

Risk Assessment Guidance.

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 – employers have a legal duty to manage foreseeable health and safety risks. If an employee is found to have played a part in contributing to their own injury, compensation claims may be reduced or denied due to 'contributory negligence'. Employers can be liable under vicarious liability for negligent actions of their employees which cause injury to others while in employment.

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Employers are required to carry out assessments of reasonably foreseeable risks and to implement risk controls, so far as is reasonably practicable. ¹

One way of managing foreseeable health and safety risks is risk assessment.

- ! A risk assessment can take many forms. You may expect that risk assessments only count if they are written down but in reality we are dynamically risk assessing all day every day, from crossing a busy road to picking up a cup of tea.
- ! Once a risk assessment has been written down you should not assume that nothing will go wrong, you should continue to dynamically risk assess for every task and if necessary update a written assessment when there have been changes, accidents or near misses.
- ! Writing down a risk assessment helps you to work through a task logically and can be an efficient way of sharing findings with other staff. You can write down a risk assessment in any manner which suits you, but you should include the date for reassessment and spaces for people to sign to say they have read and understood.
- ! Risk assessments will ideally be crumpled, stained and ragged – they need to be used, not hidden in the director's office. You could laminate a risk assessment and pin it up in a cleaning cupboard or break room.

The basic steps to go through for a risk assessment are:

1. Eliminate Hazard	Assess how likely and how serious the consequence (risk) is, and how vital it is that this task is carried out – can it be replaced by another method?
2. Reduce Hazard	If the risk needs to be reduced can this be achieved by using different equipment, more people, doing it at a different time etc?
3. Prevent people from coming into contact with Hazard	If there is risk to those not immediately involved in the task, can this be reduced by isolating the work or changing the method?
4. Introduce safe system of work	This might detail what order to carry out tasks, where to place signage, at what time work can be carried out, how many people are needed for a task etc.
5. Provide Personal Protective Equipment	PPE normally refers to items such as reflective jackets and steel toe boots.

For tasks related to housekeeping we almost always find that the useful area is from between items three and four.

3. The task is low level risk, may be better carried out when the public are not in the building or after warning other staff of the activity which is being carried out.
4. Safe System of work for hoovering a gallery may include: check and maintain equipment, signage on through route, wear appropriate shoes, cover cables with mats, plan direction of work to avoid cable etc
5. Protective equipment could be as simple as asking all staff to wear closed shoes when vacuuming.

To assess the level of a risk we need to consider the consequence and the likelihood. Housekeeping tasks are generally low level consequence but quite likely to happen:

Example:

Tripping over cable on a flat surface in a clear space. Might result in minor personal injury. Quite likely to happen. Safe system of work may be to provide mats to cover cables, to allow enough time for the task so staff are not working in a rush, to plan the work so that the most appropriate sockets are used for each area.

Tripping over a cable on stairs. This could result in death and may still be likely to happen. The risk is therefore much higher and therefore we start much higher up the table, reduce hazard looking at having an extra member of staff to hold the cable out of the way or even, eliminate hazard providing cordless vacuums for short flights of stairs or removing the carpet and having a surface which can be cleaned in another manner on the stairs

Housekeeping may involve risk assessments for the following hazards

Slips, trips and falls

Working at height

Chemicals

Object hazards

Dust and mould

Crushing injury

Manual handling / lifting

Lone working

Working in restricted spaces

Working in the cold

Should a serious incident occur it is required that it is reported by the employer. RIDDOR is the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995. Employers, the self-employed and those in control of premises must report specified workplace incidents.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/> has the relevant information regarding what should be reported and how. ²

¹ Work Place Law IOSH v 3.0

² <http://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/>