A guide to

Risk control plans

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This guidance has been reviewed and updated for the sole purpose of amending year and regulation references relating to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, in line with amendments which came into effect on 18 June 2017.

1. Introduction

1.1 What is a risk control plan?

As an employer, you have a legal health and safety responsibility to identify and control workplace hazards and risks.

A risk control plan sets out how to plan for the control of risks in the workplace. It also enables you to identify which risk controls you currently have in place. It may help you meet your legal obligations to identify hazards, and assess and control risks.

This guide provides information about how to prepare an effective risk control plan. Use this guide to help you understand what to look for and do to make your workplace safe.

Involve employees in the workplace to use, and assist in the development and implementation of the risk control plan. This could include health and safety representatives (HSRs) and the OHS Committee (if you have one).

There may be a need for approved HSR training, manager/supervisor training or hazard-specific training.

1.2 The role of an inspector

WorkSafe Victoria inspectors enforce health and safety law. To do this, inspectors use tools such as prohibition notices (if there is an immediate risk) and improvement notices (if they detect a breach of legislation), and may refer matters for further investigation (where appropriate).

Inspectors can also provide practical advice on how to comply with OHS duties and improve workplace health and safety.

If there is no planned program to identify all hazards and to assess and control all risks, an inspector may recommend that you prepare a risk control plan. This should set out the employer's approach and timeframes for achieving compliance with legislation and effective hazard management. This is your opportunity to take the initiative and show how you will deal with risks in the workplace.

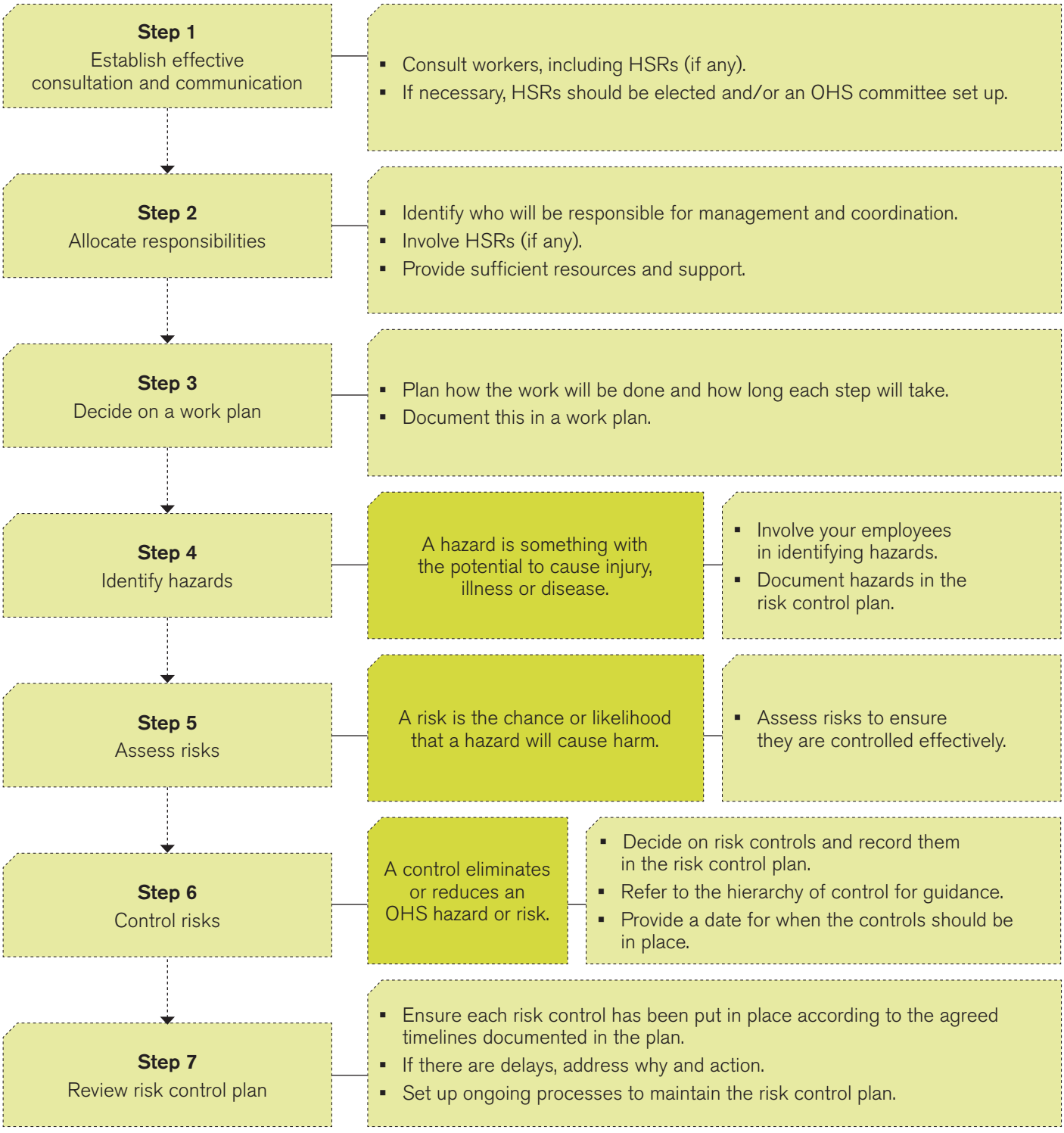
An inspector will assess the adequacy and timeliness of the risk control plan. If you are not implementing the risk control plan according to the agreed timeframe, inspectors may require you to take further action to control health and safety risks.

