

Frequently Asked Questions

1. As an organiser, do I have to carry out Risk Assessment for **every** event?

Yes. The RSC has a legal responsibility to suitably and sufficiently assess any risks for all events that it organises. By acting proactively and demonstrating that we are appropriately managing risk, it serves to prevent others e.g. insurers, from having any “ammunition” to suggest that we should follow a course of “risk aversion” i.e. not proceeding with any “interesting/exciting” chemistry events.

2. Why does the RSC not encourage a Risk Assessment method that better defines the exact level/extent of the risk rather than just looking at managing the hazard i.e. why not use a numerical Risk Analysis Matrix?

We do not seek to deter organisers from doing such an analysis and attaching it to the RSC “Red” assessment. However, such an approach does require a certain level of competency and it would be all but impossible to achieve consistency across the whole of the RSC.

3. As an organiser, do I have to **submit** a Risk Assessment form to the RSC for every event that I am arranging?

No. The only forms that have to be submitted to the RSC are those for “Red” events. The “Green” and “Blue” forms are for use and retention by the organiser.

4. Where should I record the risk banding i.e. “Green”, “Blue” or “Red” for our events?

When you enter details of the event on the RSC Conferences & Events database there is a mandatory “box” in the online process to enable you to do this.

5. Will I get a reminder to send in any necessary “Red” form?

Yes, but, only if you have correctly entered the event as being “Red” on the Conferences & Events Database at least two weeks in advance of the event.

6. What about outings and social gatherings such as dinners?

Typically, these would be classified as “Green” events. In deciding that a dinner at a local hotel, for example, requires use only of the “Green” guidance, the necessary Risk Assessment has in fact been done. No further Risk Assessment is necessary, but the “Green” form lists useful points for consideration that are relevant to ensuring a safe and successful event.

7. What should I do if, at a “Green” event, e.g. Senior Members’ Lunch at a local hotel, I spot a potential problem such as a fire exit door blocked by chairs?

Speak to the staff or management diplomatically to resolve the situation. It may be best to “wonder if their staff had noticed that the chairs were blocking the door?”.

8. We have trouble deciding whether an event is “Green”, “Blue” or “Red”. What should we do?

Always err on the cautious side and upgrade the risk banding. On the other hand, do not dream up highly improbable worst case scenarios in order to do so!

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9. When does “Green” become “Blue”?

If the event organisers have any role in a “control” sense i.e. altering layout, setting up equipment etc, then it becomes a “Blue” event. The “Blue” form is designed as an “aide memoir” to ensure that suitable “checks” are undertaken prior to and during the event set-up.

10. What about lectures or Open Day events where non-hazardous materials are used?

These would typically be classified as “Blue” events and therefore no detailed Risk Assessment is required. However, it is good practice to follow the “Green” guidance and use a “Blue” form to ensure that all risk issues are considered.

11. When does “Blue” become “Red”?

If there are experiments or demonstrations taking place involving potentially hazardous, explosive or deflagrating substances, then this is certainly a “Red” event. Where young people are involved, heightened assessment is required which is likely to mean that all demonstration/practical work involving them should normally be classified as “Red”.

12. Where can I find the “Red”, “Blue” and “Green” forms and guides?

On the RSC website: www.rsc.org/riskassessment.

13. Does the RSC have examples of the completion of “Red” Risk Assessment forms?

Yes. These can be found at www.rsc.org/riskassessment.

14. How do I find the Risk Assessment information on the RSC website?

On the www.rsc.org home page, go to “Site Search” and type in “Risk Assessment at RSC events”.

15. What is available on the RSC Risk Assessment page?

- i. A Procedure of Risk Management of events***
- ii. A handbook on Transporting Chemicals for Demonstrations and similar purposes***
- iii. An Accident/Incident Procedure form***
- iv. Examples of completed “Red” Risk Assessment forms.***

16. Can I complete the “Red” forms on line?

Yes. Go to www.rsc.org/riskassessment. Other documents that need to be included such as COSHH forms can either be faxed or scanned and sent electronically or posted.

