What You Need To Know About…

**Hazard Management in the Workplace**

Hazard management is the cornerstone of health and safety management systems – the key tool for meeting employer obligations to “take all practicable steps to prevent harm or injury”. Using a systematic approach, we can identify and manage hazards so people are not harmed in the course of their work.

But where do we start?

We start by defining what we mean by ‘hazard’. Put simply, we’re talking about anything that could cause injury or illness in any way. In particular, we are interested in “significant” hazards – those with the potential to cause serious harm or injury.

**What are the legal requirements for businesses with regard to Hazard Management?**

The *Health & Safety in Employment Act 1992* requires employers to identify and assess all workplace hazards, apply appropriate controls, and communicate all hazards to employees, contractors and members of the public. Hazards and controls must be periodically reviewed to ensure their ongoing effectiveness, and employees must be informed and trained in procedures to minimise harm and how to use emergency equipment. In addition, employers must give employees an opportunity to be involved in development of hazard management and emergency response procedures.

**How do I meet Hazard Management requirements?**

**Step 1: Identification**

Start by identifying all potential sources of harm or illness. To achieve this, there are three key approaches you can take:

- By area and the work activities carried out in each area (focus on activities)
- By occupation and the tasks they do (focus on people and tasks)
- By the total process used to convert raw materials into product for sale or to deliver a service (focus on process)

You’ll need to determine which approach is most suited for your type of business. Keep in mind that each approach may have some limitations – in some cases, you may find it beneficial to approach hazard identification from more than one point of view.

**Step 2: Risk Assessment**

Once a hazard has been identified, you’ll need to determine the level of risk associated with it. A risk assessment takes into consideration such factors as the frequency of exposure to the hazard, the likelihood of harm, and past history of incidents involving that hazard. It also considers the severity of the most likely degree of harm – an important distinction, as many hazards “could” prove fatal, but their most likely consequence is often something less serious. To keep hazard management practical, it must be based on realistic risk assessments – how often is it likely to happen, and what is the most likely consequence?
**Step 3: Controls**
Now that you know it’s a hazard and what the most likely consequence is, determine what is needed to prevent that consequence. To control hazards most effectively, apply the principles of the “hierarchy of controls” to find the more appropriate solution:

1. **Eliminate** - Can you get rid of the hazard altogether – eg, stop using the machine or chemical by re-engineering the process so it is no longer needed.
2. **Isolate** - provide an enclosure or barrier to minimise worker exposure to the hazard. E.g., installation of closed pipe work to transfer hazardous substances, enclosure of a hazardous machine or chemical process, install exhaust ventilation systems.
3. **Minimise** - Personal protective equipment (PPE) is a common means of minimising exposure risk, but it should only be used as the last line of defence if other controls are not feasible.

**Step 4: Monitor and Review**
When setting up controls, determine what you can do to check that the controls are effective. Periodic monitoring at appropriate intervals will ensure any gaps or ineffective controls can be proactively addressed to avoid harm. Monitoring may include examination of records of inspections, maintenance logs, registers, training records, workplace exposure and health monitoring records, and workplace observations, which can be checked during workplace inspections or audits.

**What does the Hazard Management system need to include?**
The hazard management system is inherently linked to other management systems such as:

- Corrective actions – to ensure actions are implemented and effective
- Incident reporting – to ensure any new hazards are identified and addressed
- Contractor management – to ensure contractors are aware of existing hazards and that any new hazards they may introduce are adequately managed
- Workplace exposure and workplace health monitoring – to measure effectiveness of controls
- Approval of new chemicals and new equipment – to ensure all new hazards are identified and managed

As with any management system, the hazard management system should be periodically reviewed in its entirety to assess its effectiveness in managing hazards.

**Where do I find out more?**

Resources include:

- Approved Code of Practice for Managing Hazards to Prevent Major Industrial Accidents: [www.osh.govt.nz](http://www.osh.govt.nz)
- How to Manage Hazards – for Small Business: [www.osh.govt.nz](http://www.osh.govt.nz)
- Risk Management Standard AS/NZS 4360:1999
For further Looking at Legislation summary sheets in this exclusive NZ Safety series, visit our Info Library on the Internet at http://www.nzsafety.co.nz/ or contact Aysha Rowe on aysha.rowe@wisnz.co.nz.