The inspector will also follow up on the action you have taken in response to any notices issued on a previous visit.

2. How to prepare a risk control plan

Penalties apply for a failure to comply with a notice.

2.1 How to prepare a risk control plan



Use the following step-by-step process to help you prepare the risk control plan.

2.2 Step 1 – Establish effective consultation and communication

A safe workplace is more easily achieved when employers and employees talk to each other about potential problems and work together to find solutions.

Consultation is a two-way exchange of information and ideas between employers and employees. It is a critical element in the identification of OHS hazards and the effective control of risks. Consultation should involve:

- sharing information about health and safety
- giving employees a reasonable opportunity to express their views
- taking those views into account.

Employees can be consulted in a variety of ways, including by setting up an OHS committee or by holding regular meetings. For example, toolbox talks may be appropriate. If employees have elected a health and safety representative (HSR), the HSR must be involved in consultation.

Communicate across the workplace

Regularly inform managers, HSRs and employees about what is being done to prepare the risk control plan. If you have separate groups working on the plan, make sure they keep each other informed of their progress. Often, the work of one group will impact on the work of others.

Different groups in the workplace will have different needs, for example:

- some employees may not be able to read or speak English very well
- night shift employees and off-site employees may not get the informal communication that day shift workers receive or be able to attend meetings.

You need to take this and other factors into account when choosing the appropriate communication methods.

2.3 Step 2 – Allocate responsibilities

A senior manager, employee or someone who has management and control of a workplace should be given responsibility for managing the preparation and implementation of the risk control plan.

To prepare the plan, you may need:

- administrative support
- expert advice (eg OHS professional, ergonomist)
- information and access to the workplace
- training
- approval to purchase new equipment or substances, if necessary.

2.4 Step 3 – Decide on working arrangements

A risk control plan can be prepared for a number of work areas including:

- the workplace as a whole
- work area (for larger workplaces)
- project by project (for example, for a construction company)
- hazard by hazard (eg for manual handling, plant or hazardous substances across the workplace).

It may be helpful to form teams to prepare different parts of the risk control plan. For example, each work area could set up a team to prepare their section of the risk control plan. Your OHS committee could be the group that pulls the different sections together into an overall plan.

Determine priority areas by assessing:

- the kinds of hazards involved
- the number and type of incidents/injuries reported in each area
- the number of people involved
- the level of risk
- any feedback on the effectiveness of your current controls.

2.5 Step 4 – Identify the hazards

A hazard is something with the potential to cause injury, illness or disease.

Hazards in a workplace can arise from a number of sources including:

- poor workplace design
- hazardous tasks being performed in the workplace
- poorly designed plant being introduced into the workplace
- incorrect installation, commissioning, use, inspection, maintenance, service, repair or alteration of plant in the workplace

- people being exposed to hazardous substances, process or environment.

Tools you can use to identify hazards include:

- reports from the workforce
- workplace inspections
- research and information from other organisations (eg your industry association, relevant unions, your WorkCover agent, WorkSafe Victoria)
- analysing incident and first aid reports (especially near miss reports)
- information from the suppliers of plant and substances (for example, safety data sheets)
- workplace monitoring (eg air monitoring, task observation)
- information from specialist staff or other parts of the business.

It's a good idea to involve your employees in this process as they are familiar with the workplace and work activities.

Identifying hazards before they enter the workplace is better than waiting until they have caused problems.

You can prevent hazards entering the workplace by thinking about health and safety when:

- purchasing new materials, plant and equipment
- designing new workplaces, work processes and activities.

2.6 Step 5 – Assess risks

After you've made a list of possible hazards, you should assess the risk. This means finding out how each hazard can cause harm and the seriousness of it. This helps to decide the best means of controlling each hazard and which hazards need the most urgent attention.

To assess a risk, you should examine the factors that affect the risk including:

- the number of people exposed to the risk
- the different types of people who are exposed and their special needs (eg new workers, contractors, members of the public, disabled workers)
- how they are exposed to the risk
- how often and how long they are exposed
- the combination of hazards they are exposed to
- how serious the harm could be
- what the law says about risk control (for example, OHS Regulations)
- the work processes involved (eg maintenance, cleaning, customer service)
- how effectively your current controls work.

Assessing risks helps you to make sure that you know what the problem is and to address the most serious problems first. It will help you to deal with the long term problems, as well as the immediate issues.

