This chapter explains the first step in the risk management process: hazard identification. It outlines how to observe and monitor your workplace to identify hazards and explains what types of hazards you may find.

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WHAT ARE YOUR DUTIES IN RELATION TO WORKPLACE HAZARDS?

Definition: Hazard

A hazard is any situation, substance, activity, event or environment that could potentially cause an injury or illness.

You have a duty under health and safety legislation to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that workers are not exposed to the risk of work-related harm.

To do this, you must carry out a risk management process that consists of four parts.

Definition: Risk Management

Risk management involves conducting hazard identification and risk assessment, and implementing, monitoring and reviewing control measures to reduce risks to the health and safety of workers.

To carry out your duty to undergo risk management processes, you must:

1. Identify hazards in your workplace.
2. Assess their potential to cause harm, i.e. conduct a risk assessment.
3. Control the risk by eliminating the hazard, or, if elimination is not reasonably practicable, minimise the risk using one or more controls.
4. Monitor the hazards and review the controls to ensure they are minimising the risks effectively.

Please refer to risk assessment and hierarchy of control in the word index for more information.
WHAT IS HAZARD IDENTIFICATION?

Hazard identification is the first step in the risk management process.

**Definition: Hazard Identification**

*Hazard identification is the range of processes used to identify hazards in the workplace.*

The most common workplace hazards are those related to:
- the working environment, e.g. an uneven or slippery floor, high noise levels, extremes of temperature or poor ventilation;
- stress;
- machinery and equipment;
- over-exertion;
- fire;
- electricity;
- toxic or poisonous chemicals;
- biological waste;
- confined spaces;
- manual handling, e.g. pushing, pulling, carrying, lifting and restraining or repetitive tasks;
- airborne contaminants, e.g. fumes, dust, vapours, and smoke;
- working at heights or over depth, e.g. over an open mine or pit; and
- exposure to UV radiation.

**Important:** Hazards causing risk of psychological illness (e.g. bullying, harassment, excessive workload or lack of support) can lead to long-term harm among workers.
Caution: You have an obligation under health and safety legislation to be proactive in your efforts to identify, assess and control risks in your workplace before they cause an injury or incident. It is not enough to simply react to hazards that have already caused an incident, whether or not actual harm has resulted.

HOW TO UNDERTAKE HAZARD IDENTIFICATION

To carry out effective hazard identification in your workplace, ensure that you:

- carefully inspect your workplace (see below);
- consult with workers about health and safety concerns (see page H 1/6); and
- regularly review relevant safety information (see page H 1/7).

Carefully inspect your workplace

Regularly inspect your workplace (every day if possible) by performing site visits to observe:

- how workers are carrying out their tasks; and
- whether there might be potential issues, e.g. workers not following safe operating procedures correctly. This will mean you can identify problems early on and work to address them.

Tip: Schedule onsite inspections at different times of the day to ensure you observe workplace activities at all relevant times.

During these workplace inspections, ask yourself the following questions:

- How is work actually being performed?
- Is equipment being used properly?
- Are correct procedures being followed?
- Are workers wearing correct personal protective equipment (PPE)?
- Are any hazardous chemicals or substances present?
- Are all necessary control measures in place?
- Are there any other factors likely to cause a risk?
Definition: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

*Personal protective equipment is equipment used or clothing worn by workers to reduce the risk of illness or injury from exposure to workplace hazards.*

**Important:** If you identify a hazard that could cause immediate or significant risk of injury or illness, move everyone in the surrounding area to a safer location first and attend to the hazard urgently.

Hazards are not always immediately obvious. As well as physical hazards, i.e. hazards likely to result in an injury, you should also look for risks posed by psychological hazards such as stress, bullying or fatigue.

**Tip:** Make a list of all the hazards you find, including the ones you know are already being dealt with. This way you can be sure all hazards have been identified and that nothing is missed. See the inspection action sheet template on page H 1/26.

**Consult with workers about health and safety concerns**

Ask your workers about any health and safety issues they may have noticed in the workplace, e.g. another worker not following safe operating procedures correctly.

