

RISK MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

COSHH – Initial Assessments

Introduction

The aim of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 1999 is to prevent damage to health from occupational exposure to hazardous substances. A primary requirement is for all employers to assess the risk of health damage to their employees or others from substances used (Regulation 6), produced or encountered in the course of their business.

Assessment Procedure

Before starting, decide who is to be involved and how the assessment is to be organised and recorded. It is better to involve all levels of staff but the results will need to be co-ordinated by one individual or perhaps a small committee. Assessment can be expediently organised in two ways:

- take different work activities and look at the exposures in each, or
- take different substances and see where exposure occurs across different activities.

In simple cases with few substances, the substances approach may be successful but in more complicated cases the activity approach can reduce the work involved.

In all cases the work should be divided into manageable chunks with realistic targets for completion.

Where large numbers of processes or materials are involved priority should be given to those situations, which appear to offer the greatest risk.

1. Identify Potentially Hazardous Substances

The first stage in any assessment is to identify substances and processes, which may fall under the scope of the Regulations. The following main areas should be considered:

a) Purchased-in Materials

Produce a list of all substances used in the Company.

Obtain safety data sheets from chemicals suppliers (although not a requirement of the Regulations it is good practice to hold this data in a central file).

Identify those substances falling under the scope of the Regulations because they are either:

- toxic
- very toxic
- harmful
- irritant
- corrosive
- sensitising agent
- carcinogenic

(The above properties will be notified by appropriate warning symbols in an orange background on the container labels and in the safety data sheets relating to the materials)

- substances with an occupational exposure limit
- substances with comparable hazards such as pesticides.

b) Processes

Identify processes where materials are converted into a different form which may be hazardous, e.g. solids reduced to dust by machining, fumes produced by hot processes, vapours, substances reacting to form new substances.

c) Biological Agents

Harmful micro organisms are less common but may be relevant for example where animals are handled, or for medical or laboratory staff, or where there are water systems likely to produce legionella.

d) Waste Materials and By-Products

e.g. wood dusts, solder and welding fumes

2. Identify Exposure Potential

Find out exactly what is being done and who is at risk. (The assessment should also consider unusual or emergency situations, e.g. night shift or maintenance, as well as normal operating practices.) Relevant investigation should consider:

a) Tasks and Activities

Consider tasks and activities where hazardous substances are likely to become airborne and inhaled, come into contact with skin or eyes, be ingested or injected (e.g. needle-stick injuries).

- How often is the activity undertaken?
- In what quantity is the material used?
- In what form is the material used, e.g. solid or fine dust, liquid or aerosol spray, at an elevated temperature or pressure?

b) Persons at Risk

- Employees, e.g. production workers, maintenance workers, supervisors, office staff
- Contractors and visitors
- People outside
- High risk categories, e.g. elderly, children, sick

3. Evaluate Risks to Health

Assessments should consider:

- a) The inherent health hazard created by the material or process.
- b) An assessment of the actual risk.

It is important to distinguish between the hazard presented by a substance and the risk it actually creates in the normal manner of use. Sulphuric acid for example is highly corrosive and therefore hazardous but would not be a risk if only used in closed systems to which employees have no access.

To allow comparison between different materials it is valid to use a numerical or descriptive evaluation, e.g. negligible, low, significant, high, very high or similar.

- c) Relevant published standards - Maximum Exposure Limit (MEL) or Occupational Exposure Standard (OES) applicable? As detailed in HSE book EH40.
- d) The adequacy of existing control measures.
- e) The need for further action or investigation.

Professional advice may need to be sought for testing local exhaust ventilation systems, carrying out air monitoring, offering advice on particular processes or substances etc.

4. **Decide on Control Measures**

The availability, effectiveness and suitability of any existing protective measures, e.g. local exhaust ventilation or personal protective equipment, should be considered.

Further action may be necessary, generally in the form of:

Containment the hazard is contained or enclosed

Engineering control typically local exhaust ventilation, ranging from a single point extract close to the source of hazards to a ventilated partial enclosure

General ventilation a good standard of general ventilation and good working practices

Special expert/specialist advice may be needed to look at protection against skin/eye contact

5. **Review of Assessment**

Assessments should be reviewed regularly (at intervals of not more than 5 years) or when there has been a significant change, e.g.:

- introduction of a new material or process
(Assessments will rapidly become dated if there are not reasonably strict controls on the introduction of new materials or processes.)
- new evidence as to the hazard of materials
- availability of new control measures

Further Information

Royal & SunAlliance Risk Management Guide No.3 Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999

Health and Safety Executive HSG97 A step by step guide to COSHH assessment

Health and Safety Executive HSG193 COSHH essentials, Easy steps to control chemicals

Health and Safety Executive EH40 Occupational Exposure Limits 2001 (published annually)

The above list of publications from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is not exhaustive. There are numerous priced and free publications, both of a general nature and industry specific produced by the HSE.

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA, Tel:01787 881165, Fax: 01787 313995. A comprehensive free catalogue of all publications is available on request, and details may also be obtained from the HSE Books home page on the World Wide Web at <http://www.hsebooks.co.uk/homepage.htm>

HSE priced publications are also available from branches of the Stationery Office (formerly HMSO) and good booksellers.

The HSE home page on the World Wide Web is <http://www.open.gov.uk/hse/hsehome.htm> and their enquiry service is available at HSE Infoline Tel:0541 545500 or by writing to HSE Information Centre, Broad Lane, Sheffield S3 7HQ.

For further assistance on this or any other risk control topic please contact the National Risk Control Unit through your Royal & Sun Alliance Regional Centre or through your insurance adviser.



SPECIMEN COSHH ASSESSMENT FORM

DEPARTMENT/LOCATION:

ASSESSOR:

DATE:

ACTIVITY	SUBSTANCE(S) USED			PERSONS AT RISK		ASSESSMENT OF RISK		
	Name	Hazard	Quantity used	class	frequency of exposure	MEL or OES?	Existing control measures (adequate?) YES / NO	further action or investigation

Review Date