

Risk assessment for event organisers

This Briefing is intended for voluntary event organisers who do not have access to the full range of training and support available to larger organisations. Its aim is to offer a simple and basic explanation of risk assessments to help you organise a safe and well-run event. It is not intended to be an exhaustive guide.

More information on formulating risk assessments can be obtained from the Health and Safety authorities in your nation. Further details are given at the end of this Briefing.

Common misconceptions

- Risk assessments only need to be done for large events.
- Risk assessments only need to be done by professional event organisers.
- Risk assessments are complicated.
- Risk assessments are something you don't have to worry about.

What is a risk assessment?

Quite simply, a risk assessment is an assessment of the risk involved in a particular activity. This assessment of risk will allow you to make a decision about what steps, if any, are necessary to reduce that risk.

Why do I need a risk assessment?

- As an event organiser, you have a responsibility to the public to ensure that your event is run in as safe and appropriate a manner as possible.
- A risk assessment ensures that you have thought through the safety implications of the activity and taken all possible steps to reduce risks, where appropriate.
- A risk assessment can never guarantee that your event will run without incident, but acting on its findings will significantly reduce the chance of problems occurring.
- If anything does go wrong, a risk assessment will show that you have done your best to predict and reduce risk. For anyone faced with a claim or prosecution relating to health and safety, the difference between having a written risk assessment and not having one may be very significant.

Don't panic

As an event organiser you almost certainly conduct risk assessments already, whether you know it or not! Take the following hypothetical case study:

JB holds a quilting morning for young mothers at her home. Six mothers attend, with their children. Two other mothers expressed an interest in attending recently but JB turned them down as she thought this would be too many children. A parent once asked if they could bring their family dog. JB said no as she thought the animal might be too boisterous and a child could get hurt. As a matter of course, JB keeps children out of the kitchen when she's preparing drinks and ensures that all cups are tidied away as soon as they are finished with.



Without really knowing it, JB has conducted a mental risk assessment of her event and taken the appropriate measures to reduce risk.

You might be thinking that surely there is really no need to conduct a risk assessment for such a simple activity? Well, consider the following points related to this quilting morning.

- If any child were injured at JB's house, she could well be found liable if it was considered that she'd acted negligently.
- A risk assessment takes very little time to produce, once you know what you are doing
- A risk assessment can save lives.
- A risk assessment shows that you have thought through the possibilities of danger at your event and have taken appropriate action.
- A risk assessment encourages you to think about all the risks associated with an event. It can result in considering areas of risk that might not otherwise have crossed your mind, and doing something about them.

JB sits down and writes a full risk assessment for her event. This makes her think fully about the event and its safety implications. She uses the following form to help her:

Assessment – Quilting group meeting

Hazards identified	Personal injury to children resulting from overcrowding	Personal injury to children resulting from hot liquid spillage in the kitchen
Hazard severity	Low/medium	High
Likelihood of occurrence	High	Medium/High
Residual risk rating	Medium	High
Control measures required	Event numbers to be restricted to 7 adults and 9 children	Children prohibited from entering the kitchen

At future sessions, JB always acts in accordance with her own risk assessment. In practice, this means ensuring she has a good look around the house to identify safety hazards before each event. She also makes a simple form for new parents which includes a space for them to list their child’s allergies and illnesses, and requires a signature to say the child remains the parent’s responsibility during the event.

It’s all very simple stuff, but JB is now much happier, knowing that she has fully thought through the safety implications of her event and is acting accordingly. In the coming months, the risk assessment ensures that her event runs smoothly and, more than once, it saves potentially dangerous situations from occurring. Are you convinced yet?

Steps to writing a risk assessment

The information below is not intended as an exhaustive or authoritative guide and should be read in conjunction with relevant Health and Safety documentation (see Further Resources).

Hazards identified

Think about all the things that could realistically go wrong and write them down. Don’t worry about how it sounds. Although the risk assessment examples in this are formally written, an informal risk assessment is quite acceptable. The important thing is that you do one!

- A ‘hazard’ is anything which has the potential to cause harm to people.
- A ‘risk’ is the likelihood of the harm from a hazard being realised and the extent of it.

Hazard severity

If it happens, how bad would it be?