Put reporting procedures in place so that workers can voice their concerns or have your workers complete anonymous surveys.

**Tip:** Confidential worker surveys can be a good way to identify issues that workers may not feel comfortable reporting, such as workplace bullying.
**Important:** Workers should report all incidents, even if no actual harm resulted, i.e. near misses. These reports could indicate hazards that may need your attention. If an incident has gone unreported, investigate the matter thoroughly and put processes in place to ensure that all future incidents are reported.

**Regularly review relevant safety information**

Review the information you have gathered in your business on a regular basis, including:

- health monitoring records;
- incident and near miss reports;
- complaints about health and safety, including complaints of bullying and interpersonal conflict;
- sick leave records; and
- the results of any inspections and investigations.

Reviewing this information can provide you with clues about areas in your workplace where there may be gaps in your safety systems.

**Tip:** Obtain information and advice about any hazards or risks relevant to the nature of your business and ensure you stay up-to-date about developments in your industry. You can find this information through regulators, industry associations, experts and safety consultants.

If you obtain plant from manufacturers or suppliers, request safety information from them, such as safety data sheets or updated instruction manuals.
**Definition: Safety Data Sheet (SDS)**

A safety data sheet (previously known as a material safety data sheet) provides information on the properties of a hazardous chemical and how the chemical affects health and safety. It also helps the user of a hazardous chemical to identify, assess and control risks associated with using that chemical.

Consider bringing in external auditors to review your operations from time to time.

**Tip:** If new equipment is being introduced it may be helpful to have a consultant or a representative of the supplier attend your workplace after the machinery is installed to assess any hazards that exist in the environment where the plant has been installed.

*Please refer to audit in the word index for more information.*

**CHECKLIST: HOW TO PROACTIVELY IDENTIFY HAZARDS IN YOUR WORKPLACE**

To proactively identify hazards in your workplace, undertake the following actions:

- Put in place a program where you will undertake annual inspections for hazards in all areas of your business. This process ensures that you do not miss any part of your business.

- Implement reporting procedures for workers to report any hazard they have identified and have them complete hazard reports to notify you of these.

- Provide product information to all workers where relevant, e.g. safety data sheets or operating manuals.

- Distribute publicly available data on hazards to your workforce so as to educate them on the potential hazards in your business, e.g. newspaper articles, industry alerts or WorkSafe alerts.

- Undertake daily safety inspections and periodic audits.
Monitor, measure and test for any potential hazard, e.g. conduct noise monitoring, electrical testing or atmospheric testing.

Perform a task evaluation process such as a job safety analysis for each relevant task.

Complete incident and near miss reports whenever an incident has occurred.

Carry out pre-start discussions before work commences.

Evaluate any proposed new or modified plant, material, process or structure.

Tip: These are just some ways to identify hazards. There are many other methods of hazard identification.

TYPES OF WORKPLACE HAZARDS YOU MIGHT IDENTIFY

A number of hazards are likely to exist in your workplace. The types of hazards relevant to your workplace will depend on the size and nature of your business.

Health and safety legislation requires all hazards to be identified and removed where reasonably practicable.

Hazards you identify may be:

- general hazards (see below); or
- special hazards (see page H 1/10).

Important: If special hazards exist in your workplace, your business will have to comply with additional obligations to ensure that those hazards are appropriately controlled.

GENERAL HAZARDS

Definition: General Hazard

A general hazard is a common hazard that exists in nearly all working environments.
General hazards exist in most work environments. For example, all offices will have similar types of health and safety risks.

General hazards include:

- working on a computer for an extended period of time;
- poor ergonomics;
- extremes of temperature;
- moving and handling items;
- interactions with customers;
- stress;
- bullying; and
- kitchen hazards (e.g. knives and cleaning products).

Other hazards can be present outside of the usual workplace, including:

- at office social functions;
- in a home working environment; and
- during off-site travel for work.

Please refer to work-related functions and working from home in the word index for more information.

**Important:** Your business has a duty of care to identify the general hazards that exist in your workplace and take reasonably practicable steps to eliminate the risks posed by those hazards.

