HEALTH AND SAFETY

GUIDANCE ON HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK

INTRODUCTION

Health and safety can give rise to risks to be considered but the overall requirement is for councils to assess and manage risk. Risk from health and safety is only one aspect of that and councils need to adopt a comprehensive approach to risk assessment.

Within section 2 of the Audit Commission annual return, there is a formal requirement to carry out an assessment of the risks facing the council.

A good way of ensuring that councils comply with the requirements is to maintain and review a risk register.

Contractors should undertake a risk assessment and make the necessary risk management arrangements. These should be included in the contract.

REGULATIONS AND CODES OF PRACTICE

The requirements of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health & Safety at Work 1999 Regulations are supplemented by a large number of regulations and codes of practice dealing with particular aspects of health and safety.

- The parish council has a duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its employees and visitors to its premises.

- This includes maintaining safely any places of work and the working environment (including equipment) without risks to health.

- Employees also have to avoid risks to themselves, colleagues and the public so there can be a shared responsibility. This could be relevant particularly where a clerk works from home.

- A written policy statement is needed if there are more than five employees.

- An employer can be liable for stress suffered by employees in certain circumstances, notably if they have failed to respond adequately to known problems.

- Risks need to be assessed, e.g. in children's playgrounds and cemeteries.

- The legislation imposes wider obligations to ensure access to services, including making permanent physical adjustments to premises.

- A disabled person is one who has a physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long-term adverse effects on his or her ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires employers to carry out "risk assessments". A risk assessment has been described as "nothing more than a careful examination of what, in your work, could cause harm to people. Risk assessment should be a practical exercise, aimed at getting the right controls in place." Employers are also required to undertake a risk assessment of the works activities carried out by people who work from home.

WHAT IS A RISK ASSESSMENT?

You must manage the health and safety risks in your workplace. To do this you need to think about what, in your business, might cause harm to people and decide whether you are doing enough to prevent that harm. This is known as a risk assessment. Once you have identified the risks, you need to decide how to control them and put the appropriate measures in place.

A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in your workplace. The law does not expect you to remove all risks, but to protect people by putting in place measures to control those risks. You are probably already taking steps to protect your employees, but your risk assessment will tell you whether you should be doing more.

HOW DO I ASSESS THE RISKS IN MY WORKPLACE?

A good starting point is to walk around your workplace and look for any hazards - a **hazard** is anything that may cause harm.

Then think about the risks - a **risk** is the chance, high or low, of somebody being harmed by the hazard, and how serious the harm could be.

Think about how accidents could happen and who might be harmed. Ask your employees what they think the hazards are, as they may notice things that are not obvious to you and may have some good ideas on how to control the risks. Concentrate on the real risks – those that are most likely to cause harm.

Consider the measures you are already taking to control the risks and ask if there is anything you should do to make your workplace safer.

Once you have identified the risks and what you need to do to control them, you should put the appropriate measures in place.

Then record your findings. If you have fewer than five employees you don't have to write anything down, but, of course, it is good practice to keep a record. Few workplaces stay the same and sooner or later you will bring in new equipment, substances or procedures that could lead to new hazards. It makes sense to review your risk assessment on a regular basis. If anything significant changes, check your risk assessment and update it.

Further information

Further information is provided in a leaflet published by the HSE called 'Five Steps to Risk Assessment'. To demonstrate how straightforward this exercise can be, the 5 steps are summarized as follows:-

Step 1 - Identify the hazards

Step 2 - Decide who might be harmed and how

Step 3 - Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions

Step 4 - Record the findings and implement them

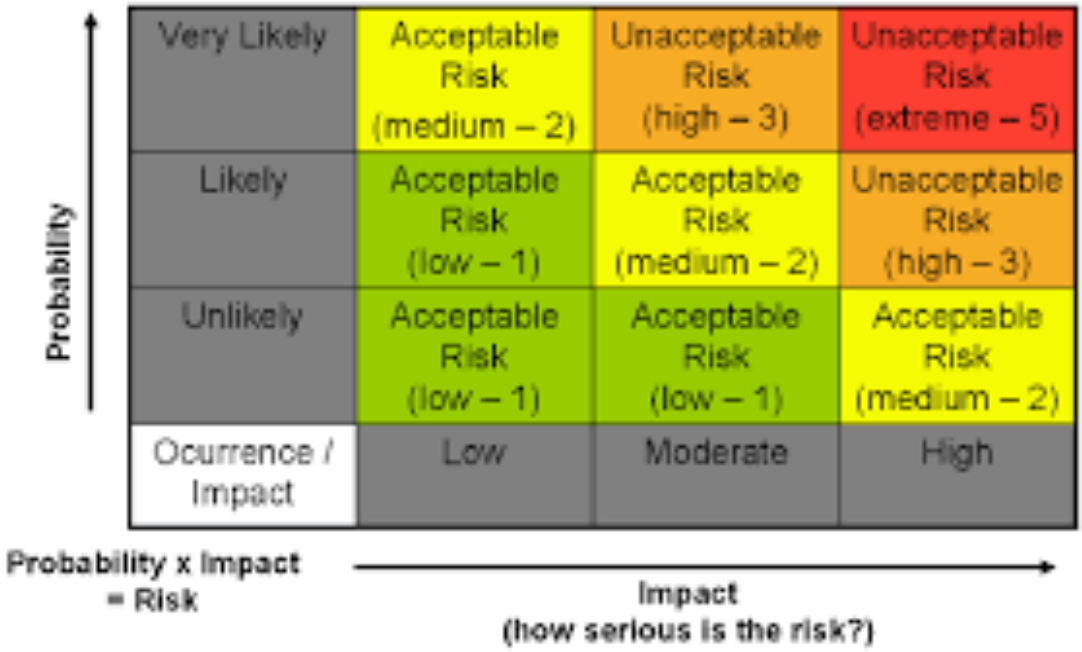
Step 5 - Review the risk assessment and update if necessary

This guidance gives only basic information.

Useful websites are:www.hse.gov.uk
www.disability.gov.uk
www.dwp.gov.uk

The above guidance has been taken from “Governance Toolkit for Parish & Town Councils” - April 2009 and the Health and Safety Executive website.

ASSESSING RISK PRIORITIES



In the table above a factor of **1** is low and **5** is extreme.

In order to determine the priority of the risk, assess how likely it is to happen and how serious its impact would be if it did happen.

Scoring each risk in this way enables you to decide how urgently it needs to be dealt with compared to the other risks.

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Good Practice Guide:

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Council name **Date of risk assessment**

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Priority 1 - 5	What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	How will you put the assessment into action?
Trailing wires in office	Trip hazard	2	Securing loose wires		
Loose paving around the entrance to village hall	Risk of trip or fall		Repair paving	Check work has been carried out	
Trees on playing field	Dead branches could fall on members of the public		Arranging for tree surgeon to inspect trees and carry out any necessary work	Arrange for regular inspections	
Street lighting columns	Members of the public		Carrying out regular inspections		
Street furniture					