



Guideline Document

Ref: GD:004:04	RE: Completion of Occupational Safety and Health Risk Assessments		
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Author(s):	The National Health and Safety Function		
Consultation with:	National Health and Safety Function		
Responsibility for Implementation:	All HSE Managers with responsibility for carrying out occupational safety and health risk assessments.		
Note:	<i>The information provided is for general guidance only, where more specific advice is required please contact the Health & Safety Help Desk (Ref: https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-services/health-and-safety/health-and-safety-helpdesk.html). The management of any occupational safety and health issue(s) remains the responsibility of local management.</i>		

Key Amendments	
Section	Amendments
3.0 - Scope	Updated reference to Ancillary Safety Statement
4.0 - Glossary of terms	Updated
5.2 - 2 nd paragraph	Updated in line with recent research
5.4 - Risk Assessment Process	Figure 1 updated
5.4.2 - Identify the most suitable type of risk assessment	Updated
5.4.3 Risk Assessment steps	Updated

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1.0 Introduction

The HSE considers the management of occupational safety, health and wellbeing as being of fundamental importance in continually improving the quality of its services, as quality of service is intrinsically linked to the provision of a safe working environment and safe systems of work.

The HSE is committed to ensuring the implementation of a safety management system that is compliant with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005, associated legislation and best practice (HSE Corporate Safety Statement).

Risk assessment forms a central part of the HSE Safety Management System involving:

- the identification of hazards that have the potential to cause harm,
- analysis and evaluation of the risks associated with a particular hazard and
- determining appropriate ways to eliminate the hazard or control the risk when the hazard cannot be eliminated.

1.1 Legislative Framework

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 places a legal obligation on employers to proactively manage safety, health and welfare and put in place the necessary protective and preventative measures to reduce injury and ill-health to their employees. Other legislation and regulations pertinent to this undertaking include (non exhaustive):

- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations, 2007 (S.I. 299/2007)
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Reporting of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 370 of 2016)
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations, 2013 and 2020 (S.I. No. 572 of 2013 and S.I. 539 of 2020)
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Chemical Agents) Regulations, 2001 to 2021 (S.I. 619 of 2001 and S.I. 231 of 2021)

1.2 Codes of Practice

- [2020 Code of Practice for the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work \(Biological Agents\) Regulations 2013 and 2020 \(S.I. No. 572 of 2013 as amended by S.I. No. 539 of 2020\)](#)
- [2021 Code of Practice for the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work \(Chemical Agents\) Regulations \(2001-2021\) and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work \(Carcinogens\) Regulations \(2001-2019\)](#)

2.0 Purpose

The document provides guidance on how to undertake workplace occupational safety and health (OSH) risk assessments which are compliant with Section 19, of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 and associated legislation.

3.0 Scope

This guidance applies to all HSE Managers (staff who hold a management role at any level within the organisation) with responsibility for carrying out health and safety risk assessments.

Note: Detailed roles and responsibilities are outlined in Ancillary Safety Statements¹.

¹ Ancillary Safety Statement (formerly known as Site or Service Safety Statement) provides details of the arrangements to manage occupational safety, health and welfare including hazard identification and risk assessment pertaining to the place of work (location) and work activities

