



The Sign of Safety

CARRYING OUT A KNIFE RISK ASSESSMENT

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. BACKGROUND	2
3. ASSESSING THE OPERATION AND THE RISK.....	3
4. SAFE SYSTEM OF WORK.....	5
5. KNIFE POLICY	6
6. TRAINING.....	7
7. REVIEW.....	7
8. CONCLUSION	7
9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7

Moving Edge Limited
Marlborough Drive
Fleckney
Leicestershire
LE8 8UR

Freephone: 0800 040 9901

Telephone: 0116 2401099

Fax: 0116 240 1083

email: sales@movingedge.com

website: www.gr8knife.com

1. INTRODUCTION

If you use knives within your operations, the following guide will assist you in complying with your legal duty to carry out a risk assessment and, where possible, eliminate risk.

The guide is comprehensive and covers the full procedure from start to finish. Following the procedure will allow you to identify areas of your work where staff or others may be put at risk from the use of knives¹. The ultimate aim of the procedure is to act pro-actively and to eliminate - or at the very least, reduce - the risk of knife related accidents.

The procedure starts by **recording** the area of operation and the risk identified. This can be done using the blank Assessment Form² provided on the CD or on your own form. You then **assess** each of the risks presented and look to provide solutions. Each assessment should be prioritized to deal with the biggest threats to safety first.

Now, using this information, your own knowledge and that of your staff, it will be possible to decide on the safest knife for your applications and to introduce a **safe system of work**. In this respect, some suggestions are provided.

Next, you should insert your **knife policy** into your Health and Safety Policy (under the Arrangements section). Again, we have suggested some suitable wording that can be used.

Then, having formulated the procedure, you must now provide your staff with the relevant information and **training**.

Finally, the last stage of the process is the ongoing **review** of the procedure to ensure that systems are still current and that there are no changes to your operations or work practices that could affect the level of risk.

2. BACKGROUND

Under current Health and Safety Legislation, you are required to carry out a risk assessment (Regulation 3(1) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations [MHSW]) and, where possible eliminate risk. If it is not possible to remove knives from your workplace, you must consider reducing the risk so far as is reasonably practicable.

Under Regulation 4 of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER), you are required to select work equipment that is both safe and suitable for the task. At this stage of the process, it may be possible to select a knife that, through its safety features and suitability, will eliminate or significantly reduce the knife injuries identified under Regulation 3 of MHSWR. Quite simply both regulations require you to select the safest knife or tool for the job.

Even if you believe your current knife is safe, or you have already introduced a safety knife, you must still review your operations periodically to ensure that the task and the risk itself has not altered and that there is no new product on the market that would be safer for you.

¹Although the procedures relate to knives, they can be used in respect of other identified risks.

²The CD also includes two samples of completed assessment forms. The first records when the risk is identified and the second records a year later when the risk has been resolved and is reassessed

Since the implementation of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Risk Assessment has become the cornerstone of modern Health and Safety Law. Risk Assessment is the process of managing hazards adequately. The Robens report, which led to the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 stated “*those who create the risk should have the responsibility for overcoming those risks*”.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, an assessment must be made of the hazards arising from work activities involving knives and the risks involved both to the workforce and anyone else who might be affected.

3. ASSESSING THE OPERATION AND THE RISK

The main concept to understand in a general risk assessment is the meaning of the terms *Hazard*, *Risk* and *Risk Management*.

A *Hazard* is something with the potential to cause harm. An open bladed retractable knife with the blade fully retracted and stored in a staff locker is relatively harmless.

A *Risk* is the realization of that hazard. Persons are put at risk if that retractable knife is left lying around on a shop floor with the blade fully extended while the member of staff stops stacking shelves to assist a customer.

Risk Management is identifying and prioritising hazards, implementing control measures from the assessment and monitoring the controls. These controls must be suitable and sufficient.

The end result of a knife assessment should be to have foreseen everything that is reasonably practicable that might cause an accident - i.e. an unplanned event that causes damage to people.

When carrying out the assessment, don't be tempted to think you know all the areas and operations that use knives. Walk around and observe the operations and the users. It will also give you an indication of the way in which they currently work. By also involving staff in the thought making process, their in-depth knowledge of an operation or area may well provide you with risks that the untrained eye may not spot or are not present at the time of the assessment.

If you decide to use the blank Assessment Form on the CD, the information required is gathered under eight headings:

I. Area or Assessment

What part of your operation has been looked at. Use a new form for individual areas such as goods-in or warehouse etc.

