

Example risk assessment for an office-based business

THIS IS TEXT

Setting the scene

The office manager carried out the risk assessment at this company, which provides management and financial consultancy services, and which leases two storeys of a ten-storey office block.

Eighteen staff work at the company, one is a wheelchair user. The offices contain typical office furniture and equipment. There is a staff kitchen, where drinks can be prepared and food heated, and there are toilet and washing facilities on each floor.

The offices are cleaned every evening by general office cleaning contractors. They store the cleaning materials in a locked cupboard.

The office block was built before 2000. The landlord has surveyed the building for the presence of asbestos and has shared the findings of this survey with all of the tenants. Asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) were found but were in good condition and in places where they were not likely to be damaged, worked on or disturbed, so it was decided to leave them in place.

The office block is locked from 9:00 pm to 6:00 am Monday to Friday and at weekends, although 24 hour/7 days a week security cover is provided.

Although this example risk assessment is for an office-based business, it may equally be applied to any business that has office-based functions within it.

How was the risk assessment done?

The manager followed the guidance in *Five steps to risk assessment* (www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf).

- 1 To identify the hazards, the manager:
 - looked at HSE's office health and safety web pages, including the *Officewise* leaflet (www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg173.pdf) to learn where hazards can occur, and at the disability and risk assessment web pages;
 - walked around the office, noting things that might pose a risk and taking into consideration what was learnt from HSE's guidance;
 - talked to supervisors and staff, including the member of staff who is a wheelchair user, to learn from their knowledge and experience of areas and activities, and listen to their concerns and opinions about health and safety issues in the workplace;
 - talked to the office cleaning contractors, to ensure that the cleaning activities did not pose a risk to office staff, and vice-versa;
 - looked at the accident book, to understand what has previously resulted in incidents.
- 2 The manager then wrote down who could be harmed by the hazards and how.
- 3 For each hazard, the manager wrote down what controls, if any, were in place to manage these hazards. The manager then compared these controls to the good practice guidance provided in HSE's office health and safety web pages. Where existing controls were not

considered good enough, the manager wrote down what else needed to be done to control the risk.

- 4 Putting the risk assessment into practice, the manager decided and recorded who was responsible for implementing the further actions and when they should be done. When each action was completed, it was ticked off and the date recorded. The manager pinned the risk assessment up in the staff room for all staff to see.
- 5 At an office meeting, the office manager discussed the findings with the staff and gave out copies of the risk assessment. The manager decided to review and update the risk assessment every year, or straightaway if any major changes in the workplace happened.

Important reminder

This example risk assessment shows the kind of approach a small business might take. Use it as a guide to think through some of the hazards in your business and the steps you need to take to control the risks. Please note that it is not a generic risk assessment that you can just put your company name on and adopt wholesale without any thought. This would not satisfy the law – and would not be effective in protecting people.

Every business is different – you need to think through the hazards and controls required in your business for yourself.

