

Most of the systems I see fall into 2 categories:

1. Lacking in any useful information
2. Comprising too much information, masking that which is really required.

So, what should you have to be both useful and meet legal requirements?

You need the following:

1. Risk assessments of your operations.
2. Assessments of substances hazardous to health.
3. Fire risk assessment.
4. Specific risk assessments, such as manual handling or noise.
5. Systems of work, including items such as an evacuation procedure.

1. Risk assessments

There is a legal requirement to assess and record risks, and to put into place control measures. Don't get carried away. What I recommend is:

- Identify the hazard, what might happen as a result of this and the likelihood of it occurring.
- Then define how it is controlled and, where appropriate, how you ensure that you keep in control. For example, if you have interlocked guards, then you need to periodically check that the interlocks work.
- If there is no risk control or it is inadequate, then define the action to correct this.
- If the risk cannot be controlled, define how you are going to minimise it. For example, forklift trucks are always a risk and the minimisation measures may be to restrict driving to trained and authorised drivers and to keep the trucks maintained.

When identifying what to assess, look at the processes. A machine when it is running poses different risks to when you are setting it up. And don't forget non-standard operations; you probably can't second guess what these will be, but you need a system to prompt a consideration of identifying risks before you carry out a particular operation.

2. CoSHH assessments

These are NOT a collection of datasheets. You need to look at each substance and decide if it poses a risk in the quantity and manner in which you are using it. If it does then list:

- Who is exposed to it, for how long and doing what.
- What the risks are.
- How you are to control the risks.

By far the best control method is to substitute high-risk substances with lower risk ones. At SSS, we have a traffic light colour coding system and we try to promote movement away from "red" substances.

When you have done this, you need to have a summary available at the point of use; it is pointless having perfect assessments sitting on a shelf if nobody knows about them.

3. Fire risk assessment

This should comprise:

- The risk of fire and how you control that risk.
- Fire containment and fire fighting.
- Fire escape ability, adequacy of escape routes and how you account for people.
- Fire management system, ie who checks the alarm system, etc.
- Actions arising.

Don't forget that many fires occur from events outside the direct control of the companies affected, so you need to look at your neighbours and also take measures to ensure you minimise the outcome of vandalism.

4. Other assessments

With most workplaces, manual handling assessments are necessary. There are several ways of doing these and the HSE's MAC system is worth following. With noise, you may need specialist help (such as that available from Strategic Safety Systems.)

5. Systems of work

Systems of work are always the final control method for a risk, but may be necessary. Follow these guidelines:

- Have them short and sweet.
- Write them as instructions and avoid the "should" word
- Use pictures where possible
- Have them available at the point where the operations they cover are carried out.

This may seem a bit daunting, but what you end up with should be simple and workable. If you still find it daunting, Strategic Safety Systems can do all the above for you and, for typical companies, this can be done in a couple of days.

See more about SSS services: <http://www.strategicsafety.co.uk/HealthAndSafetyServices.htm>