



## A risk management approach to work-related stress

**A risk management approach to work-related stress is a similar process to the risk management of physical hazards.**

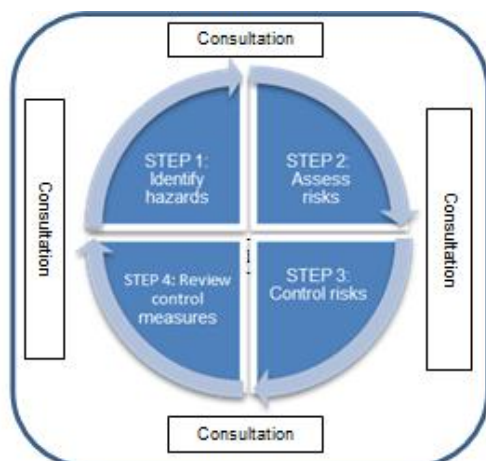
*The Occupational Health and Safety Act 1984* encourages a risk management process where a person must:

1. Identify hazards
2. Assess risks if necessary
3. Control risks
4. Review control measures to ensure they are working as planned.

This approach ensures employers or persons in control of workplaces are meeting their duty to eliminate or minimise risks to employee health and safety.

The following model demonstrates how employers can apply this risk management system to any work environment with the goal of eliminating or minimising potential causes of work-related stress as far as reasonably practicable.

Figure 1.



### Step 1: Identify the hazards

The first step in the risk management process is to identify workplace hazards. This means looking for those things in the workplace that have the potential to lead to work-related stress. This can be determined by evaluating information from:

- Workplace data, such as:
  - Productivity levels
  - Rates of absenteeism
  - Separation rates/turnover
  - Exit interviews
  - Staff engagement
  - Customer feedback
  - Peak/seasonal demands
  - Analysing incident reports and trends
  - Worker's Compensation data
- Workplace observations
- Workplace surveys

### Step 2: Assess and prioritise the risk

Risk management involves assessing the likelihood and consequences of injury or illness that may result from exposure to psychological risk factors and work-related stress. These psychological risk factors include:

#### Organisational risks:

- Work demands (physical, cognitive and emotional)
- Low control
- Poor support
- Lack of role clarity

- Poorly managed change
- Poorly managed relationships
- Low levels of recognition and reward
- Organisational justice

**Environmental risks:**

- Noise
- Temperature and humidity
- Lighting
- Vibration
- Air Quality
- Unguarded plant and machinery

**Individual risks:**

People respond to work-related stress differently and this can, in part, be related (or contributed) to a person’s previous experiences, coping styles, personality style, available support and physiological factors which are external to the work environment.

Differences in people’s responses to stress do not reduce employers’ legal duty and responsibility to minimise exposure to work-related stress.

**Step 3: Control risks**

After assessing the risk/s practicable and appropriate control measures need to be implemented.

In the context of work-related stress, designing control measures usually requires an alteration of the problem risk-factor. Examples of controlling psychological risk factors include:

- Improving supervisory skills through coaching, mentoring and/or training
- Planning workloads to meet potential demands
- Setting clear performance goals
- Ensuring role clarity
- Reviewing current HR procedures
- Employee assistance programs
- Communicating policy
- Checking understanding of changes
- Promoting effective early rehabilitation

**Step 4: Review control measures**

The final step of the risk management process is to review the effectiveness of the control measures that have been implemented. It is important to assess whether the controls are effective or require modification.

This should be a continuous process within an organisation as work environments are dynamic and usually experience continual changes to things such as management personnel, working conditions policies and procedures.

For more information contact WorkSafe on 1300 307 877.

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**Regional Offices**