- Not that bad? (‘low’)
- Pretty bad? (‘medium’)
- Very bad? (‘high’)

Give a rough indication of severity. You can always combine two ratings, e.g. ‘low/medium’. If the hazard severity is variable, i.e. could range from low to high, you can represent it as ‘medium’. For *‘Marquees might catch fire!’*, the hazard severity would be *High*.

Likelihood of occurrence

‘How likely is it to happen?’ What this actually means here is ‘How likely is it to happen if you don’t take any actions to reduce the risk beyond the controls which are already in place?’ Use the same scale of measurement as you used for ‘Hazard severity’ above. For *‘Marquees might catch fire!’*, the likelihood of occurrence would be *Low*.

Residual risk rating

Using the same scale of measurement again, the residual risk rating is a representation of the average of the hazard severity rating and the likelihood of occurrence rating.

For example:

Hazard severity	Low	Medium	Medium/High
Likelihood of occurrence	High	High	Low
Residual risk rating	Medium	Medium/High	Medium

An easy way to think about it is by using the following scores: Low = 1; Medium = 2; High = 3

A combined rating is the lower score plus one half, e.g. Low/Medium = 1.5; Medium/High = 2.5

To work out the average, add the scores of the hazard severity rating and the likelihood of occurrence rating and divide by two. Round all results less than or more than one half down and up respectively. **So...**

Assessment – Quilting group meeting

Hazards identified	Example A	Example B
Hazard severity	Medium: 2	High
Likelihood of occurrence	High: 3	Medium/High
Residual risk rating	2+3 = 5, 5/2 = 2.5 2.5 = Medium/High	High
Control measures required	Event numbers to be restricted to 7 adults and 9 children	Children prohibited from entering the kitchen

The residual risk rating allows you to see, at a glance, the combination of the hazard severity and the likelihood of occurrence.

Control measures required

What action can you take to remove the risk or reduce it to an acceptable level? Most of the time there will be a simple solution to a problem. What you should do is identify the risk and ensure that it's minimised every time.

What we actually mean here is what realistic action can you take to reduce the risk? For any risk there may be a variety of solutions that could be put in place to contain it. You should select the most appropriate solution bearing in mind the residual risk rating and the event specifics.

For example, take the following risk: a trailing power cable from a P.A. unit to a performance area presents a trip hazard to the public.

For a small event with a low attendance, the hazard might carry a low residual risk rating. Solutions such as secure in-house taping or matting might be sufficient for such events.

For a large event with a significant attendance and where crowd disturbance has been identified as a possibility, the hazard might carry a high residual risk rating. An appropriate solution would be to provide a secure and certified structure to carry the cable overhead. In-house taping or matting would not be an appropriate solution here.

Your aim should be to identify an appropriate solution that's achievable within your budget and personnel constraints. High cost solutions may reduce risks significantly but are not an option for many event organisers. Your objective is to remove the risk entirely or to reduce it to an acceptable level.



Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is within my power/ budget/capabilities to reduce the risk?
- Will taking this action eliminate the risk or reduce it to an acceptable level?

If the answer to the second question is 'no' and you cannot identify an appropriate solution that lies within your power/budget/ capabilities then you should look at removing the risk area entirely from your event. Or you could change the area in such a way that you'll be able to provide a solution that eliminates or sufficiently reduces the risk.

Note: It is rarely possible to completely remove a risk. Fencing off a generator with warning signs on the fence is generally an acceptable way of minimising risk to the public caused by an unfenced and unsigned appliance. However, this is not going to stop somebody who is determined to climb over that fence! What you've done is minimise risk to the best of your capabilities. This is what risk assessments are all about.



Further Resources

In 2014, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published the most recent guide to controlling risks in the workplace. You can download it free from the [HSE website](#) along with other [useful resources and templates](#).

Information on risk assessment across the UK and Ireland:

- [Health & Safety Executive](#) (England and Wales)
- [Health & Safety Executive](#) (Northern Ireland)
- [Health & Safety Authority](#) (Republic of Ireland)
- [Health & Safety Executive](#) (Scotland)

Voluntary Arts Briefings

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Organisation Information:

Voluntary Arts is the operating name of *The Voluntary Arts Network (VAN)* which is registered in Scotland as Company No. 139147 and Charity No. SC020345. Registered Office: The Creative Exchange, 29 Constitution Street, Edinburgh EH6 7BS.

Disclaimer:

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