

Performing a risk assessment

How to assess the risks in your activity?

Don't overcomplicate the process. The risks in your activity are probably well known and the necessary control measures are possibly in place or, if not, easy to apply. You probably already know, for example, where people are most likely to trip or slip. If so check that you have taken reasonable precautions to avoid injury.

Hazards and Risks

When thinking about your risk assessment, remember:

- A **hazard** is anything that may cause harm, such as falls from height, drowning, electricity, chemicals etc.
- The **risk** is the chance, high or low, that somebody could be harmed by these and other hazards, together with an indication of how serious the harm could be.

Carrying out a Risk Assessment

There are five widely recognised steps to follow in order to fulfil a risk assessment, these are:

1. Identify the hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed and why
3. Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions
4. Record your findings and implement them
5. Review your assessment and update if necessary

1. Identify the hazards

The first thing you need to do is work out how people could be harmed. When you have participated in an activity for a number of years then it is easy to overlook some hazards, so here are some tips to help you identify the ones that matter most:

- Observe others participating in your activity and look at what could reasonably be expected to cause harm

- Ask coaches/instructors/club members what they think. They may have noticed things that are not immediately obvious to you
- Check the manufacturer's instructions or data sheets for chemicals and equipment as they can be very helpful in spelling out the hazards and putting them in their true perspective
- Have a look back through your accident and near miss records, these often help to identify the less obvious hazards
- Remember to consider long term hazards to health such as high noise levels or surfer's ear.

2. Decide who might be harmed and why

For each hazard you need to be clear about who might be harmed; it will help you identify the best way of managing the risk. That doesn't mean listing everyone by name, but rather identifying groups of people such as people moving heavy equipment or passersby.

In each case, identify how they might be harmed, such as 'People moving heavy equipment may suffer back injury from repeated lifting or People rigging lighting equipment may suffer impact injuries due to falls from height. Remember:

- Some people may have particular requirements new people, expectant or new mothers and people with disabilities may be a particular risk. Extra thought will be needed for some hazards.
- Visitors, contractors etc who may not be involved in your activity all the time.
- The public or audiences if they could be hurt by your activities.
- If you share your venue, you will need to think about how your activity affects others; as well as how their activities affect yours.
- Ask your committee/members if they can think of anyone you may have missed.

3. Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions

Having spotted the hazards, you then have to decide what to do about them. The law requires you to do everything that is 'reasonably practicable' to protect people from harm. A good way to decide how to deal with each hazard is to follow a hierarchy of control such as:

- **Eliminate** – If the hazard can be removed, all the other controls such as risk assessment, record keeping, training are no longer needed.
- **Substitute** – If the hazard can't be removed, can it be substituted for a lower hazard

- **Reduce** – look at lowering the frequency of exposure, amount of weight
- **Adapt** – where possible adapt the task to the individual taking account of their capabilities
- **Technical progress** – take advantage of mechanical aids
- **Restrictions** – restrict access to hazards either by physical barriers or by authorisation/competency
- **Personal protective equipment** – this may be used fairly extensively throughout our activities but it only takes care of the individual so it is considered to be a 'last resort' in health and safety generally a good example would be a lighting rig in a theatre. Persons required to work on the lighting system in the ceiling could be trained in the use of harnesses, helmet, roped access systems and working at height generally or the finances could be invested in a system whereby the lighting rig could be either lowered to floor level or the rig could be accessed by guarded walkways. The initial way of working requires a much higher level of competency that only protects each individual and needs to be monitored and maintained. Whereas the latter suggestions protect everyone at the same time. Where possible consider this style of protection for your own activity.
- **Emergency arrangements** – It may be that the tasks carried out are inherently dangerous such as handling certain chemicals or woodworking using lathes and pillar drills or presses. These will incorporate several levels of control such as guards for the machinery, regular maintenance and additional safety cut off systems.

Whatever you propose to do, involve other members of your committee/club and ensure that by changing what you are doing you are not introducing new hazards.

4. Record your findings and implement them

Putting the results of your risk assessment into practice will make a difference when looking after people and your group.

Write down the results of your risk assessment and share them with your group. You need to be able to show that:

- A proper check was made
- You asked who might be affected
- You dealt with the significant hazards, taking into account the number of people who could be involved
- The precautions or controls are reasonable and the remaining risk is low
- The club was involved in the process and aware of the results and changes

It may be that you find a number of measures that you need to introduce. Prioritise these in the form of an action plan such as:

- Easy/cheap improvements that can be done quickly, maybe as a temporary solution until more reliable controls can be put in place
- Long term solutions to those risks most likely to cause accidents or ill health
- Long term solutions to those risks with the worst potential consequences
- Arrangements for training members on the main risks that remain and how they are to be controlled
- Regular checks to make sure that the control measures stay in place
- Clear responsibilities – who will lead on what action and by when.

5. Review your assessment and update if necessary

Few activities stay the same. Sooner or later you'll bring in new equipment or use a different venue. It makes sense therefore to review what you are doing on an ongoing basis, so if you have any major changes in equipment, staff, methods then review your risk assessment. In any case the risk assessments should be reviewed by the incoming committee – in conjunction with the outgoing committee if possible.

Some activities will involve using a number of different venues. If you come into this category carry out a risk assessment for what you generally do, this will form a solid basis for your safety policy. Then prior to each visit to a new venue you should assess the hazards particular to that venue and ensure participants are briefed and made aware of any special considerations.

Over time you should build a portfolio of information for each venue that can be used in the future simply by checking the information is up to date.