

When to complete a risk assessment

The aim of this guideline is to provide further clarity around when written risk assessments should be completed at the University of Queensland.

All persons in the workplace have obligations under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)* to eliminate risks to health and safety, or if elimination is not possible, to minimise those risks so far as is reasonably practicable. The responsibility for ensuring that risk assessments are completed rests with managers and supervisors at the workplace and should be performed by the person/s undertaking or performing the task. Supervisors are responsible for checking the risk assessment and signifying their approval of the risk assessment.

We all carry out risk assessments subconsciously all the time! When we cross the road, drive to work, decide to take the stairs rather than use the lift, diet choices, prioritise work tasks etc. Our daily lives are full of decisions where we complete the risk assessment and risk management process informally and often without thinking about it.

It is important that we take a considered, proportionate approach to conducting formal, documented risk assessments at work. There will be many work related activities where formally documenting a risk assessment will not be necessary. There is no black and white rule to when a formal risk assessment **does not** need to be undertaken. However, the lower the risk assigned to a particular task, the lower the need to consider a formal/written risk assessment as necessary. Considering the rationale for formally documenting risk assessments will assist with determining if this process is prudent –

- The risk assessment process allows us to intentionally consider the task at hand and to determine if certain things (controls) need to be put in place to ensure that we do not harm ourselves or others;
- Documented risk assessments can be referred to at a later date by ourselves, or others who may be planning to perform the same task;
- Documented risk assessments maintain a record of the decision making process used to determine what, if any, controls are used to eliminate or reduce the risk to health and safety of performing the task.

Managing health and safety risks is an ongoing process. Formal documentation of risk management processes is required:

- Where the work process or activity may reasonably foreseeably present a risk to health or safety of anyone.
- When any new work is planned where it is reasonable to foresee the introduction of new risks or increase of existing risks.
- When purchasing or utilising new equipment or substances where it is reasonable to foresee the introduction of new risks or increase of existing risks.
- When changing work practices, procedures or the work environment.
- When new information about workplace hazards and risks becomes available.
- After an incident (even if no injury occurred).
- At regular intervals, appropriate to the nature of the workplace and the hazards present.
- If you or other workers have a concern about the activity.
- If required by a work health and safety (or related) regulation, or other UQ policy or procedure.

Examples of when a risk assessment must be completed for:

- Any high-risk biological or high-risk GM work (e.g. DNIR/DIR/ work with poisonous or toxic animals as assessed and approved by the IBC).
- Any work involving hazardous chemicals

- Work with high emitter radiation unsealed sources
- Work with Class 4 lasers
- Work with pressure equipment
- Field work or work off campus (as part of the work off campus plan)
- Travel to international locations with a Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs (DFAT) advisory level other than level 1 – exercise normal safety precautions (please note the work to be done at the location should be assessed separately from the travel component)
- Diving work

Examples of when a risk assessment may not be required:

- Low risk general office work (i.e. use of a computer workstation as long as workstation set up has been self-assessed and is optimally adjusted for the worker)
- Low risk domestic or international travel (well recognised carrier to domestic location for conference or meeting attendance or similar)
- Relocating small amount of mobile office furniture to a proximate location (e.g. chairs or mobile pedestal draw units to an office within your building or close by)
- When operating equipment, following a formally documented SOP and after receiving any specific relevant training.

For more information, please refer to the PPL for specific guidelines e.g. working with high-risk biological material, working with blood or body fluids, manual handling, travel policy and procedure, work off-campus policy and procedure.

Please note that it should always be the work process or procedure that is being risk assessed, not a specific item of equipment or chemical.

Contact for Additional Information

If you remain unsure about whether a particular task requires a formal, documented risk assessment, contact and discuss with your local Work Health and Safety Manager/Coordinator, or the UQ OHS Division:

OHS Division	Phone:	+61 7 336 52365
	Email:	ohs@uq.edu.au