity retailers it is likely to be Operations Managers who will lead the assessment process. They must, therefore, have sufficient skills, authority and resources at their disposal to develop and implement the necessary control measures.

The assessment procedure should be supported by policy statements clarifying:

- what level of risk is tolerable to the organisation
- who is to carry out the assessments for a particular area of responsibility
- who is responsible for implementing and monitoring controls
- timescales for action and review

It is PDSA policy to aim to reduce all High and Medium risks to Low, by action agreed in the risk assessment.

Generic Assessments

In many cases, tasks are similar across an organisation and, therefore, a charity will find it helpful to produce generic assessments for distribution to the relevant work locations. This practice is encouraged by the HSE.

However, these should not be treated as a substitute for “site-specific” assessments. The generic content should be compared with the local workplace conditions (differences in shop layout, working practices or staff ability). These generic assessments should be treated as a guide and amended to suit local circumstances.

Oxfam’s 3 generic risk assessments (for shops, depots and stock collecting) were drawn up by a team comprising a Personnel Manager, Building Surveyor, H&S Advisor, Area Manager, Shop Manager, Shop Volunteer and Depot Manager.

Oxfam Area Managers received training and then they used the generic assessments as a model to assess their own shops, depots and stock collection schemes with the local managers.

British Heart Foundation has produced a generic risk assessment of Working Alone in its shops.

Topics and Tasks

One way of assessing risks is to look at workplace hazards under **Topics** such as Electrical Safety and Staff Security. These are best placed in rank order according to the level of risk they carry.

Oxfam and Acorns Children's Hospice Trust have taken the Topic approach.

Another approach is to list all the **Tasks** that people do at a workplace. In the case of a shop this would include using a steam cleaner, sorting donated stock, etc. Each task is then assessed for its potential for harm. A more detailed assessment would then be carried out for those tasks that have a Medium or High risk rating.

PDSA has followed the Task Analysis approach when producing its generic assessments.

People at Risk

The next step after identifying a hazard is to consider the people likely to be exposed to it, taking into account:

- numbers exposed
- frequency and duration of exposure
- physical and mental state
- age, ability and experience
- any disability they may suffer from

The HSE advises that the special risks faced by pregnant workers and young people under the age of 18 should be assessed separately. They also advise that a pregnant worker's assessment should be reviewed 2 or 3 times during her pregnancy and before she returns to work. Such personal assessments should be agreed and signed by the Manager and individual.

Given the number of elderly charity shop volunteers it would also be advisable for Shop Managers to complete a personal risk assessment of particularly vulnerable volunteers. Personal assessments could result in making minor changes that would reduce the risk of injury to such workers.

One Shaw Trust Shop Manager conducted a personal risk assessment of an 86-year-old volunteer. Duties within the shop team were

then changed, thus eliminating the need for her to carry loads up and down stairs.

Risk Evaluation

Risk should be evaluated in order to prioritise the need to establish control measures. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that too much time is not spent on debating risk values rather than considering the effectiveness of controls.

One method uses a simple matrix by allocating 3 values to each of:

- the likelihood of harm occurring
- the likely severity of harm

		Severity of harm		
		Minor	Serious	Critical
Likelihood of harm	Unlikely	Low	Low	Medium
	Possible	Low	Medium	High
	Probable	Medium	High	Very High

A score of 1 can be substituted for Minor & Unlikely; 2 for Serious & Possible; 3 for Critical & Probable. By multiplying the scores on each axis, a Very High risk would have a score of 9; High 6; Medium 3 or 4; and Low 1 or 2.

The Shaw Trust uses the numerical method on its risk assessment forms.

Whatever system of evaluation is used, an employer will need to decide on the degree of risk to be accepted in the organisation and for specific tasks.

Risk Control

Organisations need to develop measures that will ensure adequate control of the situation where a risk is considered to be unacceptable. Regulations lay down a hierarchy of controls:

1. **Eliminate the risk if possible.** It is better to remove a trip hazard by

Safety Matters in Charity Retailing

repairing an uneven floor than to put up a warning sign.

- 2. Separate, or protect, all people from the risk.** This is better done by “engineering” means (e.g. a guard on a piece of machinery) rather than relying on the actions of people
- 3. Provide personal protective equipment (PPE).** This would be a last resort because it relies on people to wear the equipment.

Several charities provide heavy-duty gloves for those who carry sacks of donated goods and lightweight ones for sorting. Gloves containing latex should be avoided because of the allergy risk. When sorting stock, The Pasque Charity depot volunteers use donated cotton gloves that have been taken home and washed.

PDSA provides plastic goggles for those who use steamers.

Acorns Children’s Hospice Trust provides van drivers with gloves, protective footwear and high-visibility clothing.

Assessment Records

Risk assessment is the starting point for an organisation’s safety management system. The records should provide the basis of an action plan (at organisational and local level) for any necessary improvements in procedures, conditions and/or equipment.

Charities can develop systems that best suit their own needs. There is no official format for the assessment record. A copy should be kept on site as local authority inspectors will want to examine these on their visits.

Records of the assessment process and the significant findings are vital for 2 reasons:

- to show the basis of the decisions taken at the time to assist in future reviews
- to provide an evidence trail that a “suitable and sufficient” assessment has been carried out

The results of the assessments also need to be shared with the staff and volunteers.

Oxfam’s risk assessment form has space at the end in which to enter details of

staff/volunteer consultation. Shop Managers are advised to do this at a Team meeting.

Reviews

Assessments must be reviewed from time to time and certainly not less than every 3 years to ensure that the control measures continue to be appropriate.

However, a review should always be held:

- after an incident has occurred
- when significant changes are made to working practices
- when it is suspected that an assessment is no longer valid

An incident leading to a serious injury would require a review, as would the introduction of new equipment.

The extension of the product range (e.g. to include the sale of furniture) and alterations to the building (e.g. to make the first floor or basement useable) would be classed as significant changes to working practices.

Separate Risk Assessments

Some risks are required to be assessed separately under their own specific regulations. These include hazardous substances, manual handling, display screen equipment and fire.

(Information Sheets No. 5 and 6 deal with hazardous substances and manual handling. Information Sheet No. 11 covers fire safety and attached to it is detailed guidance on how to conduct a fire risk assessment and prepare a fire safety action plan.)

Sample Risk Assessments

Two sample, generic risk assessments for a charity shop and the other is for a stock collection scheme are to be found in Information Sheets 13 and 14.

Further Reading

Five steps to risk assessment. HSE leaflet INDG 163REV2