4.0 Glossary of terms

Controls	<p>Controls are a measure that maintains and/or modifies risk. Controls include but are not limited to, any process, policy, device, practice, or other conditions and/or actions that maintain and/ or modify risk. In the HSE a control is a measure that is in place, is working effectively and operating to reduce either the likelihood or impact of a risk.</p> <p><i>(Ref: HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedures 2023)</i></p>
Dynamic Risk Assessment	<p>Dynamic risk assessment is the continuous process of identifying hazards, assessing risk in real-time while working and taking action to eliminate or reduce risk. This Risk Assessment is undocumented.</p>
Hazard	<p>A potential source of harm or adverse health effect on a person or persons.</p> <p>OSH hazard categories include physical hazards, chemical hazards, biological hazards and psychosocial hazards.</p> <p><i>(Ref: HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedures 2023)</i></p>
Likelihood	<p>The chance of something happening (also described as the probability or frequency of an event occurring)</p> <p><i>(Ref: HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedures 2023)</i></p>
Impact	<p>The outcome or consequence of an event affecting objectives</p> <p><i>(Ref: HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedures 2023)</i></p>
Place of work	<p>Includes any, or any part of any, place (whether or not within or forming part of a building or structure), land or other location at, in, upon or near which, work is carried on whether occasionally or otherwise and in particular includes vehicles</p> <p><i>(Ref: Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005, SI 10 of 2005)</i></p>
Reasonably Practicable	<p>In relation to the duties of an employer, means that an employer has exercised all due care by putting in place the necessary protective and preventative measures, having identified the hazards and assessed the risks to safety and health likely to result in accidents or injury to health at the place of work concerned and where the putting in place of any further measures is grossly disproportionate having regard to the unusual, unforeseeable and exceptional nature of any circumstance or occurrence that may result in an accident at work or injury to health at that place of work</p> <p><i>(Ref: Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, SI 10 of 2005)</i></p>
Risk	<p>Risk is the effect of uncertainty on objectives.</p> <p><i>(Ref: Adapted from the HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedures 2023)</i></p> <p>In terms of occupational safety and health risk (OSH) it is the combination of the likelihood of occurrence of a work related hazardous event(s) or exposure(s) and the impact of the injury or ill-health that can be caused by the event or exposure</p> <p><i>(Ref: Adapted from ISO Standard 45001:2018)</i></p>
Risk Assessment	<p>The overall process of risk identification, risk analysis and risk evaluation</p> <p><i>(Ref: HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedures 2023)</i></p>
Risk Register	<p>A risk register is a database of assessed risks that face any organisation at any one time. Always changing to reflect the dynamic nature of risks and the organisations management</p>

	<p>of them, its purpose is to help managers prioritise available resources to minimise risk and target improvements to best effect</p> <p><i>(Ref: HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedures 2023)</i></p>
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Roles and Definitions

Action Owner	<p>The Action Owner is accountable to the Risk Owner and is responsible for ensuring delivery of an action assigned to them and reporting on progress relating to the achievement of that action. Actions may then become controls once completed and operating effectively</p> <p><i>(Ref: HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedures 2023)</i></p>
Risk Owner	<p>Each risk should be assigned to a Risk Owner who is responsible for ensuring that the risk is managed appropriately.</p> <p>This includes ensuring;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controls and actions are in place to manage the risk. • Actions identified to manage the risk have been assigned to an Action Owner and a completion date agreed. • Notification, escalation or de-escalation of the risk or actions where appropriate. <p>The Risk Owner is normally the Manager of the function/service in which the risk is identified. Where multiple personnel have direct responsibility for, or oversight of, activities to manage an identified risk, they should collaborate with the accountable Risk Owner in their risk management efforts.</p> <p><i>(Ref: HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedures 2023)</i></p>

5.0 Guidance

5.1 Legal basis for Risk Assessment

Section 19, of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 requires every employer (and those who control workplaces to any extent) to identify the hazards at the place of work and to assess the risk presented by those hazards.

It is also the responsibility of all staff to be aware of hazards and risks in the workplace and take immediate action to report, reduce or resolve (if safe to do so) any hazards they observe in everyday practice.

5.2 Consultative Process

Section 26, of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 places a duty on the employer to consult and engage with his or her employees, their safety representatives or both on all matters relating to safety health and welfare (including risk assessments).

It is widely acknowledged that risk assessments are best conducted by those who have a good knowledge and understanding of the organisation, work practices and processes (HSG65: 2013; ISO45001: 2018). The person carrying out an activity or task is often best placed to provide details on the associated hazards and risks and should participate fully in the completion of the risk assessment. (British Safety Council).

5.3 What is a Risk Assessment?

Put simply, **Risk assessment** is the process of examining what can cause harm to people and the environment at the place of work to assist in the decision making process as to whether sufficient arrangements and precautions are in place or if additional measures are required to reduce injury and ill-health (HSA, 2016).

5.4 Risk Assessment Process

Figure 1 outlines the stages in the occupational safety and health (OSH) risk assessment process and are described below:

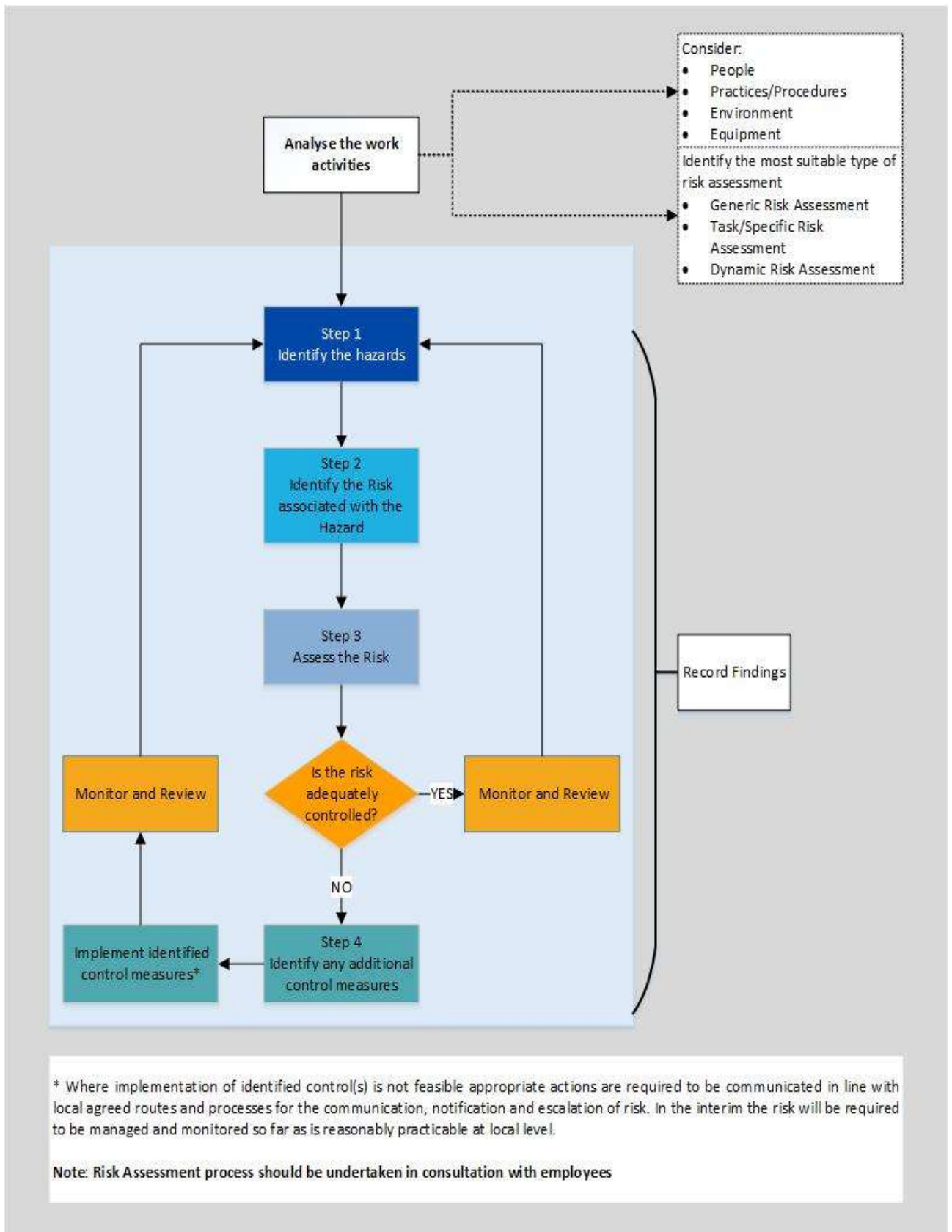


Figure 1 Risk Assessment Process

5.4.1 Analyse the work activities

To undertake a risk assessment, it is important to understand what in the workplace could cause harm (injury or ill-health) to staff, service users, visitors, contractors or anyone who comes in contact with the service and decide if enough is being done to prevent that harm from occurring.

Sources of useful information which can be gathered and analysed to undertake risk assessments include:

- Undertaking a walk around of the unit/department (workplace) to obtain information relating to the activities/tasks undertaken, the work environment, the equipment and substances that could cause harm
- Discussions with employees and Safety Representatives
- Documentation review to include:
 - Relevant legislation and codes of practice
 - Policies, Protocols, Procedures and Guidelines
 - Audit reports - to include any Health and Safety Authority (HSA) correspondence and/or internal audit reports
 - Training records
 - Information from manufacturers / suppliers
 - Safety alerts
 - Incident reports
 - Absenteeism records
 - Claims
- Competent advice from health and safety professionals, risk managers, infection prevention control specialists, manual handling co-ordinators/instructors, etc.

Note: it is important to consider infrequent/non routine tasks as well as the day to day activities/work processes within the place of work

5.4.2 Identify the most suitable type of risk assessment

Figure 2 outlines the various types of risk assessment.