Please refer to office safety in the word index for more information.

**SPECIAL HAZARDS**

**Definition: Special Hazard**

A special hazard is an activity (e.g. manual handling) or substance (e.g. a hazardous chemical) that has a higher degree of risk associated with it than a general hazard.
Special hazards exist in particular industries, such as the construction and manufacturing industry. Specific requirements apply for these hazards within the relevant legislation.

Examples of special hazards include:

- manual handling (see below);
- working in confined spaces (see page H 1/16);
- hazardous chemicals (see page H 1/19);
- dangerous goods (see page H 1/21); and
- asbestos (see page H 1/24).

**Important:** You need to be aware of all health and safety hazards that exist in your workplace. Since special hazards have a higher level of risk than regular hazards, you must ensure that your workplace has effective procedures in place to identify and control them.

**Tip:** It is important to keep up-to-date with the health and safety legislation and regulations that apply in your jurisdiction to assess whether there are changes to how special hazards in your workplace need to be controlled.

**MANUAL HANDLING**

Any manual handling tasks (both current and proposed) that could pose a health and safety risk must be identified in your workplace.

**Definition: Manual Handling**

*Manual handling is any activity that requires the use of force exerted by a person to lift, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain any person, animal or thing.*
You must also identify hazardous manual handling tasks whenever changes occur in the workplace, e.g. if new machinery is introduced, or new information or reports of injuries are brought to your attention.

Injuries during manual handling may be caused by:

- overload or intense activity, e.g. attempting to lift a heavy object;
- ongoing physical strain from repetitive movements, e.g. back pain, repetitive stress injury, etc;
- lifting or twisting;
- jerking or unexpected movements;
- awkward posture or working in a fixed position over a long period of time; and
- vibration, e.g. using a jackhammer.

**Important:** Poor manual handling (often associated with poor workplace design) results in a significant proportion of all incidents in Australian workplaces and causes major costs to employers.

**Caution:** Do not just rely on worker supervision to solve the problem as it is not possible to supervise workers all the time. It is far better to have processes and training in place to ensure workers undertake correct safety procedures when carrying out manual handling tasks.

To identify whether a task has a manual handling risk, consider the following questions:

- Does the task involve:
  - repetitive movement;
  - heavy lifting;
  - vibration;
  - high or sudden force;
  - sustained or awkward postures; or
  - repetitive or sustained forces?
- Does the task last for a long duration?
MANUAL HANDLING TIPS

There are certain factors you can consider that will help to reduce risks involved in all manual handling tasks, though specific advice will depend on the nature of the task.

Before undertaking tasks involving repetitive movements, vibration, high or sudden force, or sustained or awkward posture, consider whether you can:

- modify the task (see below);
- modify the layout of the worksite (see below);
- change how loads are moved through the worksite (see below); or
- change the process (see page H 1/14).

**Definition: Load**

A load is any object that you lift. A load more than 4.5kg may pose a risk to a worker who is lifting from a seated position. A load greater than 16kg may pose a risk to a worker who is lifting from a standing position.

**Modify the task**

Determine whether the task can be modified. For example, when handling a load, consider whether the load may be modified or repackaged into a smaller weight or a different size or shape.

**Modify the layout of the worksite**

Consider whether the plant, equipment or furniture may be modified or rearranged to reduce the effects of repetitive movements, vibration, high or sudden force, or sustained or awkward posture.

**Change how loads are moved through the worksite**

Consider whether you can change the schedule, timing and path of how loads are transported through the workplace. For example, the risks in repetitive movements or awkward posture may be reduced by rearranging loads and how they are moved around the worksite.
Change the process

Consider whether, even without workplace modifications, a task may be done in a different way, i.e. using different actions, movements and forces in order to reduce repetitive movements, high or sudden force, or sustained or awkward posture.

4 STEPS TO REDUCE MANUAL HANDLING RISKS WHEN LIFTING A LOAD

If your workers undertake work tasks involving manual handling, ensure they are properly trained and competent in correct manual handling techniques.

Important: Workers should only lift and lower loads from surfaces between knee and waist height and should use mechanical assistance whenever possible.

