

# ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

## GUIDE TO CONDUCTING ‘GENERAL’ RISK ASSESSMENTS

(Version 2)

Contents	Page
1.0 The Legal Requirement to Assess Risks	2
1.1 ‘General’ Risk Assessments	2
1.2 How this Document is Organised	3
2.0 How to Use This Guidance - Essential Considerations	3
2.1 Defining Hazards and Risks	3
3.0 Conducting a ‘General’ Risk Assessment: The Key Stages	3
<i>Step 1 – Identifying the Hazards</i>	4
<i>Step 2 – Identifying Who Might be Harmed and How</i>	4
<i>Step 3 – Identifying Existing Controls</i>	5
<i>Step 4 – Assessing the Level of Risk</i>	5
▪ <i>Risk Rating</i>	5
▪ <i>Probable Frequency</i>	5
▪ <i>Severity</i>	6
▪ <i>Additional Information – a Guide to the time within which action should be taken</i>	7
<i>Step 5 – Identifying Where Further Action is Required (and recording your findings)</i>	7
<i>Step 6 – Reviewing Your Assessment and Revising it if Necessary</i>	8
4.0 Conducting a Detailed/Major Risk Assessment	8
‘Reasonably Practicable’	9

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### 1.0 THE LEGAL REQUIREMENT TO ASSESS RISKS

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, require:

“(1) Every employer to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of-

- (a) the risks to the health and safety of employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work; and
- (b) the risks to the health and safety of persons not in his employment arising out of, or in connection with the conduct by him of his undertaking,

*for the purpose of identifying the measures he needs to take to comply with the requirements and prohibitions imposed upon him by or under the relevant statutory provisions.”*

Furthermore, the requirement to undertake risk assessment is either explicit or implicit in other Regulations made under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. It must be undertaken to ensure that no one gets hurt or becomes ill, and can be defined as the identification of the hazards inherent in an undertaking, estimating the extent of the risks involved, and identifying and executing the measures necessary to control unacceptable risks.

Heads of department/school/directors have responsibility for areas of potential risk to staff, students and persons engaged in duties on the College’s behalf, and/or visiting its premises. They must, therefore, examine what internal and external activities and facilities (including field trips and overseas visits) could cause harm to personnel. Having gathered relevant information, it will then be possible to assess whether sufficient precautions have been taken, or whether further action is required to prevent unacceptable risk resulting in harm. It will also enable the prioritisation of any remedial action that may be necessary, particularly where more than one issue is in need of attention.

Such action will normally be taken within the bounds of what is ‘*reasonably practicable*’ (see page 9 for definition).

### 1.1 ‘GENERAL’ RISK ASSESSMENTS

This paper is a practical guide to the process of conducting what may be termed as a ‘*general*’ or ‘*non-specialist*’ risk assessment i.e. an activity for which there is no specific legislative, risk assessment methodology and guidance available. Activities that require particular skills to undertake them and have their own systems of assessment are to be found in the following College documents:

- **Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations Policy and Procedure**

- **Manual Handling Operations Regulations Policy and Procedure**
- **Health and Safety Display Screen Equipment Regulations Policy and Procedure**
- **Radiation Protection Policy and Procedure documents**

**Note:** Only those personnel who have undergone a formal programme of risk assessment training may undertake risk assessments on behalf of the College. This risk assessment training will be provided by College Health and Safety Office staff.

## **1.2 HOW THIS DOCUMENT IS ORGANISED**

Section 2 – How to Use This Guidance – Essential Considerations

Section 3 – Conducting a ‘*General*’ Risk Assessment

Section 4 – Conducting a Detailed/Major Risk Assessment

By following this guidance and working through completion of the ‘General’ Risk Assessment form you will be able to identify the risks associated with the hazard or subject area under review and how they are most appropriately controlled.

