

Health & Safety, Edinburgh Napier University

Safe Systems of Work

<i>Version number</i>	2.0
<i>Version date</i>	August 2018
<i>Review Date¹:</i> <small>¹ or earlier if change in legislation or on risk assessment</small>	August 2021
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<i>Distribution</i>	

<i>Amendment Control</i>				
<i>Ref</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Notes</i>
2.0	Aug 2018	Sean Hughes		Full review

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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 in order that hazards and degrees of risk can be identified and assessed. 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.

2. 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. As part of this assessment it will be necessary to identify the hazards 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.

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);
- 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;
- list plant and equipment required;
- list personal protective equipment to be used;
- dismantling and/or disposal methods;
- emergency procedures for all foreseeable risks (ensure that procedures are conveyed to competent persons and fully understood).

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.

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.

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, requires 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