When workers are lifting an object from ground level, ensure that they:

1. Stand close to the object they are lifting.
2. Keep their feet apart and squat down by bending at the knees.
3. Keep their back as straight as possible while lifting the object.
4. Lift using their legs, keeping their back straight.
Tip: If a task requires regular lifting, consider sharing the task between two or more workers.

CHECKLIST: HOW TO AVOID A MANUAL HANDLING INJURY

Use the following checklist to reduce the risks associated with manual handling tasks in your workplace:

- Design the workplace to allow for the safe handling of objects, e.g. use ergonomic furniture and ensure workstations are at a height that minimises bending and stretching.

- Ensure that the tools you provide:
  - are in good condition;
  - are suitable for the task; and
  - do not create any additional risks, e.g. a blunt knife will mean the worker will need to exert more force to use it.

- Train and supervise your workers to ensure they safely carry out all manual handling tasks.

- Regularly review your control measures and ensure that workers are continuing to use correct manual handling techniques.

- Conduct a risk assessment for each manual handling task you have identified.

- Control the risks associated with manual handling tasks, e.g. use mechanical aids where possible, such as conveyor belts or forklifts, to assist in moving heavy loads.

Please refer to risk assessment in the word index for more information.

WORKING IN CONFINED SPACES

Definition: Confined Space
A confined space is any enclosed structure that has limited access and may contain a potentially harmful atmosphere.

Examples of confined spaces include:

- tanks;
- pits;
- chimneys;
- silos;
- underground sewers;
- tunnels; and
- wells.

Confined spaces pose a threat to health and safety because they may:

- be low in oxygen;
- contain a toxic atmosphere; and/or
- have an engulfment or entrapment risk.

Tip: A mineshaft and the workings of a mine are excluded from the definition of a confined space because mining has its own specific legislation.
Important: All workers who enter a confined space must have an entry permit to do so. A permit lists the confined space that the worker is permitted to enter, and sets out the measures to control risks for that space (e.g. pre-entry atmospheric testing, ventilation methods and the use of a standby person).

Designers, manufacturers and suppliers of plant and structures that have a confined space must either remove the need for a person to enter the space or ensure safe means of entry and exit.

For example, if a building requires a drainage pit for chemicals, the building’s design should try to minimise the need for any person to enter the pit. Failing that, any access point should provide sufficient space for the person to enter safely and enough oxygen should be present for a worker to perform any necessary repairs.

Caution: Eliminate the need for working in a confined space whenever possible. Other hazards (including noise, chemicals, inadequate ventilation and extreme temperatures) can pose much higher risks within confined spaces.

Tip: Try to design your workplace so that maintenance and monitoring equipment is not situated in a confined space. This will minimise the need for entering a confined space.

CHECKLIST: HOW TO REDUCE THE RISKS OF WORKING IN CONFINED SPACES

To reduce risks associated with working in confined spaces, complete the following checklist:

- Identify each confined space in your workplace.
- Use signage to notify others that the confined space has restricted entry.
- Identify each reasonably foreseeable hazard associated with working in the space.
- Engage a suitably qualified person to undertake a risk assessment before any work commences.
☐ Regularly review the risk assessment, i.e. before each entry into the confined space.

☐ Document who has additional duties in relation to working in a confined space, including who has the responsibility to:
  ▪ identify hazards and conduct a risk assessment;
  ▪ conduct atmospheric testing and monitoring;
  ▪ issue entry permits;
  ▪ implement training and assess the competency of workers;
  ▪ assign, control, delegate and review confined space procedures; and
  ▪ undertake standby and emergency responses.

☐ Keep records of:
  ▪ the location of confined spaces;
  ▪ the training conducted;
  ▪ risk assessments and risk control measures in place;
  ▪ inspection, calibration and maintenance of confined space safety and rescue equipment;
  ▪ inspections and audits of confined spaces; and
  ▪ reports related to any incidents associated with the confined space.

