

Risk Control Systems 6 - Occupational health management

Organisations need to prevent occupational ill-health and protect employees and members of the public from exposure to ill-health risks arising from work activities. Excellent organisations will also identify the effect of health on fitness for work and assist employees in managing lifestyle risks to improve their well-being at and away from work.

The principles for controlling health through risk assessment are the same as those for safety, however the nature of health risks can make the link between work activities and employee ill-health less apparent than in the case of injury from an accident.

Unlike safety risks which can lead to immediate injury, the results of regular exposure to health risks may not become apparent for months, years and in some cases decades. Health may be irreversibly damaged before the risk is apparent. It is essential to develop a preventive strategy to identify and control risks before anyone is harmed by them. Failure to do this may lead not only to worker disability and loss of livelihood but to financial losses for the organisation through sickness absence, lost production, recruitment and training costs, compensation and increased insurance premiums.

Level of achievement according to evidence

Goal (Excellence)

- Occupational health is an integral part of the health and safety management system and not seen as a bolt-on.
- Organisation has a proactive approach and continually checks for potential health risks before they cause harm.
- Managers and supervisors are actively involved in health risk management and have the necessary competencies to do so.
- Organisation looks to other sectors as well as rail to identify potential causes of occupational ill-health and to identify controls and solutions.
- Management of ill-health risks includes realisation of the importance of a healthy workforce and wellness is encouraged through policies and practices e.g. lifestyle advice, resilience promotion etc.
- Management of ill-health risks includes consideration of the effect of general health on the ability of individuals to undertake their job (fitness to work).

Level 4 (predictable)

- The importance of management of occupational ill-health risks is recognised to be as important as the management of safety risks.
- Risk assessments have been undertaken and control measures are in place for all occupational ill-health risks.
- Processes are in place to identify and control new occupational ill-health issues.

- Control measures are monitored for their effectiveness and where appropriate exposure limits are recognised and monitored.
- Line managers have clearly defined roles in managing health issues and are held accountable.

Level 3 (standardised)

- Occupational ill-health risks are identified and managed separately to safety risks which are likely to be given priority.
- Risk assessments are undertaken however control measures may not be chosen correctly from the COSHH hierarchy of controls (e.g. an over-reliance on PPE)
- New occupational ill-health issues are not sought and management tends to be reactive with the emphasis on rehabilitation and return to work rather than prevention.
- Some control measures and exposure limits are monitored and reported to leaders.
- Health issues are managed by HR but with input from line management

Level 2 (managed)

- Occupational health risks are recognised but not all are systematically identified.
- Some areas or departments are more aware than others of occupational ill-health issues.
- Some management of occupational health risks is in place but there is no consistency through the organisation.
- Managers lack the appropriate skills and knowledge to proactively manage occupational health risks
- Health management is still largely an HR function.

Level 1 (ad hoc)

- Occupational health risks are not identified in the organisation.
- Employees are not encouraged to report occupational health issues.
- There are few or no records relating to occupational health management.
- Health management is solely an HR function with focus on rehabilitation and return to work.