Generic Risk Assessments	Task Specific Risk Assessments	Dynamic Risk Assessments
<p>This is an assessment of the commonly identified hazards associated with the place of work and with work activities.</p>	<p>Where a work activity / task presents a greater risk the activity/task must be assessed in greater detail to determine what controls are required.</p>	<p>Dynamic risk assessment is the continuous process of identifying hazards, assessing risk in real-time while working and taking action to eliminate or reduce risk.</p>
<p>Examples</p>	<p>Examples</p>	<p>Examples</p>
<p>Examples include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housekeeping • Slips/trips/falls • Fire • Noise • Vibration • Generic manual handling activities 	<p>Examples include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual/People handling • Pregnant Employee • DSE • Chemical Agents • Biological Agent • Work-Related Stress • Lone Working 	<p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working alone (lone working) • Working in environments with potential for aggression and violence • Undertaking manual handling activities
<p>Document</p>	<p>Document</p>	<p>Undocumented</p>
<p>These risk assessments are required to be documented on the appropriate risk assessment forms.</p>	<p>These risk assessments are required to be documented on the appropriate risk assessment forms.</p>	<p>These risk assessments are undocumented. Any concerns must be reported to the line manager at the earliest opportunity and the associated documented risk assessment reviewed and updated as appropriate.</p>

Figure 2 Types of Risk Assessment

Note: Risk assessments must be specific to the work place and work activities.

With reference to the work activity (task specific) risk assessments, where the manager carries out a risk assessment for a task and the risk and control measures to be applied are specific to the work activity of the employees under their control, then one risk assessment can be completed and will apply for the service/discipline/staff grouping.

Record Findings

The results of the generic and task specific risk assessments must be documented. A suite of risk assessment forms and Hazard Control Prompt Sheets to support Managers completing risk assessments are available and can be accessed [here](#).

5.4.3 Risk Assessment Steps

Step 1: Identify the hazard

A **hazard** is anything with the potential to cause harm; therefore workplace hazards which could cause harm to employees, service users and others who come in contact with services must be identified.

Hazards can be broken down into the following categories:

Physical Hazards	Chemical Hazards	Biological Hazards	Psychosocial Hazards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual handling to include ergonomic hazards² • Slip or trip hazards • Display Screen Equipment • Housekeeping • Driving for work • Lone working • Security • Equipment • Noise • Vibration • Lighting • Ventilation • Working at height • Electricity/electrical safety • Machinery • Fire • Radiation safety • Remote working • Aggressive animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chemical substances to include cytotoxic drugs • Cleaning chemicals • Dust and fumes from various processes • Medical gas cylinders • Gas cylinders • Asbestos • Pesticides/herbicides • Tobacco smoke 	<p>Exposure to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bacteria(Legionella), • Viruses (HIV, COVID-19, influenza), • Fungi (including yeasts and moulds) • Internal human parasites (endoparasites) • Sharps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying and harassment • Work related stress • Work related aggression and violence

Table 1 Hazard Categories

(Note this is a non-exhaustive list of hazards)

² Ergonomic hazards may be due to physical and psychological demands on the worker such as repetitive and forceful movements, awkward postures and poorly designed workstations, tools and equipment.

Step 2- Identify the Risk associated with the hazard (identify who might be harmed and how i.e. risk description)

From an occupational safety and health perspective, there is a legal requirement to identify the risks to the safety, health and welfare of employees and others, i.e. harm to a person. For each hazard, identify the risk associated with the hazard i.e. **who might be harmed and how**.

“Who” - When determining the “who”, take into account hazards to those normally involved in the task (employees) and others who could be affected e.g. other staff, service users, visitors, contractors and members of the public.

Consideration should also be given to any vulnerable groups of employees. These may include:

- Young persons
- Older persons
- Pregnant, post natal and breastfeeding employees
- Night and shift workers
- People for whom English is not their first language
- People with different abilities and
- People who are handling money or dealing with the public (HSA, 2016).

“How” - The risk description should capture the nature and impact of the potential harm i.e. the type of injury / ill health that could occur.

