

Steps for Conducting a Risk Assessment



Not all risks hold equal weight. For example, focusing efforts on reducing the frequency of safety-related incidents does not necessarily lead to a coinciding reduction in the severity of incidents.

Seasoned safety professionals understand that to effectively protect workers, safety activities must go beyond compliance. That is why more and more organizations are embracing the use of a risk management approach. Risk assessment, specifically, is a process designed to evaluate a work task's injury and illness potential, assuming current levels of risk and existing controls. It also helps in decision-making about what new controls to implement and prioritization of safety expenditures.

If particular incidents continue to plague your company, your incident rates have plateaued, or you're concerned about the next big serious injury or fatality, a formalized risk assessment process may be your next best move.

Program Planning for Risk Assessment

These seven steps lay the ground work for the overall success of a risk assessment process:

- Purpose and scope
- Communication
- Employee engagement
- Task identification
- Define uses/applications
- Method(s) for updates
- Measurement

Purpose and Scope

Establishing the purpose of the risk assessment process allows the organization to set the direction, tone and expectations for implementation and ongoing use. This helps the organization clearly communicate why they are performing risk assessments and what they hope to get out of the exercise. It may be beneficial to create a purpose or vision statement for your risk assessment process.

The scope helps identify who will be involved in the risk assessment process (Areas? Departments? Which tasks or processes?). Stakeholders and team member roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are laid out. The degree, extent and rigor of the risk assessment process are defined. The assessment methodology to be used is provided as well as the risk criteria. Identifying resources available and information on internal capabilities in terms of knowledge and means will be extremely helpful.

Communication

As part of an organization's overall safety and health communication plan, specifics regarding the risk assessment process are critical. Consider things like:

- What is a risk assessment?
- Why is the organization doing them?
- Who will be involved?
- How can they help reduce overall safety and health incidents?
- How will they be done?
- When will they be done?

Strong communication plans have objectives and key messages for various organizational audiences, as well as internal and external communication schedules.



Employee Engagement

Many studies show the correlation between employee engagement and overall organizational and worker benefits. Workers feel a sense of pride and ownership when they are involved, which often leads to greater adoption of proposed changes within an organization. Management gets the benefit of employees' extensive knowledge of the tasks they perform that are critical inputs to the risk assessment process. Consider how employees across all levels of the organization can be involved in this process and why they should be involved.

Task Identification

This is where the risk assessment process starts. Organizations need to determine how to identify specific tasks involving high risk(s). A task is a specific activity being completed that clearly advances a work assignment. A task differs from a job, which is a specific duty/role/function as part of an occupation. For example, a forklift operator (a job) performs many tasks during a shift: unloading trucks, stacking materials, delivering material to a specific location, etc. Some of these tasks may have more hazards or higher risk than others.

Information to create a task list can come from existing sources: incident logs, workers' compensation loss runs, job observations, inspections, regulatory requirements, applicable consensus standards, JSA/JHA, BOPs, SOPs, work instructions and other procedures/sources. The organization should review routine and non-routine tasks. Consider past events, situations and circumstances that have, or could have, led to a serious injury or fatality.

Define Uses and Applications

Organizations that are successful with their risk management process define ongoing uses and applications for risk assessment. Frequently they are tied to the organization's management of change (MoC) process. Often establishments tie risk assessments to existing programs, such as incident investigations or inspections. Risk assessments are a strong part of a mature safety and health management system.

Method(s) for Updates

In order to keep this tool useful and relevant, it is essential for the organization to define the method(s) for periodic updates and stick to it. Often this is accomplished by some sort of annual review by the area/department owner (operations) with guidance from the safety and health team.

Measurement

Part of determining success is the ability for an organization to see the bigger picture of overall risk reduction. It is important to develop ways to track and communicate risk reduction progress. Often this is accomplished by creating leading indicators that reflect improvement. Common operational leading indicators developed relate to: the number of risk assessments per plan/target completed; percent of risks mitigated by area/site; and task risk reduction score.

Steps to a Risk Assessment

When it comes to actually starting a risk assessment, use the following steps:

1. Choose a task
2. Identify concerns (hazards/injury/illness) for the task
3. Identify current controls in place
4. Define risk criteria (risk matrix)
5. Score the task (frequency, likelihood, consequence)
6. Risk evaluation – does it fall within tolerable levels?
7. Identify additional controls to implement
8. Rescore task

Looking for Additional Help?

- Attend one of the Council's [Risk Assessment Workshops](#)
- [Seek assistance from NSC consultants](#) that can:
 - Help you customize the materials you receive in the workshop for your operations
 - Review your progress after attending the workshop and offer insight and advice
 - Assist you in prioritizing tasks on which to complete a risk assessment
 - Offer options for new controls to put in place for your specific risks