

Health & Safety

HAZARDS, RISK ASSESSMENTS, METHOD STATEMENTS & COSHH

This document is meant to act as a general guideline to help everyone who needs to undertake Risk Assessments and submit Method Statements.

As a Designer or Contractor it is something that **you** must do to provide documentary evidence of a safe system of work, as well as acting as instruction and information for your operatives. Writing a good method statement does not mean re-inventing the wheel every single time, but on the other hand, they must be activity and location specific and not be too generic.

The following are some common errors and ways in which they can be avoided.

- 1. Hazard Identification has not been satisfactorily undertaken.** Before you can undertake a risk assessment, you need to establish all the significant hazards associated with the activity or item of work under consideration. In preparing a simple list of hazards, it is essential that this be done at the location of the activity and as appropriate, take into account the access route to that work area. Examine carefully and thoroughly all hazards associated with the activity, those adjacent to the immediate work area, and those along the access route. If the visit is out of hours with regard to when the actual work is to be undertaken, give consideration to other potential hazards which might not be evident at that time.
- 2. The risks are not fully assessed.** This is the most fundamental thing you must do. Be realistic about the worst thing that **could** happen and work backwards from this to the minor risks. Everything else flows from this so it is important not to overlook anything. Perception of risk is subjective, but don't be casual or flippant about it. We all have enough experience of site work to know what **can** go wrong in real terms and what the result might be. If you already have generic risk assessments for common tasks then these will act as a good starting point – they can be referred to – but they do not take into account site conditions or specific local risks, which must be identified and controlled for each and every job.
- 3. Method Statements are not site specific.** The easiest way to get documentation rejected is to put something on paper that was obviously written by somebody who has never visited the site. Even worse is paperwork churned out of a computer with only the project name and client changed.
- 4. State *what* and not *how*.** All too often Method Statements will detail ***what*** is going to be done, but not ***how*** it's going to be done, and moreover, ***how it is going to be done SAFELY***. Putting in sequence what you are going to do is fine, but saying exactly how, is more important from a safety point of view. This will include the control measures from your assessment of risk
- 5. Too brief.** You can never put too much information into a method statement, but it's all too easy to leave things out. Describe the job to yourself and put everything you describe down on paper. Don't be tempted to summarise or lump separate activities together. The more detail there is then the less chance there is of somebody taking a shortcut
- 6. Superficial detail.** Concentrating on the safety aspects is enough. The Planning Supervisor, H&S Co-ordinator or Advisor doesn't need or want to know about costs or any other unrelated details. If you have issues then these need to be discussed with the appropriate personnel. Also, technical details (while very important) should not form the whole document. Technical

experts can often present pages of figures and data and still forget to outline a safe system of work. It may be common sense to them (and you), but the H.S.E. doesn't see it that way.

7. **Full PPE.** What does that mean? Any method statement that says "full PPE" immediately raises suspicions, because it means that you haven't really thought about it. PPE requirements will depend on your assessment of risk. If gloves are needed (for example) WRITE GLOVES – even better, write what type. Always remember that personal protective equipment is a last resort control measure, NEVER the first.
8. **Safety Data Sheets submitted as CoSHH Assessments.** Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are **NOT** full CoSHH assessments. An SDS will give product details such as chemical composition, storage and first aid measures. What they don't do is assess how you will actually use the product: who is likely to be exposed; for how long, and how you will control exposure. These variables need to be addressed and fully documented. All operatives working with hazardous substances are required by law to be given suitable and sufficient information and training, which means making them aware of the contents of both SDS and CoSHH assessments.
9. **The Method Statement is on file.** Method statements are working documents, not to be left on a shelf once they are approved. They must **state** the following as a minimum -
 - They must be read and understood by everybody who will be working to them.
 - They must be available for inspection at any time.
 - They must be monitored, reviewed and updated as the job progresses – taking into account **any** problems, modifications or improvements. which can be implemented immediately or incorporated into future operations.

Following these guidelines will mean that more people are thinking more clearly about every aspect of what we are doing, and ensuring that we continually improve on the standards of site safety. Always remember:

There's no such thing as an accident. Someone somewhere did something to cause it.

Please don't let that someone be you.

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NOTES:

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