The College ‘General’ Risk Assessment form can be found at the following link:

<http://www.rhul.ac.uk/health-and-safety/Forms/general-risk-assessment-form4.doc>

## **2.0 HOW TO USE THIS GUIDANCE - ESSENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

When conducting a risk assessment you will need to:

- (i) State precisely what the hazard or hazards (subject(s)) are - this will help you to keep focused on the risk issues and, later, how they are to be controlled.
- (ii) Identify the personnel who may be affected.
- (iii) Identify whether existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done.
- (iv) Assess the extent of risk, considering the likely level under one of the following categories: ‘*Low*’, ‘*Medium*’ or ‘*High*’ (see Step 4, page 5).
- (v) Identify what further action may be necessary to control the risk (and take that action).
- (vi) Record your findings and review your assessment at appropriate intervals.

### **2.1 DEFINING HAZARDS AND RISKS**

It is important to understand the differences between hazards and risks if you are to be sure of addressing those areas in which harm to individuals may arise and the likelihood of that resulting in injury or ill health.

**Hazard** - something with the potential to cause harm.

**Risk** - the probability (or likelihood) of harm occurring in the actual circumstances of use.

To evaluate the extent of a risk, establish the likely frequency with which harm may occur and the severity of the consequences.

### **3.0 CONDUCTING A 'GENERAL' RISK ASSESSMENT: THE KEY STAGES**

Using the 'General' Risk Assessment Form (hereafter referred to as 'form'), insert your name (including others persons conducting the assessment), the date of the assessment, and a precise description of what is being assessed, and then proceed as follows:

#### **STEP 1 - IDENTIFYING THE HAZARDS**

To ensure that you identify what could reasonably be expected to cause harm, you may find it helpful to use one or more of the following methods:

- Look at each activity that may cause injury or ill health e.g. maintenance work, people working on their own.
- Look at hazards and risks in groups e.g. machinery, transport, substances, materials, electrical hazards, etc.
- Look at each section/department e.g. laboratory, offices, production areas, areas outside of buildings, storage areas, activities conducted by personnel from outside of the College e.g. deliveries, etc.
- For substances in use, reviewing manufacturers' information/instructions or safety data sheets will help you identify hazards and place risks in their true perspective.
- Staff issues which, if not addressed, are likely to result in harm to one or more individuals.
- Any other areas or activities in which hazards and risks may be present.

#### **Remember:**

- Each hazard under review must be identified separately with its own set of control measures

Decide which method is best for you and be sure to cover non-routine activities such as maintenance work and people working outside of normal working hours, including those working alone, etc.

It may be helpful to produce a draft list of everything that may reasonably cause harm and the harm that may be caused. Circulate the draft to all relevant people, including safety representatives, asking for, and taking into account, their comments and additions. In doing so you will have made a preliminary assessment from which you will be able to eliminate from further consideration those hazards that you are satisfied do not justify any additional action and for which adequate control measures are currently in place.

Where you consider that potentially significant risks remain, for each, you will now conduct a formal, written risk assessment. Record the hazard (subject) under review on the form, in column 2, giving it a reference number (column 1).

#### **STEP 2 - IDENTIFYING WHO MIGHT BE HARMED AND HOW (the number and description of staff/others who may be involved)**

To be 'suitable' and 'sufficient', and, therefore, to comply with legal requirements, the risk assessment must:

Identify employee(s), students(s) or other person(s) who might be at risk, either directly or indirectly, and how.

Don't forget:

Young workers and trainees, persons with disabilities, and new and expectant mothers may be particularly at risk.

Cleaners, contractors, maintenance workers and security personnel, etc.

Visitors (including parties of school visitors), members of the public, or people who share the workplace with you if there is a chance they may be harmed.

Identify and describe on the form, column 3, the number of staff/students/others directly involved and the number of staff/students/others indirectly involved.

### **STEP 3 – IDENTIFYING EXISTING CONTROLS**

Having completed Steps 1 and 2, you now need to identify your existing control measures for the hazard (subject) under review. You may, indeed, establish that certain potential risks have no existing controls, while others are already adequately managed. Record your findings on the form, column 4.

**Remember** - Your Risk Assessment must take into account the following:

- Any Acts, Regulations, College Policies and Procedures or formal guidance.
- The system or procedure that may previously have been identified to be followed and the controls currently in place (if any).
- The procedure that has been observed, including, any unacceptable elements present or important elements absent.
- Any previous untoward events (accidents, incidents, etc.).
- Identify all the existing controls before assessing the level of risk.