17. Who “signs” the electronic/on-line “Red” form?

In submitting the form you provide name, email address and telephone number. This is taken as the equivalent of a written signature.

18. How long do I need to keep the forms?

There is no hard and fast rule, but the advice would be for no more than a year, unless there is an ongoing investigation. The RSC, centrally, will retain copies of submitted “Red” forms for 6 years.

19. Can I re-use last year's completed forms?

No. Complete a fresh form for each event but by all means re-use data from previous forms as long as these are suitably amended, where appropriate, to take account of changed circumstances. Do not use "generic" forms.

20. We are organising the same event at a number of different venues. Do I have to complete separate "Red" forms for each venue?

Technically, yes. This is because it is vital to consider the differences between each of the venues e.g. height of the ceiling, smoke/fume extraction facilities etc. However, where there are no significant differences then a single form that includes details of all the dates/venues will suffice.

21. Do I have to keep sending in completed forms for repeat "Red" events when I sent in one earlier in the year and only the date has changed?

Yes, but, as long as there are no significant differences, it is only necessary to advise the RSC centrally of the details of the event referring to the previous form(s).

22. There are lots of repeat demonstrations/events which tour the country. Why can we not have a single "generic" assessment for each event?

Theoretically, we could if all the venues and all other prevailing circumstances were the same for each time the event took place. However, all venues are unique and other circumstances will vary. Consequently these differences need to be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, if "generic" risk assessments were prepared for a number of the most popular experiments/demonstrations, then a large majority of the detailed assessment could remain unchanged. It would only be necessary for the organiser to ensure that aspects affected by the changes in circumstances have been suitably amended.

23. We sometimes have to observe procedures set by the host venue that we use and complete their documentation. Do I also have to complete the RSC forms?

If it is a "Red" event then the RSC form must be completed and sent in to the RSC at Cambridge, but, as long as their documentation fulfils the RSC assessment requirements, it will be sufficient to fill in only the basic event details (Title, Date, Venue, and Organiser) on the RSC form and attach their documentation to it.

24. By completing the forms do I become liable if something happens that I did not foresee?

Completing the forms is not a legal requirement, but carrying out a Risk Assessment is. If you do not complete the forms you may find it difficult to demonstrate that a suitable Risk Assessment had in fact been carried out. Where, subsequently, something unforeseen happens, the completed form(s) will demonstrate that you have followed RSC approved practice and taken reasonable steps to mitigate risk.

25. Who is responsible for completing the forms?

The RSC delegates this to the organiser of the event. In the case of events organised by RSC Local Section/Interest Groups etc this will mean the Chairs/Leaders of the groups. It becomes their responsibility to ensure that the appropriate assessments are carried out.

26. Does the form have to be signed by the Chairman/Head of the Section/Interest Group etc?

No. The signatory should be the person who has completed the form.

27. Does it have to be the same person in the organising group (Local Section, Interest Group etc) that completes the forms for all the events?

No. Many groups “allocate” the events around their members to ease the individual workload. The important factors to consider are who has the most control over the event and who is competent to undertake the assessment.

28. We are simply sponsoring an event and are not involved in its organisation, but, it will carry the RSC logo. Do we need to complete the RSC forms?

No. It is the responsibility of the organisers to have carried out appropriate Risk Assessment. However, it is good practice, when sponsoring, to make it clear that a suitable and sufficient assessment must be carried out and to assure yourselves that it has, in fact, been carried out.

29. We are putting on a joint event with another organisation such as the SCI. Who is responsible for carrying out the Risk Assessment?

Whoever has the main role/control in the organisation of the event. It would be good practice, however, for the RSC procedures to be followed in any situation where the RSC has a significant input into an event. From an RSC perspective, where we are involved we need to be sure that a suitable and sufficient assessment has been undertaken.

30. If suitable and sufficient Risk Assessment/Management is carried out for an event, does it matter if the RSC forms are filled in or not?

Yes. If an event is to be under the RSC banner, then, for a “Red” event, the RSC forms and/or equivalent must be submitted to the RSC in advance of the event.

31. We only organise ordinary lecture type events, as opposed to demonstration lectures, within our local university, so is this whole exercise not just way over the top?

