

Managing hazards and risks

Employers or businesses, or anyone who falls under the definition of a ‘person conducting a business or undertaking’ (a PCBU), has legal obligations under work health and safety laws.

1. identify hazards in the workplace
2. assess the risk those hazards create
3. then eliminate or minimise them as much as possible.

An employer and/or PCBU has a legal duty eliminate or minimise risks to health and safety of workers at work in their business or undertaking.

The person with management or control of a workplace also has a legal duty to make sure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that there are no health and safety risks to anyone working in or visiting the workplace. This includes when people are entering or exiting the workplace. It generally does not include residences, unless the residence is occupied for the purpose of conducting a business.

A workplace can include a vehicle, vessel, aircraft, mobile structure or any installation on water that a worker might be at while at work.

Ways that a business can manage their hazards and health and safety risks include:

- consult with workers about safety, hazards, and risk control
- implement a safety management system and a risk management process that are regularly reviewed
- consult, cooperate and coordinate with any other duty holders who have a responsibility for health and safety
- maintain the workplace and facilities in a safe condition
- provide appropriate training
- implement appropriate procedures for workers who work in remote or isolated worksites
- provide first aid equipment and prepare, implement and practice emergency plans for evacuations in emergencies.

Management of hazards and risks of fixtures, fittings or plant at workplaces

If your business has management over or control of fixtures, fittings or plant you must ensure that they don't put workers or other people in the workplace at risk of injury.

Plant includes:

- any machinery, equipment, appliance, container, implement and tool
- any component of any of those things
- anything fitted or connected to any of those things.

This does not apply to residences unless the residence is being used to conduct a business.

Reasonably practicable

'Reasonably practicable' is a phrase found in WHS legislation that explains the lengths that a PCBU should go to to ensure the work health and safety and when eliminating or controlling the risks or hazards in their workplace.

It means that businesses have to do everything that is reasonable and practical to ensure the health and safety of workers and others. Businesses and employers always need to try and eliminate, so far as is 'reasonably practicable', any health and safety risks in the workplace.

Hazards need to be identified, risks assessed, and steps taken to eliminate or control these risks.

You should also think about things that may be relevant to the hazards and risks and/or the means of eliminating or minimising the risks.

When determining what is reasonably practicable, you need to consider:

- the likelihood of the hazard or risk occurring
- the degree of harm that might result from the hazard or risk
- what you know or reasonably ought to know about the hazard or the risk and the ways of eliminating or minimising the hazard or risk
- the availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or minimise the risk
- after assessing the risk, whether the costs associated to minimise the risk are grossly disproportionate to the risk.

To help determine what is reasonably practicable to meet a health and safety duty, [use this guide from SafeWork Australia](#).

Hazard elimination and risk control

There is a hierarchy (or order) of steps you need to follow when managing hazards and risks in your workplace.

1. Businesses must always try to eliminate any health and safety hazards and risks in the workplace.
2. If a hazard cannot be removed, you must minimise it by substituting (entirely or partly) the hazard with something with a lesser risk.
3. Enclose or isolate the hazard from any person exposed to it, eg with barriers.
4. Implement engineering controls of the hazard, eg through machine guards.

5. If engineering solutions don't work, you must implement administrative controls, eg implement safety procedures and safe work practices such as job rotation to reduce exposure time to the hazard.
6. Provide personal protective equipment, eg ear plugs, goggles.

A combination of controls may be used to minimise a risk if a single control is not sufficient.

Limiting the impact of hazards

The WHS Regulation and [relevant codes of practice](#) provide detailed information on how you can achieve the standards under the work health and safety laws.

For practical advice and tips on managing risks, download the code of practice on [for managing work health and safety risks](#).

[Download the code of practice](#)

Consultation and review

Consultation with workers is an important component in the management of hazards and risks in your workplace. Our [consultation@work](#) toolkit has all our consultation resources available in one spot.

Controls that your business has in place to eliminate or minimise the risk of workers or others sustaining an injury or illness must be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that they remain the most effective method of control risk in your workplace.

There are many ways you can review risk controls in place, some ideas include:

- analysing your business's register of injuries
- regular site walks/inspections with HSR's
- tool box talks with your workers.

Further information

Other sources we have to manage particular hazards and risks are in our:

- [hazard library](#).
- [resource library](#).
- [video and webinar library](#).

You can also search the web for:

- material published by other work health and safety regulators
- specific industry practice and publications
- published scientific and technical literature.

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