☐ Provide approved confined space entry training for all workers required to work in confined spaces, including information on:
  ▪ working in confined spaces;
  ▪ risk management processes;
  ▪ emergency procedures; and
  ▪ the selection, use, fitting and maintenance of safety equipment.

☐ Issue entry permits to workers (including contractors) who enter confined spaces. Ensure that no person enters or works in a confined space unless authorised by an entry permit issued by you.
Ensure your workers use the appropriate PPE, e.g. a respiratory protection device, harness or eye protection. This will vary depending on the type of confined space they are working in.

Ensure that appropriate confined space rescue arrangements are in place when workers are within confined spaces and can be actioned immediately, e.g. have a person stand by with a fire extinguisher and ensure workers have access to first aid supplies.

Ensure that any work performed in a confined space is performed in accordance with the requirements of AS 2865 Safe Working in a Confined Space.

Please refer to risk assessment in the word index for more information.

**Tip:** The Confined Spaces Code of Practice on the Safe Work Australia website (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au) provides practical guidance for managing the risks of confined spaces and has a helpful flowchart to assist you in identifying confined spaces.

**HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS**

**Definition: Hazardous Chemical**

A hazardous chemical is any substance, mixture or article that satisfies the criteria for one or more Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals hazard classes. These chemicals have potentially adverse effects on human health.

**Caution:** Adverse effects caused by exposure to hazardous chemicals can be serious even if they are not immediately recognisable.
To determine whether a chemical is hazardous, check:

- the label;
- the hazard pictogram;
- the safety data sheet (SDS); or
- the National Industrial Chemical Notification and Assessment Scheme chemical assessment reports.

**Definition: Hazard Pictogram**

A hazard pictogram is a symbol representing a hazard depicted in a white background framed with a red border.

Examples of hazardous chemicals include:

- solvents, e.g. dry-cleaning liquid or paint thinners;
- printing inks and dyes;
- resins;
- paints;
- adhesives; and
- cleaning products.

**Tip:** Consult the Australian Dangerous Goods Code for the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (ADG Code) if your business is involved in the transport of hazardous chemicals. You can also find guidance in the Code of Practice Managing Risks of Hazardous Chemicals in the Workplace, which can be found at [www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au).

**Caution:** Chemicals can expose workers to direct health risks (e.g. chemical poisoning) and can also create risks to workplace safety (e.g. by causing a fire or explosion). Be extremely careful if dangerous chemicals are used or stored in your workplace.
Case Law

In Inspector Ken Kumar v David Ritchie (2006), an employee died after an explosion occurred while he was cleaning a tank containing a resin solution using a highly flammable substance known as MEK.

No audit had been undertaken to assess the risk of MEK causing explosions. Both the company and its CEO, Mr Ritchie, were successfully prosecuted by WorkCover.

Please refer to chemical safety in the word index for more information.

DANGEROUS GOODS

By their very nature, dangerous goods are a hazard.

Definition: Dangerous Goods

Dangerous goods are substances or articles that present an immediate hazard to people, property or the environment because of their physical, chemical or acutely toxic properties.

Examples of dangerous goods include:

- explosives, e.g. sparklers, firecrackers and ammunition;
- flammable liquids, e.g. lighter fluid and perfumes; and
- corrosives, e.g. dishwashing detergent.

Important: Work Health and Safety (WHS) Regulations cover dangerous goods and hazardous substances under a single framework for hazardous chemicals. In Victoria and Western Australia, dangerous goods and hazardous substances are covered by separate legislation.

Tip: The criteria used to determine whether substances are classified as dangerous goods is contained in the ADG Code.
Important: Under the WHS Act, the Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) will be used instead of the ADG Code to classify hazardous chemical classes in the workplace from 31 December 2016. The ADG Code will not be used other than for the transport of hazardous chemicals that are classified as dangerous goods.

Tip: Many dangerous goods are chemicals that are also classified as hazardous substances, such as pool chlorination products and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). This means that a substance may be regulated by more than one piece of legislation.

Please refer to dangerous goods in the word index for more information.