Table 2 provides examples of components of a hazard risk description relating to OSH risks

Hazard and Risk Description			
Hazard	There is a risk of/to	Due to ...	Resulting in (Impact/Consequence)
Work-related aggression and violence	Risk of aggression and violence	Due to carrying out lone working activities in the community (home visits)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical injury and /or Psychosocial injury /illness to staff
Driving for work	Risk of vehicle breakdown while driving for work	Due to poorly maintained vehicle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosocial injury /illness to staff
Lack of security	Risk of unauthorised access	Due to poor access controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical injury and /or Psychosocial injury /illness to staff

Table 2 Hazard and Risk Description

In addition to the legal requirement to identify the risks to the safety, health and welfare of employees and others, i.e. harm to a person, there is a HSE requirement to consider other risk impact categories. Refer to [HSE guide risk assesment tool](#).

Step 3 – Assess the Risk

Risk is measured in terms of two dimensions, likelihood and impact i.e., the likelihood (probability/frequency) of the risk occurring and the impact (consequence) of the risk should it occur.

The HSE has adopted a standardised approach to the assignment of likelihood and impact scores for the rating of the risk. The Risk Assessment Tool can be found [here](#).

Note: For OSH risk assessments document the Inherent risk only where there is no documented risk assessment with identified controls for the hazard being considered.

Step 4 - Identify any additional control measures

The legislative requirement is to do all that is “reasonably practicable” to eliminate or reduce the risk. If at this stage, the assessment shows that the risk is adequately controlled, document the assessment and continue to monitor and review.

If however, the risk is not adequately controlled; further control measures must be considered. Controls are methods of eliminating hazards or reducing the associated risk. The selection and implementation of the most appropriate method of risk control must be considered. To assist in the process, the following hierarchy of controls should be followed.

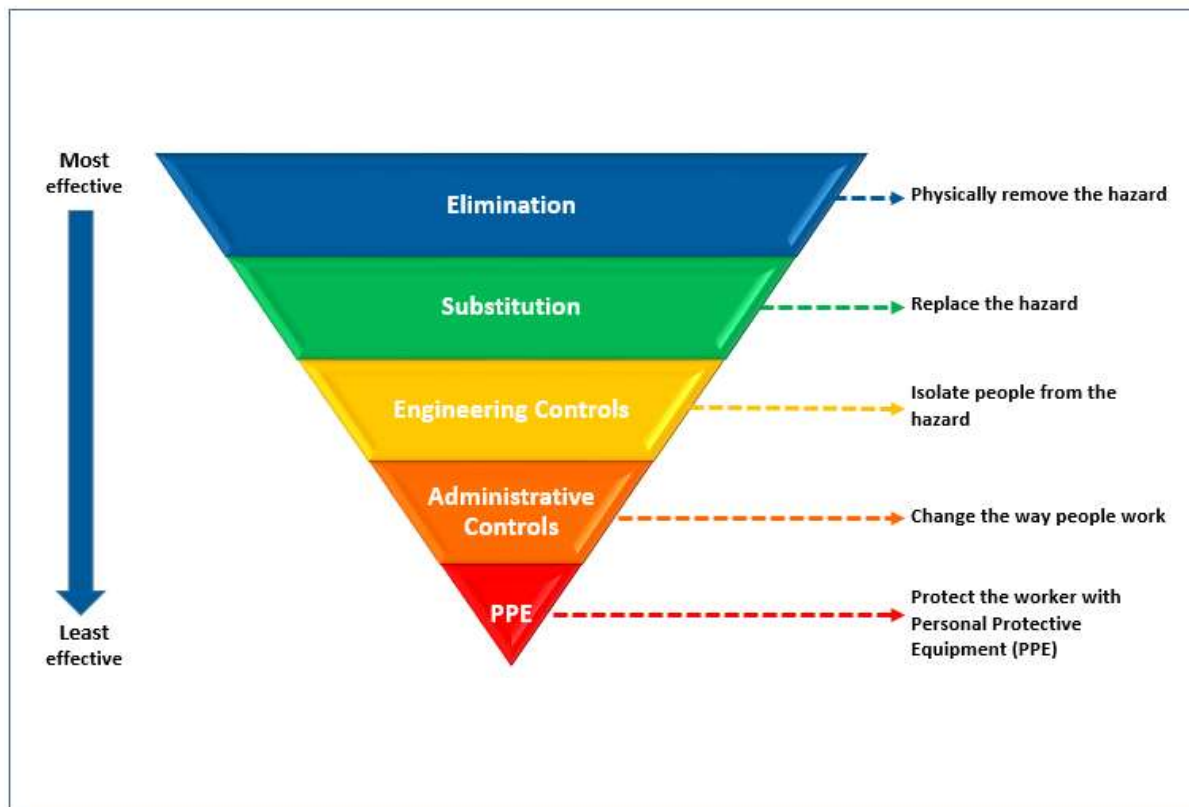


Figure 3 Hierarchy of Control

Note: The most effective way to control the risk is to eliminate it. By definition this control is 100% effective. The further down the chain, the less effective the control measures become.

