

Risk assessment: how to get started

Jon Allbutt kicks off a new series of health and safety tips

To have an up-to-date statement of safety policy that gives details of the general arrangements for health and safety at work is not enough to fully comply with modern health and safety legislation. It should be the beginning of a process to produce what will become a safety manual which contains all the work necessary to comply with the regulations introduced under the 1974 Act and also the new EU/HSE Regulations which came into force on January 1, 1993.

In effect, the safety manual is a clear account of what should be happening in the workplace, setting the safety standards for each area of the work. To be fully effective the manual must reflect the actual working practices and is therefore a working document and not an academic dissertation on each subject! In fact, inspectors will compare what is stated in the manual with their observations of what is happening 'on the ground'. The safety manual is an essential reference for the employer, manager and employee and must be available for all to use where necessary.

It will not be possible to complete the work in one exercise. The safety manual may in fact never be completed as it will be altered, revised and will include new material as work practices change.

The term Risk Assessment is the new buzz phrase which conjures up a picture of difficult technical operations requiring special skills. Whilst this may be true for some of the tasks, eg noise assessments, the majority of the work requires only a good knowledge of the work, the relevant guidance, a fund of common sense and a heightened sense of safety awareness! The manager who has a detailed knowledge of the work and experience in carrying it out is the best person to carry out the risk assessment process. He does however need some training or guidance so that he develops 'health and safety eyes', that is the ability to see the workplace

in terms of its hazards. The blindness of familiarity is a major obstacle and some help is necessary to help the assessor to 'see' where the hazards are. A fellow manager from a neighbouring course will be able to help, or the club could call in independent expertise to get the process started. If the club decides to use a consultant, remember to follow the guidance in the HSE leaflet 'Selecting a Health and Safety Consultancy'.

Before commencing the risk assessments, plan how the job will be done, allocate time each week and sort out how the information will be recorded and stored. The use of computer software will provide greater flexibility and allow for alterations with the minimum waste of time. Organising a directory (Health and Safety) which is divided into sub-directories to take account of each area of work (Manual Handling, Noise, The Golf Course, Machinery) and then individual files for each assessment is the best system. There is no special software available for this, the use of a good quality word processing software will be sufficient for most needs.

Manual systems can be used and many of the documents give suggested formats for conducting assessments. There will be a lot of paperwork, so plan carefully and create files to separate the information and avoid a confused pile of paper!

When deciding on where to start, suggest that the Management Regulations are used to check out existing arrangements and also to identify hazards that are not already covered by specific regulations, eg there are no 'Risk of Being Hit by Golf Balls Regulations'! To have a set of the Regulations is very important. New Health & Safety guidance leaflets will be available from the GTC mid-May, but there will be a charge for these. tel: 0347 838640. Some free leaflets are available from the Health and Safety Executive Information Centre, Broad Lane, Sheffield S3 7HQ. Tel: 0742 892345. Fax: 0742 892333.

Norwich greenkeeper Ray Wigley (deputy head at Costessey Park GC, Parklands) says he follows these five steps when formulating a risk assessment:

- 1 Ensure all relevant risks or hazards are identified. Do not concentrate on trivialities. concern yourself with what actually happens in the workplace not what should happen; think about non-routine operations; consider interruptions caused by outside activities, the weather, golfers etc.
- 2 Ensure that all groups of employees and others who might be affected are considered; think about the golfers, greenkeepers and visiting reps.

- 3 Take account of any existing measures. Do they work? Are they properly maintained? Can you remove the hazard altogether by use of different equipment? If not, how can you minimise the risk? Only use PPE when there is nothing else that you can reasonably do.

- 4 If you have five or more employees, you must record the significant findings. For example, "Fuel storage facility checked - signed to remind no smoking naked flames within 50 feet."

- 5 Review the assessment from time to time and revise if necessary. Timings are not important but suggestions are to carry out a review quarterly.

■ *With the US Masters nearly upon us, Alan Mitchell, South Coast Section secretary, has this timely warning:*

The Greenkeeper's Lament

The story true is often told,
Of Percy once a greensman bold,
As a bloke was not contentious,
But at his job most conscientious.

Twenty summers came and went,
While Percy often did lament,
How can I make my greens sensational,
Just like those at Augusta National?

For you must dear reader pity,
Perce who had a greens committee,
Who yearly saw the National greens,
All lighted up on telly screens.

Looking at this turf like lightning,
Really could be rather frightening,
For Perce knew after the Master's fleeting,
The committee quickly would call a meeting.

"Perce!" they'd cry all tongues a-lashing,
"From the members we get a-bashing,
They want us for it is fashionable,
To get our greens like Augusta National."

So they went and gave to Perce,
And now you'll see things getting worse,
I think the man's first name was Peter,
Who gave to Perce the dreaded Stimpmeter.

With this tool they would stand tall,
And have greens to beat them all,
Slick and green with curvy bends,
On which they could impress their friends.

Well Perce tried hard to tell the facts,
But it availed not, they wanted acts,
"Give us greens like we desire,
Or Percy you we'll surely fire!

Then Perce left the meeting site,
Though he had put up quite a fight,
They didn't want to know the reason,
Augusta looked so good each season.

So here stood Perce quite all alone,
To the vagaries of English climate prone,
Take-all patch and dollar spot,
Fusarium wilt, he'd got the lot.

No USGA spec greens for him,
What could he do just for this whim?
He reduced the height to speed the ball,
And in three months had lost them all.

With greens all sad and looking sick,
The committee the fault with Perce did pick,
And so they sent him soundly packing,
For they thought that he was lacking.

And now Perce doesn't tend his course,
He rather goes with cart and horse,
And feeling like the committee to throttle,
At each front door leaves a fresh milk bottle.