2.7 Step 6 – Control the risks

Once you've identified the hazards, and assessed and prioritised the risks, you should start implementing the appropriate risk control measures. By law, you are required to eliminate the risk, or if that is not reasonably practicable, reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practicable.
If the current control measures are inadequate or there continues to be a risk from a particular hazard, the following hierarchy of control may be used to find the best solution for controlling the risk.

a. Eliminate the risk from the workplace

The most effective form of control is to eliminate the risk at source. For example, when purchasing, avoid buying hazardous materials, plant or equipment. Consider whether the risks could be eliminated by a redesign of work systems or the workplace itself.

b. If you cannot eliminate risks, then you must reduce them as far as is reasonably practicable

The best way is to control a risk at its source by:

- substituting to a lower risk (for example, making the load lighter and less awkward for a hazardous manual handling task)
- isolating the source of the risk (for example, enclosing a noisy machine within a soundproof booth)
- using an engineering control (for example, guarding a power press or using a mechanical device to handle a heavy or awkward object).

c. If it is not possible to control a risk at its source:

- change work practices (for example, introducing job rotation to vary repetitive work)
- provide training (for example, training people in particular lifting techniques)
- provide personal protective equipment (for example, respirators).

Note: The risk control measures in c. should only be used in the short term when it is not practicable to control the risk at its source or reasonably practicable to use a higher order risk control option at that time.

You may have a number of actions to include in the risk control plan – some may require immediate action, others will take longer to put into place.

To prioritise your actions, think about:

- How severe is the risk?
- How immediate is the risk?
- Who does it affect?
- How easily can it be controlled?
- What other benefits would there be from controlling the risk?

Review the risk controls

Risk controls should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they have been implemented correctly and to monitor their effectiveness.

You need to review and, where necessary, revise your risk controls whenever changes are made to the workplace that could affect health and safety (for example, changes to the way work is done or to the equipment used and when the control measures no longer adequately control the risk). Employers must also review risk controls if an HSR requests a review.

It's important that all employees are informed of any changes to work practices that are a result of the implementation of new controls in the risk control plan.

Training

For employees to work safely and effectively, ensure they are well trained. Keep a record of training and regularly review all work practices.

2.8 Step 7 – Review progress and maintain the risk control plan

Your plan should be regularly reviewed and updated. It is a good idea to schedule review dates for your plan to ensure the work is being done in a reasonable timeframe and if there are delays, find out why this is so.

HSRs and the OHS committee (if you have one) should be involved in the reviews.

Note: The most effective way to control risks is to make sure they don't enter the workplace. Ensure that as hazards (tasks, work areas, processes) come to your attention they are placed on the list in the risk control plan, assessed and then risk controls implemented.

Appendix 1
How effective is your risk control plan?

Does your risk control plan have the following features?	No	Yes
Have you checked current controls, if any, are adequate?		
Have employees and health and safety representatives, if any, been involved in preparing the risk control plan?		
Are the roles and responsibilities for preparing the risk control plan clear?		
Has the employer signed off the plan?		
Has the employer provided sufficient resources to implement the plan (eg information, instruction, training)?		
Where necessary, have OHS professionals been engaged to assist in preparing the plan?		
Has the workplace been informed about the risk control plan?		
Have all of the hazards in the workplace been identified and listed in the risk control plan?		
Are new plant, substances and processes examined to stop new hazards before they enter the workplace?		
Have all of the factors that will affect the risks been considered in assessing risks?		
Are new plant, substances and processes examined to stop new hazards before they enter the workplace?		
Have all of the factors that will affect the risks been considered in assessing risks?		
Have you taken steps to control immediate risks?		
Do your control measures focus on controlling risks at their source?		
Do the control measures in the risk control plan reduce risk as far as practicable?		
Have timeframes in the risk control plan been established, and are they monitored to ensure any delays or problems are addressed?		
Does the risk control plan include a review of the effectiveness of risk controls?		
Have you set up ongoing processes to maintain your safety improvements?		

Appendix 2
Riskcontrol plan

Company and address:		**Inspection date:**	
Date of plan:		**Work areas the plan covers:**	
Who was consulted:		**Prepared by:**	
Signed by senior manager/date:		**Signed by HSR/date:**	

Identified issue	Proposed solution	Agreed actions	Due date/s	Person responsible	Status/ comments	Date completed	Review date
Example: No evidence that fire alarms had been tested	*Inspection/testing fire alarm system according to Australian Standard*	▪ *Establish contract with provider* ▪ *Establish preventative maintenance and routines* ▪ *Incorporate into procedures/workplace inspection program*	*00/00/00*	*Joe Smith – Maintenance Manager*	*Performed 1st weekly test of evacuation alarm* *00.00.00*	*05/05/13*	

Acknowledgement of risk control plan completion by:

Employer: _____ Senior manager: _____

WorkSafe Victoria

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Agent contact details are all available at **worksafe.vic.gov.au/agents**

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