

Activity A4

Understanding risk assessment: teacher and trainer notes

This activity aims to help learners understand risk assessment and its application in a range of settings. Whilst it has been developed with the engineering and manufacturing sector in mind, the activity can be adapted for learners from all areas of learning. Where this guide refers to 'workshop', a kitchen, office, hairdressing salon or stage set could easily be substituted.

Learners will probably be familiar with the term 'risk assessment' but not necessarily understand its implication in the workplace. The aim is to de-mystify risk assessment and to demonstrate that learners can contribute to the process themselves.

Learners in pilot sites found the activity particularly rewarding and adapted their attitude and behaviour. For example, learners in one centre came to appreciate that slips, trips and falls are the main cause of accidents requiring time off work. They took care not to leave tools and equipment on the floor causing obstructions. Unprompted by the teacher, they also cleared away water that had spilled onto the workshop floor. They learned that they, individually, were responsible for health and safety. When they see a problem, they should act responsibly in either dealing with it themselves or in pointing out the hazard to the person in charge. This left them with a greater sense of personal responsibility for the safety of their working environment.

It should be made clear that the intention is to help learners acquire an understanding of risk assessment and the associated actions, not to train them as health and safety officers.

This activity has four stages and you will need to plan the session carefully as learners will be working independently in and around the workshops at different times.

Learning objectives

Learners should be able to:

- identify and record hazards in the workplace
- determine the level of risk posed by a hazard using the risk graph
- make recommendations for removal of hazard or reduction of risk.

Materials required

Risk assessment learning materials for each learner:

- an introduction to risk assessment learning resources
- risk assessment form
- risk graph
- example session plan from CD ROM *Resources*.

Time needed

About one and a half hours.

Starting points

You might plan to use this activity towards the end of a structured induction or health and safety programme when learners should already have some understanding of their responsibilities towards health and safety and some knowledge of particular aspects of it. This developmental activity requires learners to apply their knowledge and experience in order to evaluate situations and to make judgements, using high level skills. It will allow you to assess overall learner understanding of the health and safety issues covered during training.

Suggested approach

Introduce the learning objectives for the session and outline the purpose of risk assessment. To establish learners' initial understanding, ask them to work in small groups to share ideas about who might be affected by accidents at work and in what way. For example, personal injuries affect individuals, families and employers. Ask each group in turn to give feedback to the whole class and pool their suggestions. You might expect older or employed learners to give more detailed responses than younger learners who have not been in a workplace.

Introduce some of the specialist terminology of risk assessment. You might, for example, ask groups to research and agree definitions for 'hazard', 'risk' or 'control measures'. You could ask learners to 'show you' their definitions on mini-whiteboards.

Now you have an idea of learner understanding, you can decide how to organise learners into groups of three for the remainder of the activity. Introduce the learning materials and the five key principles of risk assessment.

Developing the session

Stage 1

Introduce the learning materials and consider the five principles of risk assessment. Refer to the example risk assessment from a motor vehicle workshop and ask each small group to examine one hazard in Table A4.1, commenting and reporting back to the class if the future action proposed was adequate to deal with the situation.

Move on to consider the guidelines for determining level of risk. Demonstrate how to apply them to a common hazard found in the learners' own work context. Now ask groups to try to apply the guidelines to the hazards from the motor vehicle workshop and to report back to the class.

When you think learners have a sufficient understanding of the need to assess risk, check that everyone understands how to use the risk assessment form and send them into a workshop in small groups. Care must, of course, be taken not to put learners into dangerous situations and they will need to be supervised whilst carrying out this task. Prior agreement may be needed to enter other work areas and safety precautions must be followed.

Ask learners to identify three potential hazards in the workshop and to record them on the risk assessment form. Encourage them to draw on their knowledge and experience to make careful and critical observations and to discuss their opinions with each other.

The size of the workshop and the number of learners will dictate how many can occupy a workshop at any given time.

Stage 2

Learners assess the hazards and levels of risk using the graph to plot their results. They need to judge the likelihood on a scale of 1 to 5 that an accident could occur and the severity of any potential accident also on a scale of 1 to 5.

Stage 3

Learners now analyse and evaluate the risks and decide if the existing preventative measures are adequate. They must consider what future actions they would recommend and within what timescale and give feedback.

Consolidating and checking learning

Stage 4

To monitor and consolidate learning, you need to ask groups to report back on their findings and explain their reasoning to the whole group. There are many ways to handle this and you should select an approach best suited to learners' needs and context. You might ask learners to:

- conduct a peer assessment by exchanging their risk assessment forms and graphs with colleagues in different groups. Groups should use the criteria, the five principles of risk assessment, to assess each other's work and then exchange feedback on what has been done well and what could be improved, and how
- summarise their findings and present them on a poster or 'visual organiser' and display it on the wall. Conduct a walkabout review when learners offer explanations and expand each other's points
- present their findings orally to the whole group, illustrated with the poster as a visual aid
- present recommendations to implement necessary improvements
- conduct a simulated health and safety workshop inspection with learners in charge
- write up a 'hazard report' on their findings
- organise a whole class discussion on their joint conclusions (with you as an observer).

In each case, you need to monitor the understanding of key concepts and support and reinforce where necessary. Finally, refer back to the learning objectives.

What learners might do next

If appropriate, you might ask learners to practise and improve their risk assessment skills in their workplace or in other areas of their organisation, seeking support from relevant staff in each situation.

Learners might be interested in researching the job role of the health and safety officer. They could do this by asking to see the relevant member of staff in your organisation or at their workplace, or by using the internet to find out the skills and qualifications needed for the job.

The Jobs4U careers website has an extensive database with downloadable and printable job descriptions at:

www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u/