

Risk management

In order to understand the workplace health and safety requirements for risk management, and your obligations under the law you must consider and understand relevant legislation and codes of practice.

What law applies

Legal obligations, legislation, code of practice

Understanding hazards and risks

Hazards, risks and the differences between them

What is risk management?

What could cause harm to people in your workplace

The five steps

Five step risk management process

What law applies

In order to understand the workplace health and safety requirements for risk management, and your obligations under the law you must consider and understand relevant legislation and codes of practice.

General health and safety obligations

To understand your obligations and safety requirements you must be familiar with the:

Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 which imposes obligations on people at workplaces to ensure workplace health and safety. The *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* also helps you to meet your workplace health and safety obligations through:

- The *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008* which describes what must be done to prevent or control certain hazards which cause injury, illness or death
- codes of practice, which are designed to give practical advice about ways to manage exposure to common risks. In particular, the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007* should be read in conjunction with information on PPE.

Every Queensland employer must have **workers' compensation** insurance. Most employers insure with WorkCover Queensland, while a small number of large organisations have their own insurance. This insurance coverage ensures that employees injured at work receive financial support.

What you must do

It is a requirement of the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* that risks must be assessed and control measures then implemented and reviewed to prevent or minimise exposure to the risks.

If the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008* describes how to prevent or minimise a risk at your workplace you **must** do what the regulation says. If there is a code of practice that describes how to prevent or minimise a risk at your workplace you **must** do what the code says or adopt and follow another way that gives the same level of protection against the risk.

If there is no regulation or code of practice about a risk at your workplace you **must** choose an appropriate way to manage exposure to the risk. People must, where there is no regulation or code of practice about a risk, take reasonable precautions and exercise proper diligence against the risk.

See the Risk Management Code of Practice 2007 for further information.

Specific legislation for risk management

Under the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*, to properly manage exposure to risks, a person must:

1. Look for the hazards
2. Determine who might be harmed and how
3. Decide on control measures
4. Put controls in place
5. Review the controls

Control measures should be implemented in the following order:

1. get rid of the harm or prevent the risk
2. if this is not possible:
 - replace with something less harmful
 - separate people from the harm
 - change work processes or the physical work environment, for example, by redesigning work, plant, equipment, components or premises
 - apply administrative arrangements, for example, limit entry or time spent in a hazardous area
 - use personal protective equipment

What Specific code of practice for risk management

The *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007* outlines a five-step process that will help you to identify and manage health and safety problems.

Understanding hazards and risks

A **hazard** is something with the potential to cause harm. **Risk** is the likelihood that the harm will occur from exposure to the hazard. For example:

- The hazard is electricity. The risk is the likelihood that a worker might be electrocuted because of exposure to electrical wires that is inadequately insulated.
- The hazard is a 40kg bag. The risk is the likelihood that a worker might suffer back strain from manually lifting 40kg bags.
- The hazard is carbon monoxide. The risk is the likelihood that a worker might suffer carbon dioxide poisoning because they are using a petrol operated pump in a well.

What is risk management

Risk management is a five step process for controlling exposure to health and safety risks associated with hazards in the workplace.

In many cases risk management is nothing more than a careful examination of what could cause harm to people in your workplace and:

- weighing up whether you have taken enough precautions, or
- should do more to prevent harm, **and**
- controlling exposure to prevent harm.

The aim is to make sure that no one gets hurt or becomes ill – that a person returns home safely after work.

When undertaking risk management:

- Involve workers in the process.
- Don't use it to justify a decision that has already been made.
- Consider good practice in your industry.
- Make records of any risk management activities undertaken.

For more information on risk management, refer to Section 2 of the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007*.

The five steps

Preparing for the five steps

Before approaching the five steps it is important to consider the context in which the risk management process takes place

The five steps of the risk management process are:

Step 1 - Look for the hazards

How to look for hazards, What to look for

Step 2 - Decide who might be harmed and how

Assessing the risk - how might someone be harmed? What is the harm? How likely is this harm?

Step 3 - Decide on control measures

Is there a Regulation or Code of Practice about any hazards you have identified? What are the existing controls? Are controls as high as possible in list of control priorities? Do controls protect everyone exposed to harm? What additional controls are required?

Step 4 - Put controls in place

Developing a plan for improving controls, Improving controls

Step 5 - Review the controls

Are the controls working? Are there any new problems?

Preparing for the five steps

Before approaching the five steps it is important to consider the context in which the risk management process takes place.

Defining the context involves identifying:

- work processes, practices, activities and tasks that will be analysed in the risk management process and the steps involved;
- how risks may interact with one another - one activity may effect to risks in another
- the people involved in carrying out those work processes and in what capacity;
- whether the people involved are sufficiently competent/skilled/experienced; and
- what items of plant or materials are used.

Achieving this requires extensive consultation, including all the people doing the task, employers, safety officers and experts. It could also extend to suppliers or manufacturers of plant or materials used in your workplace.

Step 1 - Look for the hazards

Look for those things or processes at your workplace that could cause harm, asking the question 'does this task/activity/situation/event have the potential to harm a person?'

