

COSHH assessment

Carrying out a control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH) assessment is a fundamental requirement of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002.

First, an employer must not carry out any work that is liable to expose employees to any substance hazardous to health unless a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks has been carried out. Second, if the assessment indicates that substances hazardous to health will be used or created, employers must identify the necessary actions to take to comply with the regulations.

A COSHH assessment is carried out in the same way to a normal risk assessment, by following these steps:

- Identify the hazards – identify the harmful substances and the exposure to them when produced by a process, e.g. cutting or grinding.
- Assess the risks – decide who might be harmed and how, and often speaking with employees can help identify risks.
- Control the risks – decide how to prevent exposure, and use the hierarchy of control when deciding on your control measures.
- Record your findings – you must do this if you have five or more employees, but it makes sense to record the steps you have taken to identify and control the risks.
- Review your controls – you should review the assessment regularly to ensure that it is still effective. You should also review it if there have been changes in your workplace that could introduce new risks, or following any accidents or near misses.



The role of the assessor

Anyone who is competent can carry out a COSHH assessment. They need to have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience, and to have received the necessary information, instruction and training.

The assessor will need:

- access to the safety data sheets for the products, which contain product details and any potential hazards, and which give you the information to safely store, handle and dispose of the product, as well as detailing what personal protective equipment is required and the emergency procedures in the event of exposure.
- a good working knowledge of the product and the process it is being used in.
- the ability to specify the steps and control measures required to keep anyone safe who is working with the substance.
- the ability to make valid conclusions, put together the assessment and communicate findings to all who may be affected.

Recording the assessment

The assessment is a considered judgement that balances the hazardous properties of the substance, the method by which it will be handled, and the environment in which it will be used.

There are many ways to record this information so that it is easily available and can be clearly understood. The way in which you choose to do this will be bespoke to your organisation. The Health and Safety Executive provides assessment templates on its website: if you do not already have one, or are starting on this process, these can provide you with a solid starting point.

A good COSHH assessment will ensure that the correct information from the safety data sheet, the users and the process has been collected and collated to produce a useful and usable assessment, which can safely guide those who will be using it.