II. Persons Who Might be Affected

Don't just consider the person carrying out the job. Consider people who may be in the vicinity (authorized or unauthorized). This list could include work colleagues, contractors for maintenance, visitors, customers, cleaners and members of the general public. This list includes people who may not be there all the time but must be considered for the times that they are there. Lastly recognize groups of people who may be more vulnerable to the risks than others, as these groups may need special arrangements. This list could include young workers or trainees who are inexperienced, expectant mothers and people with learning difficulties or disabilities.

III. Equipment

This will be the knife itself.

IV. Risk

The risks involved in this particular area (such as lacerations or puncture wounds). If there are several different types of knife operation, list them on separate forms and find a clear solution to each individual risk.

V. Current Risk Control Measures

List anything that was seen to be done at the time of the assessment to counter the risks involved. This may include current systems of work or even the way staff operate to try and avoid injury. On the other hand there may currently be no system and nothing that is seen to be done.

VI. Further action required

Make a brief description of the knife operation carried out and weigh up the possibility of a hazard actually causing harm. This will determine what action, if any, is required. Remember to keep the action proportionate to the risk and do not try to over complicate things. Also, look in the accident book for records of accidents or near misses that involved knives. It is not unusual, once all reasonable action has been taken, to still be left with a residual risk. You should then consider how dangerous the threat of this remaining risk is.

Consider what can be done to reduce the risk and how it may be put into practice.

Reducing risk can be achieved in several different ways including changing the way a job is done, using a less dangerous knife, isolating the task or changing the time a task is carried etc. As a last resort, personal protective equipment (P.P.E.) should be considered. Reducing risk in a lot of instances does not have to cost a lot of money however, failure to eliminate or reduce risk, can cost you a lot more in the long run. There doesn't even need be an accident for these costs to be realised. If the HSE visit your premises and feel there is a serious risk to health, they may stop you carrying out work until improvements have been made (by issuing you with a prohibition notice) or they may even decide to prosecute.

VII. Probability, severity and risk factors

This is a form of measurement of the risk from the hazard. A scale of 1 to 10 is used for both probability and severity.

Probability 1 = Something is rarely going to happen.
10 = Something is happening time and time again on a regular basis.

Severity 1 = Victim might have a nervous shock.
10 = The possibility of one or more fatalities occurring.

Risk Factor This is the probability and severity totals multiplied together to give a measurement of the risk involved with that particular assessment.

VIII. Priority

This is a subjective scale of Low (L), Low to Medium (LM), Medium (M), Medium to High (MH) and High (H) to measure the importance of the risk as seen at the time of the assessment. Obviously, any specific mandatory requirement relating to the hazard will have a greater priority than a requirement that is not mandatory. By prioritizing risk in this way, you are able to tackle those areas where a knife cut is most likely to occur first. One point to consider is, if a risk that is Low but is likely to affect a lot of people, it should have a higher priority than a risk that, is considered Low Medium but only affects the odd person.

When dealing with the prioritized residual risk, you should consider whether you have done everything that is reasonably practicable and, if they exist, have followed accepted industry standards? Even if the answer is yes, you should still ask yourself if there is more that could or should be done? Remember you have a duty to carry out what is considered reasonably practicable or suitable and sufficient. In order to do this, draw up a list of prioritized risks and work through the list looking firstly, at how can the risk be eliminated altogether and then, if that is not possible, how can the risk be reduced sufficiently to make harm negligible or very unlikely.

The knife assessment should be as thorough as possible. It is an ongoing exercise and should be looked at regularly by those responsible to make sure that any new hazards that may have arisen have been assessed and current ones have not either increased or decreased in severity.

In order to help achieve this, a no blame form of reporting accidents could be adopted. Employees are the ones at greatest risk and situations can be avoided or overcome if staff are able to report incidents without fear of being reprimanded.

When carrying out a knife assessment remember the following:

- What is being cut
- What type of knife is being used
- What do staff say
- What advice or help can a Manufacturer offer me
- Can I obtain a sample to test in my own environment
- How can I implement a safer system of work
- What training will staff require.

4. SAFE SYSTEM OF WORK

A safe system of work would be written instructions to the employee on how to carry out a task and could include some or all of the following:

- Only use the safety knife provided.
- Follow the training given.
- Inspect the safety knife each day before work begins for signs of damage or wear. Check the knife frequently throughout the day and ensure the blade remains sharp.
- Report any damage to the person responsible and seek a replacement.
- Inspect the object or packaging to be cut and ensure that it is stable and on an even surface. If the product needs to be moved you should follow the training you have been given and use lifting aids where appropriate.

