

Risk assessment factfile

1. What is a risk assessment?

‘Risk assessment’ means examining carefully what might cause harm and subsequently deciding on the precautions that are in place, or need to be. The aim of any risk assessment is to identify risks and take suitable and sufficient measures to minimise the likelihood of any harm or damage occurring.

2. Why carry out risk assessments?

Everyone who organises events or manages places that attract members of the public should have a health and safety management system to anticipate, monitor and control potential risks.

Employers are legally required to assess risks to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees at work and to make sure that people not in their employment such as customers, visitors, volunteers or contractors, are not adversely affected by their operations.

As a Heritage Open Days organiser who volunteers to open a building or stage an activity, you may not be legally bound to carry out a risk assessment before the event; but it is very likely that the insurer of your property or activity will ask you to do so and will certainly want to see proof of it in case an accident should occur due to negligence.

We strongly recommend doing a risk assessment of your property or planned activities before registering with HODs and another shortly before the event. Examining and preventing risk simply makes sense. It may take up some of your time during the preparatory stages, but may spare you a lot of hassle later on.

3. About hazards and risks

Hazard = something with the potential to cause harm

Risk = the likelihood and the severity of the harm

For example, the wet and slippery surface clearly constitutes a hazard that could potentially lead to injury. The risk associated with the hazard is that passers-by slip and hurt their back or head, or break their arm or leg.

How to evaluate the likelihood or severity of an occurrence? The previous history of accidents (e.g. a lot of people have hit their head against an obstruction before) as well as the number and type of people who will pass or could come into contact with the hazardous feature can both be indicators for the nature, chance and degree of harm that can arise from a hazard.



4. Five steps of risk assessment

How do you proceed? Simply follow the five steps of risk assessment, and you should be well prepared for your visitors.

step 1: Look for the hazard

Look out for any physical features or objects that could lead to accidents or overcrowding. These may include:

- Steep steps
- Uneven or slippery flooring
- Dead ends and locked gates
- Convergence of several routes into one.



step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how

Identify your potential visitor groups (e.g. children, elderly people, people with special needs etc) and what obstacles and hidden hazards they may encounter when visiting your building or participating in your event.

But whoever your visitors are, they all have in common the fact that they are not familiar with the layout, the circulation routes and facilities of the property or location. In itself, this unfamiliarity forms a hazard.

step 3: Evaluate risks and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done

In taking action, ask yourself:

- a) Can I get rid of the hazard altogether? And if not,
- b) How can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?

Possible measures to eliminate the hazard or control the risks may include:



- Closing all areas which could be dangerous
- Signposting hazards
- Posting & training sufficient volunteers to point out any hazards to visitors and take charge in an emergency

- Checking your First-Aid kit is complete
- Making sure there is a telephone on site
- Operating a strict non-smoking policy
- Providing emergency escape that is safe and effective for all
- Liaising with outside organisations such as police and other emergency services.