### **STEP 4 – ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF RISK**

#### **RISK RATING**

You should now investigate and assess the probability or likelihood of injury or ill health occurring as a result of inadequately managed or uncontrolled risk, based on the worst case likely outcome.

To establish the level of risk (*Low, Medium or High*) associated with each hazard (subject), you assess the frequency (probability) of an occurrence taking place, and the likely severity of the consequences. Take into account in your assessments, the number of people who may be involved. Follow (i) and (ii) below to arrive at your estimated level of risk.

#### **(i) Probable Frequency**

Using the following six headings, assess the probability/likelihood of harm occurring from the hazard (subject) under investigation:

- |   |   |                  |
|---|---|------------------|
| 1 | = | Zero to Very Low |
| 2 | = | Very unlikely    |
| 3 | = | Unlikely         |
| 4 | = | Likely           |
| 5 | = | Very likely      |
| 6 | = | Almost certain   |

**(ii) Severity**

Using the following six headings, consider the severity of the consequences of the occurrence:

- 1 = No Injury or Illness
- 2 = Minor Injury/ies or Illness
- 3 = 'Lost Time' Injury or Illness
- 4 = 'Over 3 Day' Injury or Illness
- 5 = Major Injury or Illness
- 6 = Fatality, Disabling Injury/Illness

Now work out the 'hazard rating'/numerical value for each hazard (or subject) under review. To do this, using Table 1 below, multiply your estimated 'Probable Frequency' rating by your estimated 'Severity' rating.

**TABLE 1**

**S E V E R I T Y**

<b>F</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>R</b>	<b>6</b>	36	30	24	18	12	6
<b>E</b>	<b>5</b>	30	25	20	15	10	5
<b>Q</b>	<b>4</b>	24	20	16	12	8	4
<b>U</b>	<b>3</b>	18	15	12	9	6	3
<b>E</b>	<b>2</b>	12	10	8	6	4	2
<b>N</b>	<b>1</b>	6	5	4	3	2	1
<b>C</b>							
<b>Y</b>							

Using the numerical value (hazard rating) you arrived at from TABLE 1 now refer to TABLE 2. Your Hazard Rating will fall within one of the six bands in column 1. From the appropriate hazard rating band, read across the table to establish: the *Estimated Risk*, the *Risk Rating* and the *Level of Risk* you are dealing with, i.e. *LOW*, *MEDIUM* or *HIGH*.

**TABLE 2**

<b>HAZARD RATING</b>	<b>ESTIMATED RISK</b>	<b>RISK RATING</b>	<b>LEVEL OF RISK</b>
0 – 5	MINOR	1	LOW
6 – 11	ACCEPTABLE	2	
12 – 17	MODERATE	3	MEDIUM
18 – 23	SIGNIFICANT	4	
24 – 29	HIGH	5	HIGH
30 – 36	EXTREME	6	

Now record your findings on the form, column 5, under one of the headings of 'Low', 'Medium' or 'High' level of risk.

### **Additional Information – A guide to the time within which action should be taken**

You should attach to your identified level of risk an action timetable. To do this, refer to Table 2 and the relevant Risk Rating number applicable to the hazard. Now, referring to Table 3, from the appropriate risk rating number you have a guide to the approximate time within which action should be taken and, therefore, how quickly you should resolve the hazard (subject).

The use of Table 3 is intended only to provide a guide to the time within which action should be taken. If, after having conducted your assessment you decide that shorter action times are appropriate, you should adhere to them. Do not, however, exceed these action times.

The Action Timetable can also be used as a useful means of comparing a number of risks and the order in which they should be addressed.

**TABLE 3**

<u>RISK RATING</u>	<u>ACTION TIMETABLE</u>
1	Acceptable risk/no further action required.
2	Action within 1 year.
3	Action within 3 months.
4	Action within 1 month.
5	Action within 1 week.
6	Immediate action.