No. There is a legal requirement to carry out suitable and sufficient Risk Assessment. The RSC forms are a relatively simple means to this end and the risk banding approach means that for such relatively low risk events their completion is not disproportionately time consuming.

32. Do I need to check insurance certificates etc when I book a venue, hire a coach, arrange a boat trip etc?

No, but do make sure that you use reputable companies for whom it would be reasonable to assume that they had fulfilled all their legal requirements.

33. Why do you ask for the forms to be submitted two weeks before the event?

This is to allow the team at the RSC centrally time to have a look at the assessment and to make a judgement on whether to seek further clarification or amendment.

34. What happens if we do not submit the forms on time?

The bottom line is that the RSC could ask for the event to be cancelled. However, in reality, we would try and work with you to ensure that a suitable, if more dynamic, Risk Assessment is undertaken at or just before the event.

35. We have booked an external presenter for a practical activity. Who should complete the “Red” forms.

You, as the organiser, are responsible for ensuring that they are completed but you should ask the presenter to give you details of the experimental content assessment and controls. It is becoming standard practice for many of those regularly involved in giving presentations, to keep this information in electronic format.

36. Despite reminders, the presenter we have booked for a series of demonstrations for schools still has not sent us the completed Risk Assessment for his experimental work and the two week deadline is up. What do we do?

Advise the RSC at Cambridge of the situation and send in the form completed as far as you can with a note to say that the details of the experimental work are to follow. Send these in as soon as they are available. If, on the day itself, you still have no completed Risk Assessment, then, before the event goes ahead, you MUST assess the arrangements yourself and make a judgement as to their suitability and sufficiency and as to whether or not the event can proceed safely. Make sure that you keep a comprehensive written record of all the agreed experimental protocols.

37. What will happen if a group persistently does not complete and/or submit the necessary Risk Assessment procedures?

If reminders and persuasion are ineffective, then, ultimately, the RSC could withdraw from the group the right to hold events under the RSC banner and with it their insurance cover.

38. Do I need to check through the details of the experimental Risk Assessment submitted to me by the external presenter before sending it off to the RSC?

Yes, but it is accepted that certain assumptions may be made regarding the competency of RSC endorsed/recognised presenters.

39. There has been an incident at our event where either people have been injured and/or property has been lost or damaged. Where can I get details of the procedures that I am meant to follow?

You can download the accident/emergency procedures, including a report form, from the web-site www.rsc.org/riskassessment.

40. Do I have to report all incidents at one of our events to HQ?

Yes if the incident involves injury to a person and/or non-trivial loss or damage to property including pets. You must also report “near-misses”.

41. Why do I have to report “near-misses”?

This will enable advice on best practice to be circulated so that the possibilities for such incidents can be minimised in the future, thereby reducing the risk of serious accidents.

42. Why do you want the accident reported and the form completed immediately? Would it not be better to wait until the next day when the initial shock has had a chance to subside?

It is important to capture as much information as possible, including any details of witnesses, individuals involved, photographs and sketches etc, as soon as possible while things are still fresh in people's minds. Reporting the incident as soon as possible to the RSC centrally, means that staff will be able to instigate any necessary help and support without delay and also will be pre-warned prior to any Media or HSE involvement.

43. There has been a serious accident at our event. An investigation has shown that the Risk Assessment of the experimental work completed by the external demonstrator was flawed. I signed the form submitted to the RSC so will I be held liable?

The RSC assumes vicarious liability/responsibility for the actions of all whom it "employs" other than for actions that could subsequently be deemed "individually reckless".

44. In the event of an accident, does the RSC provide insurance cover?

Yes. Any event carried out under the RSC banner is fully insured including appropriate personal accident and public liability cover.

45. Who can I contact for help in completing the forms?

The staff at the RSC in Cambridge, currently Pauline Meakins (meakinsp@rsc.org), will be pleased to help.

46. Is there training available from the RSC in developing competency in carrying out Risk Assessment/Management?

There is currently no organised programme of training but if there is an identifiable requirement then this will be considered. Contact Pauline Meakins (meakinsp@rsc.org) at Cambridge.

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