

Health and safety: managing hazards

Hazards

A hazard is an event or situation that is an actual or potential cause of harm. This can include a person's behaviour or a situation resulting from physical or mental fatigue, drugs, alcohol, traumatic shock, or another temporary condition that affects a person's behaviour.

Significant hazards

All hazards must be assessed to determine whether they are significant hazards. A significant hazard is one that has the potential to cause serious harm that could result in permanent or temporary loss of body function such as a fall, burn, cancer, poisoning laceration etc. This can also include harm over a long period of time such as occupational asthma, or harm a long time after the exposure to substances such as asbestos poisoning.

You may refuse to do work that you believe is likely to cause you serious harm. If you are in this situation we recommend you contact NZNO for support.

Notification of hazards

Each workplace must have a hazard management plan.

Most reporting procedures are in the following form:

- > fill in a hazard form;
- > notify your health and safety representative and NZNO delegate if there is one;
- > notify your manager

If there is no health and safety representative or NZNO delegate we recommend you contact NZNO so we can inform you of the process for elections.

Working with a hazard

If the hazard can't be removed immediately and if you are at risk while working, the hazard must be controlled. While all hazards must be controlled, all significant hazards must be eliminated. If this is not possible the hazard must be isolated. If it is not possible to isolate the hazard then it must be minimised. This is called the hierarchy of control.

Eliminate, isolate, minimise

Monitoring of hazards

The effectiveness of the controls outlined above must be monitored, and where applicable, the environment and the health of the workers exposed to these hazards must also be monitored.

Timeframes for removing hazards

The Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 places a duty on employers and workers to take steps to ensure their own safety and that of others. Hazard management should be done in a timely way. If not, notify your health and safety representative, your manager and/or your NZNO delegate. You should not continue to work in an environment or with machinery where you are at risk of injury.

Stay informed about the progress

Workers have the right to be kept informed of the progress. You can ask the health and safety representative or your manager for updates.

Hazard notices

A hazard notice describes a hazard identified in a place of work and may set out suggested steps to deal with the hazard.

Issuing a hazard notice

Only a health and safety representative who has completed an appropriate course approved under section 19G of the Health and Safety in Employment Act (1992) may issue a hazard notice.

The health and safety representative must believe on reasonable grounds that there is a hazard in the place of work and they have brought the hazard to the attention of the employer. They must have discussed or attempted to discuss with the employer steps for dealing with the hazard.

The health and safety representative may give the employer a hazard notice if they believe on reasonable grounds;

- > the employer refuses to discuss;
- > the employer fails to take steps to deal with the hazard;
- > the employer and representative do not agree on the steps that must be taken;
- > the employer hasn't agreed on a timeframe in which they will deal with the hazard;
- > the employer hasn't met the timeframe agreed to address the hazard.

Where can I find out more?

- > Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment Labour information
- > Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992
- > NZNO fact sheet 'Health and safety'
- > NZNO Member support centre 0800 28 38 48

Material referred to in this document is sourced from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment Labour information and the Health and Safety and Employment Act 1992.

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Mission statement

NZNO is committed to the representation of members and the promotion of nursing and midwifery. NZNO embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi and works to improve the health status of all peoples of Aotearoa/ New Zealand through participation in health and social policy development.

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