### **STEP 5 – IDENTIFYING WHERE FURTHER ACTION IS REQUIRED (AND RECORDING YOUR FINDINGS)**

Having completed Steps 1 to 4 above, you will have gained a detailed understanding of the specific risk-related issue(s) needing to be addressed. Where an unacceptable risk remains, you will now need to:

Decide what further action will be necessary (this may include the need for the provision of information, instruction, or training, or any other means considered appropriate).

It will be appropriate to ask whether you can remove the hazard altogether. If the answer is no, how can you control the risks so that harm is unlikely? For example:

- Try a less risky option.
- Prevent access to the hazard (e.g. by guarding).
- Organise work to reduce exposure to the hazard.
- Issue personal protective equipment (as a last resort).

Remember:

- (i) Any controls you implement need to meet the requirements of relevant Acts, Regulations, Guidance Notes or best practice, and College Policies and Procedures. If in doubt, seek the advice of the College Health & Safety Adviser.
- (ii) Identify controls clearly, and where possible use statements which take the opportunity to instruct staff on what action is required (e.g. this substance must be used at all times in a fume cupboard).

- (iii) Avoid vague statements which do not clearly identify the controls (e.g. ‘appropriate’ personal protective equipment must be worn at all times).
- (ii) You will need to identify the financial implications of the action to be taken (normally within the bounds of what is reasonably practicable – see p.9 for definition).
- (iv) To summarise the action to be undertaken (the preventative and protective measures identified as necessary), under the Column headed ‘Further Action Required’
- (v) Make particular note of any circumstances identified where serious and imminent danger could arise and take appropriate remedial action.

The above is a process best undertaken by involving key people (particularly the personnel involved) in a ‘brainstorming’ exercise. To support the further action you establish as necessary, you should identify the information required for those whose health and safety you have identified to be at risk, including information, instruction and training, and be sure to take into account any emergency arrangements that must be instituted.

Produce your plan of action identifying the details of the implementation of your controls, in order of priority, identifying persons with special responsibilities and the realistic timescales within which action is to be completed.

Now record your findings on the Form, column 6 **and be sure to take the action you have identified as necessary.**

Where it is appropriate, produce from your risk assessment such memoranda or reports as may be appropriate, passing these to the relevant personnel. In so doing, you will have satisfied the requirements of Regulations 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and other such legislation which may call for the formal assessment of risk.

#### **STEP 6 - REVIEWING YOUR ASSESSMENT AND REVISING IT IF NECESSARY**

Having identified the hazard, the level of risk, and the preventative and protective measures it will be necessary to take, you will be in a position to resolve the hazard. Such action will normally be satisfied within the bounds of what is “reasonably practicable” unless otherwise specified under the requirements of Acts and Regulations. If the subject is clearly outside of your ability to resolve, then pass on your assessment to the appropriate member of staff for action (normally your immediate line manager).

You must ensure that once completed the risk assessment is periodically reviewed and updated and that any new potential hazard (subject) is also risk assessed. Record on the form, column 7, details of the date by which action is to be taken and subsequent review dates.

#### **4.0 CONDUCTING A DETAILED/MAJOR RISK ASSESSMENT**

Where the hazard (subject) may be of a complicated nature with potentially significant or major implications, and the measures required to control it are unclear or complicated, or potentially costly, it will be necessary to undertake a more comprehensive risk assessment. The stages to be followed will be essentially the same as those detailed in Section 2 above but you will need to spend more time on your assessment, including comprehensive information gathering and recording. The College Health & Safety Adviser or Deputy Health & Safety Adviser must be involved in undertaking such an assessment.

***'REASONABLY PRACTICABLE'***

Place on one hand the quantum or level of risk and on the other money, time, or trouble involved in averting the risk. If there is a gross disproportion between them with the risk being insignificant in relation to the sacrifice then you will have proven that compliance was not reasonably practicable.

Dr Richard Fisk  
Health & Safety Adviser  
Version 2  
15/04/2008

'In accordance with the College's commitment to equality and diversity, this Policy has been written and screened to avoid discrimination and promote a positive approach to race, disability and gender issues. Comments on the content of this document should be directed to Mrs Leanie DuToit in the College Health and Safety Office.'