



Health & Safety Safe Systems of Work

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¹ or earlier if change in legislation or on risk assessment

Amendment Control

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1.0	Aug 2015	
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1. What is a safe system of work

A safe system of work is a formal procedure which is developed from the examination of tasks of a job as a whole in order that hazards and degrees of risk can be identified and assessed. Safe systems of work are required where hazards cannot be eliminated, and some risk still exists. Safe methods of work are then developed and introduced to ensure that either hazards are eliminated or the degree of risks associated with each hazard is minimised or reduced.

2. Assessment

Before starting the assessment, the person(s) that develops a safe system of work must be competent, i.e. they have appropriate knowledge, experience and training so they properly understand the work activity being analysed. The assessment will be done by the supervising staff with input from the workers who shall also have been deemed competent persons for completing the task. This is critical as it should enable the workers to provide information about the practical knowledge and skills required to do the work/complete the task and gain a better understanding of the hazards and risks and the way in which the safe system will minimise those risks.

Initial Assessment

An initial assessment of the tasks should be carried out to determine what is being used, by whom, where, and how the task is being performed. It is recognised that most accidents are caused by a combination of factors (plant and equipment, materials, lack of supervision, lack of training, etc.) therefore, any prevention/control measures put into place will be based on an integral approach and not one that deals with each factor in isolation.

As part of this assessment, it will be necessary to identify the foreseeable hazards (physical, chemical and health) associated with the task and to determine the degree of risk of injury or ill health to those exposed to the hazard. The safe system of work is designed to ensure that those affected are consulted at the planning stage to check that all eventualities have been considered when organising such works and are an important means of minimising any risks involved. It must bring together all the necessary control measures, including any design aspects, physical control measures, competent personnel, training, monitoring, supervision, policies and procedures, PPE and the use of plant, equipment and tools.

Following this assessment a safe system of work will need to be prepared by consideration of such aspects as follows:-

- Preparation of the task.
- Authorisation for the task (the level of competence of all operatives and any specialist skills), including those supervising the works.
- Planning job sequence (list sequence of events as planned with identified hazards/residual risks and controls clearly defined).
- Specifying safe work methods (list isolation/pre-work precautions).
- List prohibited activities (communicate to others as necessary).
- Safe access and egress (including confined spaces).
- List plant, equipment and tools, electrical sources, hazardous materials required.
- List personal protective equipment to be used.

- Dismantling and/or disposal methods.
- Fire hazards and risks.
- Emergency procedures for all foreseeable risks (ensure that procedures are conveyed to competent persons and fully understood).
- Other foreseeable hazards, whether to the people carrying out this work or to others who might be affected by it.
- The environment in which the task is to be carried out, e.g. space, lighting, temperature, etc.
- The requirement for a 'permit to work' to be in place (this needs to ensure that controls are in place, communicated effectively to those carrying out the works, authorised by ENU and signed off as complete by those carrying out the works).

3. Implementation

Implementation of the system will require supervisors and involved staff to be briefed on the hazards/risks and the safe system of work, ensuring that the necessary skills/experience exist or are acquired. Safe systems of work will only be effective if properly implemented and maintained.

Training

In order to ensure safe systems of work are followed every time, our staff and supervisors must be:

- Adequately trained in how to carry out the process correctly;
- Competent in carrying out the work safely; and
- Aware of the systems and hazards which the safe methods aim to remove/reduce.

It is vital that everyone appreciates the need for the system and its role in preventing accidents.

Particular training might therefore include:

- Why the safe system is needed;
- What is involved in the work;
- The identified hazards; and
- The precautions that have been decided.

Communication

Remember, there must be adequate communication for the system to be successful. The system's details should be fully understood by everyone who works with it. The importance of discussing the proposed system with those who will have to work under it and those who must supervise its operation cannot be underlined enough.

4. Monitoring

Monitoring of the system by supervisors and Deans of School/Directors of Service will be required once the system of work is introduced to check compliance with the procedure and the effectiveness of the system. Monitoring will be carried out at regular intervals to ensure that systems are working effectively and are being fully complied with and that the system of work is still workable.

5. Changes to the safe system of work

Action will require to be taken, e.g. counselling, disciplinary measures (in line with HR policies), where monitoring discloses failure to comply with the safe system of work. Measures to improve effectiveness of the system should be introduced with the minimum of delay.

Any changes to the safe system of work require that all personnel are informed and involved in the re-drafting/re-implementation of the safe system of work.

Requirements for the changes to a safe system of work are:

- Changes to the process, machinery or chemicals
- Changes to legislation
- Changes to location
- Changes to work practices
- Following an accident, near miss or dangerous occurrence
- Enforcement action
- Safer substances are available
- Advances in technology are taken advantage of

Safe systems of work should be reviewed at least annually.