CHECKLIST: HOW TO REDUCE THE RISKSPOSED BY DANGEROUS GOODS

Use the following checklist to reduce the risks that dangerous goods, including hazardous chemicals, pose in your workplace:

- Always select the safest product for the task.
- Obtain a current safety data sheet (SDS) (i.e. less than 5 years old) from the product supplier for each hazardous substance you use in the workplace.
- Make the SDS readily available to your workers.
- Provide your workers with adequate induction, instruction and training on the hazardous substance.
- Ensure that your workers:
  - follow all instructions for safe storage, clean up and disposal of dangerous goods; and
  - comply with safe operating procedures.
Assess the risks created by work that involves potential exposure to any dangerous goods, e.g. by conducting atmospheric monitoring, and act on all recommendations. The assessment should be reviewed when significant changes occur, and at least once every 5 years. Reviews should be more frequent for chemicals that carry a higher risk of injury or illness.

Maintain records of risk assessments, instruction and training.

Minimise the quantities of dangerous goods and hazardous chemicals stored onsite (including empty containers).

Prepare and maintain a register of all the dangerous goods used and stored in your workplace. The register must contain a list of product names as well as their classification and quantities.

Correctly label containers and pipes with placards and signs regarding dangerous goods, e.g. “Contains ammonia”.

Conduct atmospheric testing and/or health monitoring if necessary.

Develop a plan to deal with emergencies and ensure that a copy of the plan is available where dangerous goods are stored.

Require all supervisors to actively ensure that workers comply with safe operating procedures.

Please refer to risk assessment and health monitoring in the word index for more information.

**Caution:** Notify your health and safety regulator immediately if hazardous chemicals stored or used in your workplace exceed the amounts specified in the Code of Practice Managing Risks of Hazardous Chemicals in the Workplace. This can be found at [www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au).
Important: You are also required to notify the safety regulator in your State or Territory if your workplace stores or handles dangerous goods in excess of the quantities specified by your regulator. Please refer to the Information Directory for information on your relevant safety regulator.

ASBESTOS

Definition: Asbestos

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that was commonly used in the Australian residential building industry between the 1940s and 1970s due to its durability, fire resistance and insulating properties. It is now known that asbestos gives off small fibres that can easily be inhaled, which are a major health hazard.

Caution: Under health and safety regulations, it is prohibited for a PCBU to carry out, or direct or allow a worker to carry out, work involving asbestos (subject to limited exceptions).

Important: An asbestos register is a requirement in all States and Territories. See page H 1/27 for an asbestos register template.

CHECKLIST: HOW TO REDUCE THE RISKS OF ASBESTOS IN YOUR WORKPLACE

To reduce the risks associated with asbestos in your workplace, ensure you do the following:

- Identify all products and materials in your workplace that contain asbestos.
- Create and maintain an asbestos register, with details of all the products and materials that contain asbestos and their current condition.
If asbestos is in your workplace, prepare an asbestos management plan that:

- identifies the asbestos;
- outlines how to manage asbestos in your workplace;
- outlines procedures for reporting incidents or emergencies involving asbestos; and
- provides information for workers carrying out work involving asbestos.

Ensure that asbestos removal is done by a licensed remover and/or in strict accordance with jurisdictional asbestos regulations (check with your safety regulator for the regulations that apply to you).

Provide adequate information, instruction and training to your workers to ensure they are aware of the risks involved with asbestos. Ensure they understand the precautions they should take to protect their health.

Keep records of any training and information sessions you provide to your workers.

Conduct any necessary atmospheric monitoring or health monitoring and act on all recommendations.

Require all supervisors to ensure workers are complying with safe operating procedures.

Please refer to risk assessment and health monitoring in the word index for more information.
**INSPECTION ACTION SHEET**

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<th>Date of Inspection:</th>
<th>Area:</th>
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**Manager/Supervisor:**

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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Hazard identified</th>
<th>Action required (repair, replace, perform risk assessment)</th>
<th>Person responsible</th>
<th>Date due</th>
<th>Completion date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Building location</td>
<td>Type of asbestos</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Date of identification</td>
<td>Friable or non-friable?</td>
<td>Is this asbestos accessible?</td>
</tr>
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