

The voice of the Voluntary Arts

Risk assessment for event organisers – a beginners guide

Common misconceptions:

- risk assessments only need to be done for large events;
- risk assessments only need to be done by professional event organisers;
- risk assessments are complicated;
- I don't understand risk assessments;
- I don't have to worry about risk assessments.

Purpose of this guide:

This guide is intended, in particular, for voluntary or amateur event organisers who do not have access to the range of training and support available to their professional counterparts. Its aim is to offer a simple and basic explanation of risk assessments to help you to organise a safe and well run event. It is not intended to be an exhaustive guide.

More information on formulating risk assessments should be obtained from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Further details are given at the end of this guide. If you have ever had any of the above misconceptions, then this guide is for you.

What is a risk assessment?

Quite simply, a risk assessment is an assessment of the risk involved in a particular activity. This assessment of risk will allow you to make a decision about what steps, if any, are necessary to reduce that risk.

Why do I need a risk assessment?

- as an event organiser, you have a responsibility to the public to ensure that your event is run in as safe and appropriate a manner as possible;

- a risk assessment ensures that you have thought through the safety implications of the activity or event and taken all possible steps to reduce risks, where appropriate;
- a risk assessment does not guarantee that nothing will go wrong, but acting on its findings will significantly reduce the chance of problems occurring;
- if anything does go wrong, a risk assessment will show that you have done your best to predict and remove any risks. For anyone faced with a claim or prosecution relating to health and safety, the difference between having and not having a written risk assessment may be significant.

Don't panic

As an event organiser you almost certainly conduct risk assessments already, whether you know it or not! Take the following hypothetical case study:

JB holds a quilting morning for young mothers at her home. Six mothers attend, with their children. Two other mothers expressed an interest in attending recently but JB turned them down as she thought this would be too many children. A parent once asked if they could bring their family dog. JB said no as she thought the animal might be too boisterous and hurt a child. As a matter of course, JB keeps children out of the kitchen when she is preparing drinks and ensures that all cups are tidied away as soon as they are finished with.

Nothing special there, but what JB has done, without knowing it, is conducted a mental risk assessment of her event and taken the appropriate measures to reduce the risks.



How ridiculous!

You are thinking. I know it's only an example, but surely there is really no need to conduct a risk assessment for such a simple activity.

Think again.

This time bearing in mind the following points:

- if any child were injured at JB's house, she could well be found liable if it was considered that she had acted negligently;
- a risk assessment takes very little time to produce, once you know what you are doing.
- a risk assessment can save lives;
- a risk assessment shows that you have thought through the possibilities of danger at your event and have taken action accordingly;
- a risk assessment encourages you to think about all the risks associated with an event. It can result in you thinking about areas of risk that you might not have otherwise considered, and doing something about them.

JB sits down and writes a full risk assessment for her event. This makes her think fully about the event and it's safety implications. She uses this form to help her:

Assessment: Theatre group meeting

Hazards identified	Personal injury to children resulting from overcrowding	Personal injury to children resulting from hot liquid spillage in kitchen
Hazard severity	Low/medium	High
Likelihood of occurrence	High	Medium/high
Residual Risk Rating	Medium	High
Control measures required	Event numbers to be restricted to 7 adults and 9 children	Children to be prohibited from entering kitchen

At future sessions JB always acts in accordance with her risk assessment. In practice this means (in addition to acting the way she has always done) ensuring she has a good look round the house before each event, to identify safety hazards. She also makes a simple form for new parents which includes a space for them to list their child's allergies and illnesses and requires a signature to say the child remains the responsibility of the parent during the event.

Very simple stuff, but JB is now much happier, knowing that she has thought through the safety implications of her event to the full and is acting accordingly. In the coming months the risk assessment ensures that her event runs smoothly and, more than once, it saves potentially dangerous situations from occurring.

Have I convinced you yet?

5 steps to writing a risk assessment

A simple risk assessment has 5 parts.

The information below is not intended as an exhaustive or authoritative guide and should be read in conjunction with relevant HSE documentation as described at the end.

Hazards identified

Think about what could go wrong and write them down. Don't worry about how it sounds. Although the risk assessment examples in this are formally written, an informal risk assessment is quite acceptable.

For example: ***The marquees might catch fire!***

The important thing is **that you do one!**

- a 'hazard' is anything which has the potential to cause harm to people;
- a 'risk' is the likelihood of the harm from a hazard being realised and the extent of it.

Hazard severity

If it happens how **bad** would it be?