Table 3 below provides a description of each of the control measures outlined in the hierarchy of controls and includes examples of how control measures can be applied.

Control	Description	Summary
Elimination	Elimination of the hazard should be the first and obvious way of controlling the risk. If no hazard exists, there is no risk of injury or ill-health	Can the hazard be eliminated?
Substitution	Where it is not possible to eliminate the hazard, the next most effective way of controlling the hazard is to substitute the hazard by using a safer alternative / replacing with something less hazardous. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the use of telemedicine or the provision of virtual health services to minimise the risk of work related aggression and violence • substituting a hazardous chemical with a less hazardous one • procuring smaller containers of reduced weight to minimise the risk of manual handling injuries 	Can the activity/task be reorganised to eliminate or reduce the risks?
Engineering Controls	Consider if there is any way that the hazard can be contained or isolated. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • redesigning a work process • placing a fixed guard or interlock on a hazardous piece of equipment such as an office shredder, catering food processor or • the use of safety engineered devices • the introduction of needleless intravenous systems • Locking hazardous substances away under strict controls • adopting a closed transfer system when preparing and drawing up medications to reduce exposure to hazardous drugs • placing noisy equipment in a non-accessible enclosure or room isolating the hazard from the person 	Can the hazard be eliminated or reduced by isolating it or by introducing engineering controls?
Administrative controls	Administrative controls are generally management strategies which have been put in place to minimise the risk. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identification and provision of training programmes • the introduction of policies, procedures and guidelines • changing work patterns e.g. job rotation / adequate rest breaks to minimise employee exposure. 	Can the risk be reduced by introducing safe systems of work?

Personal Protective Equipment	<p>The use of personal protective equipment (PPE) should only be considered as a last resort to control the risk once all the other options have been exhausted.</p> <p>Examples of PPE include: masks, goggles, ear defenders / plugs, clothing and footwear e.g. aprons or safety shoes. The level of PPE required will be determined by the risk assessment and any special instructions from the manufacturers.</p> <p>In the case of chemicals and substances, this information is provided in the Safety Data Sheets (SDS).</p>	<p>Is Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) required as a last resort to other forms of risk elimination or risk reduction?</p>
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Table 3 Control Measures

Implement Additional Controls

Additional controls should be prioritised and assigned to a nominated person responsible for implementation. In line with the [HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedure](#) the line manager has three options for assigning additional controls (actions) to action owners on their risk assessment. These options are as follows:

- To themselves as the Line Manager
- To someone who reports to them (i.e. a member of their team)
- To the person, the manager reports to (i.e. their Line Manager)

To complete the action the Action Owner may need to involve or consult with others. However, in order to monitor the action one person must have lead responsibility.

Monitoring and Review

Once control measures have been introduced, implement a process for the regular monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved. This should be proactive to include audits/workplace inspections, analysing local performance indicators, on notification of a change in circumstances for an employee and reactive following an incident.

In line with Section 19 (3) of the [Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005](#), risk assessments must be reviewed where:

- a) There has been significant change in the matters to which they relate.
- b) There is another reason to believe they are no longer valid.

It is best practice and HSE policy, to review risk assessments at least annually.

Communication, Notification and Escalation of Risk

Where it is not possible to complete all actions identified due to resources or other constraints, appropriate actions are required to be communicated in line with local agreed routes and processes for the communication, notification and escalation of risk. In the interim the risk will be required to be managed and monitored so far as is reasonably practicable at local level. For further guidance refer to the [HSE Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Procedure](#).

6.0 References

[Health and Safety Authority \(2016\) A Guide to Risk Assessments and Safety Statements](#)
[Health and Safety Executive \(2011\) Five Steps to Risk Assessment](#)
[Health and Safety Executive \(2013\) *Managing for Health and Safety* \(HSG 65\). ISBN 978 0716 6456 6.](#)
British Safety Council [Risk Assessment: A Complete Guide | British Safety Council \(britsafe.org\)](#)
HSE Corporate Safety Statement available at
<https://www2.healthservice.hse.ie/organisation/national-pppgs/hse-corporate-safety-statement/>
[ISO 45001:2018 Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems – requirements with guidance for use](#)
[Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005](#)