- Ensure that there is no risk of the object or its contents toppling onto you or anyone else while carrying out the cutting operation or once the cutting operation has been completed.
- Never use any other tool than the one specified for the activity.
- Use the tool in accordance with the training you have been given.
- If in doubt, ask how to proceed. DO NOT proceed without assistance.
- If handling assistance is required, then ask. DO NOT proceed without assistance.

An example of what you could include in your Health and Safety Policy is as follows:

Safe Systems of Work will be rigid and adhered to by the company, its employees and others under its control. Safety knives will be provided free of charge to all staff required to use such knives and the use of all other knives is banned in the workplace. Maintenance and replacement of safety knives, etc. will be the responsibility of _____³. Employees and others under the Company's control have a legal obligation to report any faults in equipment or breaches in health and safety arrangements to _____.

The Company will train all staff in the use of safety knives and the arrangements for replacement or repair. _____ will undertake the training and ensure that all staff are adequately trained and competent before using safety knives and will keep documented records of all training received.

Staff who do not comply with these safety arrangements will be in breach of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and may be disciplined accordingly.

5. KNIFE POLICY

Involve staff in the decision making process. Explain to them the law and the need to protect them and why you want their input and assistance in both forming and introducing a knife policy. Without the support and co-operation of staff, you will find it difficult to comply with the Law.

Listen to what staff have to say (both negative and positive). Being part of the team will result in less resistance to change as it will be their decision making that has helped influence the policy.

This policy could include some or all of the following:

- The banning of open bladed knives of all description.
- Not allowing staff to make or bring in their own equipment.
- Issue safer knives and let staff know that these are the only knives to be used.
- Who has responsibilities under the policy and what they are.
- The training they will receive and the safe system of work they must follow
- Where to obtain knives and replacement blades
- Who to report problems with the knives or policy to
- Who is responsible for training

Once you have created your knife policy, it can then be included in your Health and Safety Policy (HSP). Your Health and Safety Policy should also include the employee's obligations (under MHSWR) that include 'a duty to use all equipment provided to them for safety reasons in the way in which they have been instructed or trained and to report any unsafe conditions etc. that the training and information they have been given should reasonably make them aware of'.

³Insert here the name of the individual responsible or the Job Function (e.g. Warehouse Manager).

6. TRAINING

Once you have selected the right tool for the job, you must now consider the user. Are they trained how to use a knife? In order to use the right technique - for the tool you have selected and also to follow your new Safe System of Work - they will require training. This can be aided by the use of Video, Guidance Notes and Wall Posters depicting correct and safe knife usage.

Remember **IT IS** important.

IT IS stands for **I**nformation, **T**raining, **I**nstruction and **S**upervision.

Information for all knife users – the dangers from open blades etc. and the steps taken to control the risk. Allow input from staff members about their experiences.

Training for all new staff and refresher training as required to ensure staff don't fall into bad habits and to include **information** again. Keep a log of training records.

Instruction on the Safe System of Work and how it applies to the staff and to others their work or actions may effect. Include staff input again to ensure that the system works in practice as well as on paper.

Supervision to ensure all staff follow the Safe Systems of Work and the training they have been given. This is also a useful way to highlight further training requirements.

7. REVIEW

As time goes by it will become necessary to review your assessment. This is to ensure that the system now put in place remains current and that staff are following this system. The review is also an opportunity to check that there are no further improvements to be made. For example, it could be that there is now a new knife available that is more suited to your requirements.

It is also necessary to review your assessment if there are changes to your operations which significantly alter the priority of the risk or create new risks altogether. Changes that could effect the risk would include new equipment or machinery, changes in the number of times an operation is carried out or a change in the location of an operation etc.

8. CONCLUSION

If you have followed the procedure, your workplace is now a safer workplace! Congratulations. If you have any observation or require further information, help or advice, then please contact Moving Edge on 0800 040 9901 or send an email to info@movingedge.com

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The information provided herein is produced by Moving Edge Limited⁴ and is based on the publication 'Five Steps to Risk Assessment'⁵ that is printed and published by The Health and Safety Executive - a copy of which is included on the CD. The information is provided in good faith and on the basis that Moving Edge Limited accepts no legal responsibility for its use.

⁴©Copyright Moving Edge Limited 2006. All rights reserved.

⁵©Crown Copyright