



Are you at risk?

a UNISON guide for members

UNISON
the public service union

Are you at risk?



UNISON believes that no one should be put at unnecessary risk at work.

UNISON believes that work related deaths, injuries, ill-health, and “accidents” are not acceptable.

UNISON knows that your employer has a responsibility to ensure that your work does not cause you harm. Not only is it the right thing to do – it’s the law!

We train and give guidance to our safety reps, but you can help us too.

If you know what your employer should be doing to protect you from harm at work, then you may be able to make sure that they do this. And if not, you’ll know to raise your concerns with your local safety or other UNISON branch rep.

The five step approach for employers

1 Identify the hazard

This means thinking about what may harm you or other people.

This harm may occur while you are actually doing the work, or it may happen at a later date – possibly years later. Potential hazards (things that may cause harm) include:

- threats or attacks by clients, patients or the public;
- stress caused by work;
- lifting or moving heavy loads;
- repetitive movements or lifting;
- bullying;
- slipping, tripping, or falling over; and
- working with asbestos or other dangerous substances that can make you ill.

Do any of these apply to you or your work?

Are there any other hazards (things that may cause harm) at your work or in your job?

One of the ways for your employer to find out about hazards is to speak to you, your colleagues and your safety rep. You are doing the job every day and so are more likely to notice things that people less familiar with your work would miss.

Has your employer asked you and your colleagues about the hazards?

Speak to your safety rep to see if the employer has spoken with them, and tell them if you are happy to be involved in this process.

2 Decide who might be harmed and how

Who is at risk of harm? Your employer must think about all workers, visitors, and members of the public; and then identify what hazards they are at risk from.

A cleaner may be at risk from lone working, slips and trips, and chemicals. A teaching assistant or nurse may be at risk from bullying, violence, slips and trips, and stress. A parking attendant may be at risk from violence, lone working, stress, and slips, trips, and falls.

Your employer must especially think about the risks faced by vulnerable members of staff, like young or older workers, new or expectant mothers, and those with disabilities or ill health.

Think about the work you and your colleagues do and about the hazards you may face while you carry out your job.

Are any of you especially vulnerable?

3 Estimate the chance of harm and identify ways to avoid or reduce the risk

Once your employer has thought about the hazards, and those who are at risk from them, next it must work out the chance of someone being harmed, and then take appropriate action to prevent that happening.

If there is no risk of harm from a potential hazard then your employer doesn't have to do anything else for this hazard. Where there is a risk of harm, your employer must take appropriate action by doing everything "reasonably practicable", to prevent the harm occurring. If it is not possible to prevent the harm, then it must reduce as far "reasonably practicable", both the chance of harm occurring and its likely seriousness.

The more likely it is that harm will occur, or the more serious the harm could be, the more your employer is expected to do.

For example, if the risk of getting a splinter is so high that it happens every hour that the job is carried out, then an employer would be expected to do more to prevent this happening than if the risk was only once in every 10,000 times the job was done. By comparison, if there is a high risk of death, an employer would have to do much more to avoid this risk, than where the risk is of getting a splinter.

Of those hazards identified (in step 2 above or by you) what is the likelihood/chance of any of them happening to you?

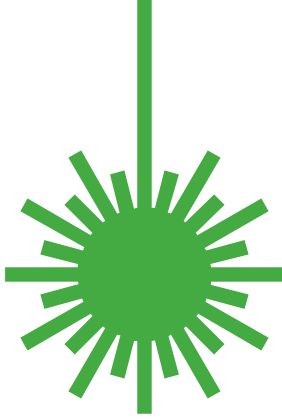
Do you know what measures your employer has taken to prevent or reduce the risk/chance of them happening?

Are there any other measures that could be taken to further reduce the risks that you face?

Sometimes new systems, methods, materials, or substances might become available that reduce the risk, but are not currently being used because they may not have existed the last time the risk assessment was carried out.

Can you think of anything that might reduce the risk to you or your colleagues? If so, speak to your local UNISON branch or safety rep.

Your knowledge could be very helpful to your employer – make sure your voice is heard!



4 Record and apply the findings

Your employer must make a record (either on paper or on a computer) when a risk assessment has been conducted (if they have five or more employees). This record should include the important findings including: the hazards and risks, the measures to be taken to prevent or reduce the chance of harm and why, and any group of employees particularly at risk.

However, it is also good practice for very small employers (with fewer than five employees) to also make a record as it proves that a risk assessment has been done if a health and safety inspector visits. Also, the employer, safety rep, and employees can refer to it in the future to check that all the necessary measures have been taken, and to decide what else, if anything, could be done.

Any measures identified within the assessment for preventing or reducing the risks must now be applied, adopted, or put in place by your employer. If this does not happen, then the risk assessment is not of much use.

Your employer must let you, your colleagues, and your safety rep know about the findings:

- what the hazards and risks are,
- who may be harmed and how,
- what measures are being taken to prevent or reduce the risks and why.

Find out if your employer has done this.

5 Review the risk assessment and update it as necessary

Even a good risk assessment that is applied cannot just be forgotten. Things change, so a risk assessment must be looked at again (reviewed) on a regular basis. How often will depend on the hazard and the likelihood that someone will be harmed.

New information, new ways of preventing or reducing risks, or new circumstances may indicate that a risk assessment is no longer valid. These include an “accident” at work, work related ill health, a violent incident, a near miss, technological changes, or published reports. In such a case, a risk assessment must be revisited immediately, not just at the regular periodic review.

Find out if your risk assessment has been or needs to be reviewed.

So now you know what your employer should be doing!

If you've not been told already, ask your employer what hazards and risks you face in your work and what measures are in place to prevent or minimise those risks.

Unless your work has been risk assessed and you have been given the appropriate information, your employer must not expect you to carry out work which is likely to put you at risk. For risks where an emergency plan might be necessary or which could put you in serious danger, your employer should allow and enable you and other employees to stop work and move to a place of safety. Examples here might include a chemical spill, asbestos contamination, or a fire.

Do you have any concerns about health and safety at work?

Contact your UNISON safety rep if you have any concerns:

- about your employer not sharing the information it should,
- on hazards being missed or underestimated,
- regarding the measures to prevent or control the risk of harm not being taken or not being sufficient, or
- because there does not appear to be a risk assessment covering you, your colleagues, and your work.

Have you already been exposed to, injured, or made ill by a hazard at work?

UNISON may be able to help you claim compensation. Usually it is necessary to prove that an injury or illness was caused by work and that the employer should have prevented it. For legal assistance, UNISON members should contact UNISONdirect on 0800 857 857 (0800 0 967 968 for textphone users).

But remember, it is best to prevent the harm in the first place, so make sure you and your safety rep are consulted!

UNISON is campaigning to ensure that every employer carries out proper risk assessments and keeps those risk assessments under review and up to date.



Further information

All UNISON safety reps have access to guidance and training to help them check that your employer is carrying out good risk assessments. If you'd like to know more about how to check your employers risk assessment, our guide aimed at safety reps will help.

Risk assessment, a guide for UNISON safety reps can be ordered online (stock no. 1351).

Find out about other health and safety issues

www.unison.org.uk/safety

UNISON online catalogue

www.unison.org.uk/catalogue

Find out about being a safety rep, or becoming one (stock no. 1684) or

www.unison.org.uk/activistroles

Join us and be part of our campaign for safer workplaces

join.unison.org.uk

For further information you can call us on **0800 0 857 857**

(0800 0 967 968 for textphone users)

Find out more about us

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where health
and safety
matters**



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