

Contributors



Jackie Wong

Jackie is a writer, editor, and facilitator based in Vancouver. Her journalism on mental health, housing, and equity has been published across Canada. In this issue, she speaks with employers in the cannabis industry about how they are keeping their workplaces safe (page 7).



Sarah Ripplinger

Sarah has a passion for storytelling that turns heads, excites, and inspires. When she's not typing away or in a meeting, you might see her on a bike, at the beach, or off in the mountains somewhere. She fittingly speaks about hearing safety for heli-ski guides in our safety talk (page 17).



Kathy Eccles

Kathy is a writer and editor who has spent 18 years working in corporate communications in Vancouver. In this issue, she speaks with Hartland Landfill on Vancouver Island about proper asbestos disposal (page 11).



Marnie Douglas

Marnie is a Kelowna-based writer and communications professional. She believes that everyone has a story — this issue it's BCIT, winner of the AWMAC innovation award (page 20).

Ask an officer

Risk assessment in 3 steps: List hazards, rate them, control them



Nigel Corduff
Investigations officer

Region: Kelowna
Years on the job: 11

Following a workplace incident or near miss (an incident that almost happened), WorkSafeBC may investigate to identify the causes and explore other related factors. WorkSafeBC investigations officer Nigel Corduff talks about how risk assessment can prevent incidents and benefit workers and employers.

Q. What is a risk assessment?

A. Risk assessments are not as complicated as people might think. They come down to a basic principle: ensuring that people don't come into contact with things that could cause them harm. A basic risk assessment is a list of the hazards in a workplace that could prevent workers from going home healthy and safe. If something is moving, or has a chemical or physical aspect to it that could be harmful to the worker, and the worker touches it or is exposed to it, you're dealing with a hazard that can put workers at risk of injury.

Q. Why is risk assessment so important?

A. Risk assessment is an integral part of incident prevention. By identifying hazards, you can change work practices or processes to keep people safer. Assessment can also make people more aware of risks and create ways to avoid or minimize them. Knowing the risk helps not just your workers but also others who may be on your jobsite, like contractors, visitors, and members of the public.

Risk assessment is also good business. It helps keep people safe and productive, which reduces injury costs and paperwork. The saddest thing is when our investigators get called in. That means someone has been exposed to an uncontrolled hazard and the worst has already happened. Failing to assess risk could change someone's life in a negative way, forever.

Q. How do I assess risk at my business?

A. First, look for things that could harm people and develop a list. Work with your Joint Health and Safety Committee or worker representatives. If you're a small employer, it can be as simple as walking around and taking notes during your normal workplace inspections. When making your list, always consider the worst-case scenario.

It's important to get input from people doing the work, from supervisors, and from other levels of management. They may come up with something you didn't think of. You can also look at your first aid records and near-miss reports, to see what kind of hazards your workers are facing.

Next, rate the level of risk presented by the hazard. For example, high, moderate, or low risk. There's a simple formula you can use: Risk = exposure + probability + consequences. Consider the example of a tree faller using a chainsaw. The worker can be cutting trees for hours at a time, so there's a lot of exposure. A number of fallers get injured every year, so there's definitely probability. And, the consequences of something happening to the faller can be fatal. Add those factors together and you'd rate the risk of using a chainsaw to fall trees as high.

Once the risk is assessed, you need to plan controls to eliminate or reduce the risk when there's a potential for injury. Don't just settle for one control. Try for two or three levels of redundancy.

Q. What often gets overlooked during risk assessments?

A. People can become accustomed to the risk so they discount the fact that an incident could happen, they don't recognize a hazard, or they don't think through all the controls they could use.

Another problem is not writing down the risk assessment. It needs to be reviewed. You can't keep it in your head because it won't protect other people if they're not aware of it.

Q. Is there a standard format for creating a risk assessment?

A. There are many different models. Choose one that reflects your workplace's health and safety culture. A good guideline to remember is that you have to be able to explain your risk assessment to all levels of people in your workplace, from front-line workers to the people in the executive suite. They all have to understand it.

Q. How often do I need to review my risk assessment?

A. This is a living document, so review it regularly — once a year at the very least and whenever conditions change in your workplace, such as a new machine or a new process, material, or worker. If you're dealing with a breakdown or other upset condition, review is essential at these times.

Q. Where can I get more information on risk assessment?

A. You can call on our officers and visit worksafebc.com for free resources. Your health and safety association has information too. And you can find all kinds of risk assessment tools online.

Looking for answers to your specific health and safety questions? Send them to us at worksafemagazine@worksafebc.com, and we'll consider them for our next "Ask an officer" feature. ☺



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