Be aware that workplace hazards are not always obvious. Some are concealed or not readily visible, like electricity, gases or high frequency noise. Others may develop over time, like wear and tear on plant or equipment, and others may be intermittent or temporary.

Some examples of the types of workplace hazards to look for include:

- work environment (such as slippery floor surfaces, poor lighting, heat or cold)
- energy (such as electricity or heat)
- manual tasks
- noise
- substances (such as chemicals)
- plant, machinery and equipment
- workplace activities or arrangements such as purchasing policies, shiftwork rosters, performance expectations, maintenance and servicing programs and training programs that impact upon the safety of the workplace.

For more information on the types of hazards refer to Section 3 of Supplement 1 of the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007*.

There are a number of ways of looking for hazards including:

- Walking through your workplace and looking for hazards in a systematic way looking at physical things and workplace activities.
- Asking workers about hazards.
- Consulting with workplace health and safety representatives and committees.
- Considering how people use equipment and materials and how they could be hurt directly and indirectly by workplace activities.
- Conducting a safety audit.
- Scientific or technical evaluation.
- Reviewing your workplace records such as sick leave and incident reports.
- Acquiring information from designers, manufacturers and suppliers.
- Talking to anyone who can help such as your industry association and suppliers of equipment and consumables.

For more information on identifying hazards refer to Supplement 1 of the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007*.

Once hazards are identified it is good practice to record them in a hazard register.

View/print an example of a hazard identification and register

Step 2 - Decide who might be harmed and how

Look for the ways that people could be hurt or become ill and at the possible causes of injury or illness. This is also called a risk assessment.

For each hazard:

- estimate the **likelihood** of an incident occurring at your workplace, bearing in mind existing control measures
- estimate the **consequences** of an incident occurring at your workplace, bearing in mind existing control measures

Consequences range from:

- extreme - death or permanent disablement
- major - serious bodily injury or serious work caused illness
- moderate - injury or illness requiring casualty treatment
- mild - requiring first aid only with no lost work time

For more information about factors affecting consequences refer to Appendix B of Supplement 2 of the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007*.

Likelihood ranges from:

- very likely - could happen frequently
- likely - could happen occasionally
- unlikely - could happen, but rarely
- very unlikely - could happen, but probably never will

For more information about the factors affecting likelihood refer to Appendix A of Supplement 2 of the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007*.

By combining your likelihood and consequence estimates you can rate the risk. There are many ways of rating risks of injury or illness, two of the most common ways are to use a:

- risk priority chart
- risk assessment

Using the ratings of each risk, develop a prioritised list of workplace risks requiring action.

You should involve workers in this assessment.

Don't forget:

- young workers, trainees, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding who may be at heightened risk

- cleaners, visitors, contractors, maintenance workers, contractors who may not be familiar with your workplace risks
- members of the public or people with whom you share your workplace who could be hurt by your workplace activities

For more information on how to do a risk assessment refer to Supplement 2 of the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007*.

Step 3 - Decide on control measures

You need to answer the following questions:

- Are there legislated things that I must do in relation to the specific hazard?
- Is there a Code of Practice relating to the specific hazard?
- What are existing controls?
- Are controls as high as possible in hierarchy of control priorities?
- Do controls protect everyone exposed to harm?
- What additional controls are required?

If there is a provision within the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 1997* about any hazards you have identified then you must control the risks associated with those hazards in the way specified.

If there is a Code of Practice about any of the hazards you have identified then you must do what the code of practice says or adopt and follow another way that gives the same level of protection against the risks.

View a full list of the Codes of Practice

If there is no direction within Regulation, or you choose to follow another way to protect against risks you must consider the hierarchy of control measures to decide on what are appropriate control measures.

Hierarchy of control measures

Control measures should be implemented in the following order:

1. get rid of the harm or prevent the risk
2. if this is not possible:
 - replace with something less harmful
 - separate people from the harm
 - change work processes or the physical work environment, for example, by redesigning work, plant, equipment, components or premises
 - apply administrative arrangements, for example, limit entry or time spent in a hazardous area
 - use personal protective equipment

For more information on deciding on control measures refer to Section 1 of Supplement 3 of the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007*.

Step 4 - Put controls in place

You need to develop a plan for improving controls. This needs to include time frames and responsibilities. It may involve a staged approach to improving controls. Maintenance of controls also needs to be included at this stage.

It is important to ensure that work procedures are changed or developed and implemented to include new or changed controls. Plans for new or changed controls need to be communicated throughout your organisation. Training, instruction and supervision should be provided.

Then controls need to be put in place. It is important that supervision is effective particularly when any changes are being made. The degree of supervision needs to be in keeping with the seriousness of the risk that you have previously assessed.

For more information on putting control measures in place refer to Section 5 of Supplement 3 of the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007*.

Step 5 - Review the controls

Finally the controls that you have put in place need to be reviewed and changed as necessary. This can be done by using processes already described earlier in this document.

For more information on monitoring and reviewing control measures refer to Section 7 of Supplement 3 of the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007*.