

Presentation: Risk Assessment

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Tim started by describing the objective of his presentation was to demonstrate a user-friendly way for small businesses, with few resources, to identify their work activity hazards and devise suitable and sufficient control measures to eliminate or reduce the residual risks. He went on to say that 60% of organisations were SMEs and he had observed companies doing spray painting to roofwork and most of them were just not up to the task of carrying out risk assessment for themselves. He also added that use of consultants did not provide a good solution and recommended that employers should get involved as much as possible in the process themselves.

Tim added that it was important to appreciate the cost of ignoring risks to safety and ill-health and displayed this chart of HSE estimates, in order to motivate employers to take the subject seriously: -

	Human cost	Lost output	Resource costs	Total
Fatality	£991,200	£520,700	£900	£1,500,000
Major injury	£18,400	£16,200	£5,800	£40,500
Other reportable injury (O3D)	£ 2,700	£2,600	£500	£5,800
Minor injury	£200	£100	£50	£350
Average case of ill health	£6,700	£2,700	£800	£10,100

He said that something like 1 in 3 cases of ill-health consultations at GPs were work-related, so it was unwise to ignore this area of costs.

Tim then described an historic survey of Accidents in Factories from 1968, done by the Department of Employment. The sample was 621 accidents (0.5% of the total for that year), of which 308 were reasonably preventable. Interestingly, it was reported that there were 114 breaches of the law, so a minimal standard of compliance would

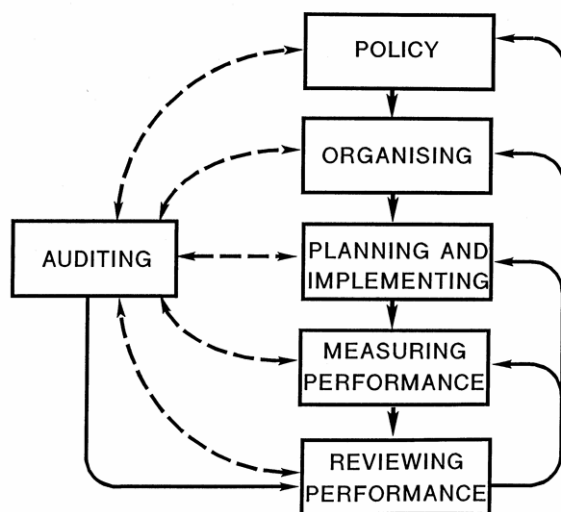
have only prevented a small percentage of the sampled accidents. This infers that employers must not merely observe minimal compliance, they must always strive to achieve a higher standard by challenging what appeared to be “not reasonable precautions”

The development of Health and Safety at Work Act, shortly after this time attempted to do this and the very first legislation under this Act were the First Aid Regulations of 1981. The first structure approach to risk management, however, did not appear until 1992 when the “Six-pack” Regulations emanating from EU Directives introduced explicit obligations to carry out risk assessment. These were also incorporated into the guidance in HSG65, Successful Health and Safety Management, which launched the well-known “POPIMAR” diagram, below.

The task of risk assessment is obviously focussed on the “Planning and Implementing” stage, but all the others also have an influence on this crucial control. This is why it is important to make it as simple as possible and why the HSE developed the guidance in their “5 Steps to Risk Assessment”

The trouble is, he added, that employers find that hazards are most difficult to identify and define themselves and that, if they attempt to purchase expertise from a lot of publishers, they merely end up with an expensive manual of glossy, irrelevant Risk Assessments that stay on the office shelf! To prove the point, Tim said that he has about 60 clients, employing less than 50 employees, of whom 40% do not have adequate Risk Assessments. He went on to say that the HSE templates are technically good but were not interactive enough to be ‘customised’ by the user to suit

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their specific needs. This demanded that the user was able to comprehend and write a fairly competent standard of English and that poses a problem where it is not their first language. The HSE method is therefore labour intensive as well as too complex, he said. As an example, Tim cited an HSE “Example risk assessment for a warehouse”, which was 1800 words, on six pages!

The solution, Tim suggested, was a ‘Generic Risk Assessment’, that employers can edit and make specific for their situation. This could be provided, he went on, by a simple, structured checklist, where Employers can tick, or circle, the relevant factors and identify the hazards easily to select suitable and sufficient control measures. The audience had been provided with a suite of blank risk assessment proformas, with Level 1 assessments leading to Level 2 assessments, comprising the foundations of an Integrated Risk Management System (These are published on the BHSEA website). These comprised: -

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- Level 1 Risk Assessment Form.
- Level 2 Workplace Risks.
- Level 2 Work Equipment Risks.
- Level 2 Manual Handling Risks.
- Level 2 Hazardous Substances Risks.
- Level 2 Display Screen Equip Risks.
- Level 2 Fire Risks.
- Level 2 Environmental Risks.
- Level 2 Other Risks (one offs)

Tim guided the audience through the completion and use of these forms and then examined the identification of hazards, which is not as easy as it sounds, he suggested! For instance: -

- Not all hazards are obvious
- Some only occur during maintenance or emergencies
- Some are not detected by our five senses, and
- Some are new and not previously thought of as hazardous

As an example, Tim displayed the photograph, below, and asked, “where is the hazard”? Apparently, this is a perfect working area, as befits a high tech., precision machine working area, in a food factory. The answer lay in something that was ‘sensed’ in this area, and many others, throughout the factory. The truth was only revealed when a noise frequency analysis detected a 31.5 Hz, low frequency sound, emanating from the centrifugal fan in the foreground. Tim went on to show photographs of bell founders who failed to wear protective boots, when casting molten metal, and a steam lance used for pipe cleaning that dropped chemicals on workers below! Both of these were examples, he said, of what could be missed in initial risk assessments and where the application needed to be monitored, or where their proximity to ‘other workers’ had to be considered.



Where is the Hazard? It's invisible – but you can hear it!

Factors like this could be identified by consulting operators who would be aware of ‘less obvious’ factors like this and whose involvement would ultimately secure an improved commitment to the successful operation of the risk assessments.

Tim followed this up with a hazard-spotting case study in a warehouse, just to liven up the audience a little bit! The warehouse employed 14 workers, on a 50-hour working week and received some visitors to the premises. The first stage of the exercise was to conduct a Level 1 risk assessment, by observing a cartoon view of the warehouse. Then Tim displayed a completed Level 2 risk assessment for the Workplace to demonstrate the progression from hazards to risks.

Tim concluded by saying that the identification of risks should be done by relying on the best information available and it was a definite advantage if they were also trusted by Insurers! The most obvious were the HSE and CITB, which had been established the longest in UK. Increasingly, Trade Association guidance is found to be good and Tim commented that the following were excellent quality sources: -

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) - USA and Worksafe (Australia)
- Occupational Safety and Health, New Zealand.
- Canada's National Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)HSG129, Health and Safety in Engineering Workshops

The Chairman thanked Tim for his very comprehensive presentation of a very suitable risk assessment system for most SMEs and the members joined him with a vote of thanks.