Company name: Smith's Consultants

Date of risk assessment: 01/10/07

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	Action by whom?	Action by when?	Done
Slips and trips	Staff and visitors may be injured if they trip over objects or slip on spillages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ General good housekeeping. ■ All areas well lit, including stairs. ■ No trailing leads or cables. ■ Staff keep work areas clear, eg no boxes left in walkways, deliveries stored immediately. ■ Offices cleaned every evening. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Better housekeeping in staff kitchen needed, eg on spills. 	All staff, supervisors to monitor	From now on	1/10/07
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arrange for loose carpet tile on second floor to be repaired/replaced. 	Manager	From now on	
Manual handling of paper, office equipment etc	Staff risk injuries or back pain from handling heavy/bulky objects, eg deliveries of paper.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Trolley used to transport boxes of paper and other heavy items when collecting deliveries etc. ■ High shelves for light objects only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remind staff that they should not try to lift objects that look or appear too heavy to handle. 	Manager	4/10/07	4/10/07
Display screen equipment	Staff risk posture problems and pain, discomfort or injuries, eg to their hands/ arms, from overuse or improper use or from poorly designed workstations or work environments. Headaches or sore eyes can also occur, eg if the lighting is poor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ DSE training and assessments of workstation from CD ROM carried out by all new starters early on in induction. Any actions to be carried out asap. ■ Reassessment to be carried out at any change to work feature, eg equipment, furniture or the work environment such as lighting. ■ Workstation and equipment set to ensure good posture and to avoid glare and reflections on the screen. ■ Shared workstations are assessed for all users. ■ Work planned to include regular breaks or change of activity. ■ Lighting and temperature suitably controlled. ■ Adjustable blinds at window to control natural light on screen ■ Noise levels controlled. ■ Eye tests provided for those who need them, dutyholder to pay for basic spectacles specific for VDU use (or portion of cost in other cases). ■ Laptop users trained to carry out own DSE assessment for use away from office. When used at office, laptop should be used with docking station, screen, keyboard and mouse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Supervisors to monitor to ensure staff continue to get breaks away from the computer. 	Supervisors	4/10/07	4/10/07
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Check that identified actions from self-assessments are followed up ASAP. 	Manager	21/10/07	4/10/07
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tell staff that they are to inform their manager of any pain they have that may be linked to computer use. 	All staff	21/10/07	21/10/07
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Broken window blind near accounts section – letter to landlord. 	Company secretary	4/10/07	2/10/07
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remind laptop users to carry out regular DSE assessment to avoid problems and identify any issues. 	Manager	4/10/07	4/10/07

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Working at height Filing on top shelves, putting up decorations etc	Falls from any height can cause bruising and fractures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff stand on chair to file on high shelves, put up decorations etc. ■ Internal windows cleaned by contractor using a stepladder. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Chairs are too unstable. An appropriate stepladder will be bought and staff shown how to use it safely. 	Manager	4/10/07	3/10/07
Stress	All staff could be affected by factors such as lack of job control, bullying, not knowing their role etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff understand what their duties and responsibilities are. ■ Staff can talk to supervisors or manager if they are feeling unwell or at ease about things at work. ■ 'No bullying' policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remind staff that they can speak confidentially to manager or supervisors (on a no-blame basis!) if they are feeling unwell or ill at ease because of work. 	Manager	4/10/07	3/10/07
Electrical	Staff could get electrical shocks or burns from using faulty electrical equipment. Electrical faults can also lead to fires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff trained to spot and report (to office administrator) any defective plugs, discoloured sockets or damaged cable/equipment. ■ Defective equipment taken out of use safely and promptly replaced. ■ Staff told not to bring in their own appliances, toasters, fans etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ask landlord when the next safety check of the electrical installation will be done. 	Office administrator	4/10/07	4/10/07
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Confirm with landlord the system for making safe any damage to building installation electrics, eg broken light switches or sockets. 	Office administrator	4/10/07	4/10/07
Asbestos Asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) are present in some partition walls	Staff and others carrying out normal activities, at very low risk as asbestos only poses a risk if fibres are released into air and inhaled. Maintenance workers most at risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Partition walls in good condition and asbestos unlikely to be disturbed during normal activities. ■ Systems in place to inform contractors and others who might disturb the asbestos, where it is and to ensure safe working. ■ 'Danger, asbestos, do not disturb' signs posted at partition walls. ■ Staff told to report any accidental damage immediately. ■ Condition of partition walls checked periodically. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At next staff meeting, remind staff that the asbestos must not be disturbed and to report any accidental damage to the partition walls immediately. 	Manager	4/10/07	4/10/07
Fire	If trapped, staff could suffer fatal injuries from smoke inhalation/burns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Working with landlord, fire risk assessment done, see www.fire.gov.uk/workplace+safety/ and necessary action taken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure the actions identified as necessary by the fire risk assessment are done. 	Manager	From now on	

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	Action by whom?	Action by when?	Done
Lone working	Staff could suffer injury or ill health while out of the office, eg when visiting clients' offices, or while working alone in the office.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff write visit details in office diary and give a contact number. ■ Staff not returning to the office after a visit call in to report this. ■ Security staff check all areas, including toilets, before locking up at night. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Whereabouts of staff 'out of the office' to be monitored by office-based staff. 	Office admin team	From now on	

Assessment review date: 28/09/08