



RISK MANAGEMENT GUIDE

CONTROL OF SUBSTANCES HAZARDOUS TO HEALTH (COSHH) – RISK ASSESSMENTS

Introduction

This Risk Management Guide complements the one devoted to the COSHH Regulations and the two should be read together.

The aim of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002 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. Whoever co-ordinates the work should have access to and understand the COSHH Regulations and be able to obtain the necessary information. They also need the knowledge and experience to make correct decisions about the risks and actions needed. 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. Where large numbers of processes or materials are involved, priority should be given to those situations that appear to offer the greatest risk.

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

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 on the container labels and in the safety data sheets relating to the materials.)

- Substances with a workplace 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 i.e. the public
- High risk categories, e.g. elderly, children, sick

3. Evaluate Risks to Health

Assessments should consider:

- The inherent health hazard created by the material or process.
- 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 useful to use a numerical or descriptive evaluation, e.g. negligible, low, significant, high, very high, or similar.

- The adequacy of existing control measures.
- 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
- **Monitoring the exposure:** Measure the concentration of hazardous substances in the air breathed in by workers where your assessment deems this necessary
- **Provision of Personal Protective Equipment:** This should always be considered as a 'measure of last resort'.
- **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

How do I obtain further information?

The following are available from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

INDG136, COSHH – A brief guide to the regulations. What you need to know about the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002.

HSG97, A step by step guide to COSHH Assessments

The HSE have a specific web - page dedicated to COSHH which is located at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/index.htm>

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. Details may also be obtained from the HSE Books home page on the World Wide Web at <http://www.hsebooks.com/Books/>

The HSE home page on the World Wide Web is <http://www.hse.gov.uk/index.htm>

Their enquiry service is also available at HSE Info -line Tel: 0845 3450055.

IMPORTANT

The information set out in this document constitutes a set of general guidelines and should not be construed or relied upon as specialist advice. Therefore **MORE TH>N BUSINESS** accepts no responsibility towards any person relying upon these Risk Management Guidelines nor accepts any liability whatsoever for the accuracy of data supplied by another party or the consequences of reliance upon it.