

Grey Paper No.24 - November 2014 - Health and Safety Risk Assessment

Grey Paper No.6 issued in 2003 gave advice about writing a **Health and Safety Policy** for your theatre. Grey Paper No.16, issued in 2010, dealt with the specific question of **Fire Risk Assessment**.

This paper gives advice about the generality of Risk Assessment and is drawn from a leaflet issued by the Health & Safety Executive in August 2014.

Copies of the full leaflet and further advice, including a risk assessment template can be downloaded from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk>

Introduction

As part of managing the health and safety of your business, you must control the risks in your theatre. To do this you need to think about what might cause harm to people and decide whether you are taking reasonable steps to prevent that harm. In order to do this you should undertake a risk assessment. You know your building and the activities that take place in it better than anyone else and are therefore in an ideal position to know the hazards that exist.

A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in your theatre.

The procedure is relatively simple.

1. Identify the hazards

One of the most important aspects of your risk assessment is accurately identifying the potential hazards in your theatre. A good starting point is to walk around your theatre and think about any hazards. In other words, what is it about the activities, processes or substances used that could injure anyone using the building?

Some of the things you might do are:

☐ ☐ **Check manufacturers' instructions or data sheets for chemicals and equipment** as they can be very helpful in explaining the hazards and putting them in their true perspective.

☐ ☐ **Look back at your accident and ill-health records** – these often help to identify the less obvious hazards.

☐ ☐ **Take account of non-routine operations** (eg maintenance, cleaning operations or changes in production cycles). Remember to think about long-term hazards to health (eg high levels of noise or exposure to harmful substances).

There are some hazards with a recognised risk of harm, for example working at height, working with chemicals, machinery etc.

2. Who might be harmed?

Think how anyone using the theatre – actors, directors, technicians, set builders, bar and front of house staff and audience might be harmed. Ask your active members what they think the hazards are, as they may notice things that are not obvious to you and may have some good ideas on how to control the risks.

For each hazard you need to be clear about who might be harmed – it will help you identify the best way of controlling the risk. That doesn't mean listing everyone by name, but rather identifying groups of people as above.

3. Evaluate the risks

Having identified the hazards, you then have to decide how likely it is that harm will occur, ie the level of risk and what to do about it. Risk is a part of everyday life and you are not expected to eliminate all risks. What you must do is make sure you know about the main risks and the things you need to do to manage them responsibly.

Generally, you need to do everything 'reasonably practicable' to protect people from harm. This means balancing the level of risk against the measures needed to control the real risk in terms of money, time or trouble. However, **you do not need to take action if it would be grossly disproportionate to the level of risk.**

Your risk assessment should only include what you could reasonably be expected to know – **you are not expected to anticipate unforeseeable risks.**

Look at what you're already doing and the control measures you already have in place. Ask yourself:

- ☐ ☐ Can I get rid of the hazard altogether?
- ☐ ☐ If not, how can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?

Some practical steps you could take include:

- ☐ ☐ trying a less risky option;
- ☐ ☐ preventing access to the hazards;
- ☐ ☐ organising your work to reduce exposure to the hazard;
- ☐ ☐ issuing protective equipment;
- ☐ ☐ providing welfare facilities such as first aid and washing facilities;
- ☐ ☐ involving and consulting with your active members.

Improving health and safety need not cost a lot but failure to take simple precautions can cost you a lot more if an accident does happen.

4. Record your significant findings

An easy way to record your findings is to use the risk assessment template which can be downloaded from the HSE Website. A risk assessment must be suitable and sufficient, ie it should show that:

- ☐ ☐ a proper check was made;
- ☐ ☐ you asked who might be affected;
- ☐ ☐ you dealt with all the obvious significant hazards, taking into account the number of people who could be involved;
- ☐ ☐ the precautions are reasonable, and the remaining risk is low;
- ☐ ☐ you involved the appropriate people in the process

If your risk assessment identifies a number of hazards, you need to put them in order of importance and address the most serious risks first. Identify long-term solutions for the risks with the biggest consequences, as well as those risks most likely to cause accidents or ill health. You should also establish whether there are improvements that can be implemented quickly, even temporarily, until more reliable controls can be put in place.

Remember, the greater the hazard the more robust and reliable the measures to control the risk of an injury occurring will need to be.

5. Regularly review your risk assessment

Few workplaces stay the same. Sooner or later, you will bring in new equipment, substances and procedures that could lead to new hazards. So it makes sense to review what you are doing on an ongoing basis, look at your risk assessment again and ask yourself:

- ☐ ☐ Have there been any significant changes?
- ☐ ☐ Are there improvements you still need to make?
- ☐ ☐ Have your workers spotted a problem?
- ☐ ☐ Have you learnt anything from accidents or near misses?

Make sure your risk assessment stays up to date.

This paper has been prepared by Tom Williams drawing on information contained in the Health and Safety Executive leaflet **Risk Assessment – a brief guide to controlling risks in the workplace**. The full leaflet may be downloaded from www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.htm

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