- not that bad? ('Low')
- pretty bad? ('Medium') or
- very bad? ('High').

Give a rough indication of severity. You can always combine two ratings e.g. 'low/medium'. If the hazard severity is variable i.e. could range from low to high, you can represent it as 'medium'.

For ***marquees might catch fire!***, the hazard severity would be: **High**.



Likelihood of occurrence

How likely is it to happen? An important note – what this actually means here is ‘How likely is it to happen if you don’t take any actions to reduce the risk beyond the controls which are already in place’. Use the same scale of measurement as you used for ‘Hazard severity’ above.

For the above example, the likelihood of occurrence would be: **Low**.

Residual risk rating

Using the same scale of measurement again, the residual risk rating is a representation of the average of the hazard severity rating and the likelihood of occurrence rating.

For example:

Hazard severity	Low	Medium	Medium/high
Likelihood of occurrence	High	High	Low
Residual Risk Rating	Medium	Medium/high	Medium

An easy way to think about it is by using the following scores: Low = 1; Medium = 2; High = 3

A combined rating is the lower score plus one half e.g. Low/Medium = 1.5; Medium/High = 2.5

To work out the average add the scores of the hazard severity rating and the likelihood of occurrence rating and divide by two. Round all results less than or more than one half down and up respectively e.g.

Assessment: Theatre group meeting

Hazards identified	Example a	Example b
Hazard severity	Medium -2	High
Likelihood of occurrence	High -3	Medium/high
Residual Risk Rating	2+3 = 5, 5/2 = 2.5 2.5 = Medium/high	High
Control measures required	Event numbers to be restricted to 7 adults and 9 children	Children to be prohibited from entering kitchen

The residual risk rating allows you to see, at a glance, the combination of the hazard severity and the likelihood of occurrence.

Control measures required

What action can you take to remove the risk or reduce it to an acceptable level? Most of the time there will be a simple and common sense solution to the problem. What you need to do is identify it and ensure that it is carried out and is carried out every time that risk is present.

What we actually mean here is what realistic action can you take to reduce the risk. For any risk there may be a variety of solutions that may be put in place to contain it. You should select the most appropriate solution bearing in mind the residual risk rating and the event specifics, including manpower and financial considerations.

For example, take the following risk:

A trailing power cable from a P.A. unit to a performance area (any type) presents a trip hazard to the public. For a small event with a low attendance, the hazard might carry a residual rating of low. Solutions such as secure in-house taping or matting might be sufficient for such events.

For a large event with a significant attendance and where crowd disturbance has been identified as a possibility, the hazard might carry a residual risk rating of high. An appropriate solution would be to provide a secure and certified structure to carry the cable overhead. In-house taping or matting would not be an appropriate solution in such cases.

Your aim should be to identify an appropriate solution that is achievable within your budget and manpower constraints. High cost solutions may reduce risks significantly but are not an option for many event organisers. Your objective is to remove the risk entirely or to reduce it to an acceptable level.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is it within my power / budget / capabilities to do that will reduce the risk?
- Will taking this action eliminate the risk or reduce it to an acceptable level?



If the answer to the second question is 'no' and you cannot identify an appropriate solution that lies within your power / budget / capabilities then you should look at removing the risk area entirely from your event, or changing it in such a way that you will be able to provide a solution that eliminates or sufficiently reduces the risk.

Note: It is rarely possible to completely remove a risk. Fencing off a generator with warning signs on the fence is generally an acceptable way of minimising the risk to the public caused by an unfenced and unsigned appliance. However, this is not going to stop somebody who is determined to climb over that fence! What you have done is minimised the risk to the best of your capabilities and this is what risk assessments are all about.

Further information

5 steps to risk assessment

Further information on constructing risk assessments is available in this document, free of charge, from the Health and Safety Executive:

Order code: 0717615804

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Health and Safety issues

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) produces a wide range of information and resources. Contact them, as above, for further details or a catalogue of publications. They also run an information line for queries.

T: 08701 545 500.

Once you have read **5 steps to risk assessment** you will be able to start writing your own risk assessments. Try it!

About the author and disclaimer

Abigail Cooper coordinates Colchester Free Festival, a large outdoor community arts festival, based in Colchester, Essex. This document has been produced as a basic introductory guide. It is intended for those with no experience of producing risk assessments. By its nature, it is incomplete and should not be regarded as an authority. Neither VAN nor the author accepts responsibility for any risk assessments produced using any part of this document as a guide.

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