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## Safe Systems of Work

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Part of the employer's general duty is to provide systems of work that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health. Components of a system include:

- the organisation and co-ordination of the work of those involved;
- training, instruction and supervision;
- layout of plant and appliances;
- methods to be used, and;
- general conditions of work.

The essence of the present legislation is that employers are expected to manage hazards with the same degree of attention and with the same allocation of resources and priorities as they manage other subjects such as quality control, industrial relations and budgetary matters. Furthermore, as part of management commitment to the principles, employers have a duty to establish and maintain, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe systems of work. Safe systems of work must be identified through the risk assessment process.

The following components of a safe system are identified for guidance:-

- Co-ordination of the work of different departments and activities.
- Layout of plant and appliances for special tasks.
- The method of using particular machines.
- The method of carrying out particular processes.
- The instruction of trainees and inexperienced employees in particular tasks beyond their normal experience.
- The sequence in which the work is to be carried out.
- The provision of warnings, notices, and the issue of special instructions in particular cases.
- The procedure for introducing changes into normally accepted routines and practices, including explanations of why the changes are necessary.

- A contingency plan to deal with foreseeable emergencies.
- An auditing or monitoring regime to ensure the system is working safely.

These points are illustrative of what goes to make a system safe. With the provision of safe plant and equipment; general competence of the staff involved, including the supervisors in charge of the work; and; a safe place of work, including both the physical place of work, and its environments; attention to the ten components, listed above, will enable employers to meet their statutory duties.

The requirement to establish and maintain safe systems of work applies not only to routine activities, which are repeated every day; it also applies to tasks occurring infrequently at certain times such as during annual maintenance work. It also applies to single, one-off jobs, which happen only once in a lifetime. It will be clear that there is a different emphasis in each of the three categories given. In the first there may be problems of familiarity and the potentially hazardous complacency arising from it. In the last there needs to be emphasis on meticulous planning and constant close supervision by qualified, skilled and experienced staff.

In certain cases ensuring that systems of work are safe may be achieved with the help of permits-to-work. Such written permits formalise the progression through a particular operation. Most often the operations are those with a high risk. They require clearances at specific stages throughout the operation and a signed go-ahead that it is safe to continue from a named, specifically appointed person. Only when this is done is the next stage allowed to go ahead.

The principle of establishing and equally importantly, maintaining safe systems of work, is keenly regarded by enforcing authorities who see it as a direct reflection of managerial competence and commitment.