

# Glossary of Health and Safety Terms - Summary Guide

## Introduction

The following is a list of terms used including those used to describe potential hazards that may be encountered by those working in the built environment. The best way of preventing risk is to assess them and use a hierarchy of controls to mitigate against the exposure to them using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as the last line of defence.

The overriding legislation is The Personal Protective Equipment at Work (Amendment) Regulations 2022. For each type of equipment there are a number of specific standards that apply understandably too many to comprehensively list here given the number of PPE categories.

It should also be remembered that Regulation (EU) 2016/425 (as incorporated into UK law) sets out the essential health and safety requirements for PPE in the UK.

This is designed to provide information and is by no means a fully comprehensive list. Further information should be sought from various agencies such as the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) and National Health Service (NHS) [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).

## Access Routes

Access routes are an integral part of all new construction sites. Providing access for staff, contractors, equipment and materials, they are essential to efficient project management and delivery.

## Acid

An undesired, unplanned incident resulting in injury, ill- health, death or damage.

## Allergen

A substance that causes an allergic reaction in the body.

## Acute exposure

Immediate exposure to a hazardous substance over a short time period.

## Appointed Person

A designated person who has been nominated to take a supervisory role in the event of an accident, injury or illness. The appointed person will have completed basic first aid training and have the skills and knowledge to deal with a first aid situation.

## Asbestos

The name used for a group of fibrous silicate minerals that once inhaled, have adverse effects on health and can lead to fatal lung diseases.

## Asbestosis

The damage of lung tissue caused by asbestos, resulting in a shortness of breath.

## Audit

An official inspection of the health and safety management arrangements of a premises, carried out by qualified auditors. The aim of an audit is to confirm that adequate control measures have been put in place to cover the risks and to ensure that these measures are being adhered to.

## Best Practice

A way of delivering risk control practices which have been recognised by an authoritative body as cooperating with the law.

## Chronic Exposure

Multiple exposures to a hazardous substance over a long period of time. This may be continuous or repeated contact with a substance over months or years

## CIEH

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

## Code of Practice

A set of rules fixed by regulatory bodies or trade associations which, although not law themselves, are intended to provide guidance on how to comply with the law.

## Common Law

Unwritten law which has been devised through judicial precedent rather than statutes. A breach of common law can however, result in a criminal offence.

## Competent Person

A person who has been adequately trained and has the appropriate skills and knowledge to perform certain health and safety tasks without posing a risk to themselves or others.

## Confined Space

An enclosed area that has the potential to cause serious harm from hazardous substances or conditions within the space.

## Contaminant

A substance, usually a pollutant, which has been discovered in an area where it does not usually belong.

## Control Measures

Actions that have been put in place to regulate and reduce the risks associated with the work being carried out.

## Corrosive

A substance that has destructive effects on another substance.

## COSHH

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health.

## Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)

The Construction Skills Certification Scheme runs a training and qualification verification scheme of the same name for the British construction industry. To apply for a CSCS card you are required to pass the appropriate level of CITB Health, safety and environment (HS&E) test within the last two years or an approved alternative.

## Display Screen Equipment (DSE)

A device that has an alphanumeric or graphic display screen, such as a computer monitor.  
View our Display Screen Equipment courses

## Emergency Plan

A plan detailing the exact actions to be taken in the event of an emergency with the aim of evacuating all persons from dangerous environments or conditions.

## Ergonomic Hazards

Working methods that have the potential to damage the musculoskeletal system, including forceful movements, vibration, extreme temperatures, improper lifting techniques and inappropriate workstations.

## Explosive Proof Protection

Preventative techniques applied to the manufacturing process of equipment for use in high-risk, explosive work environments.

## Fires

Class A: fires with flammable solids such as wood, plastic and paper.

Class B: fires involving flammable liquids and electrical fires.

Class C: fires involving gases.

Class D: fires involving metals such as magnesium, potassium and titanium.

Class F: fires with cooking oils and fats.

## Flammability

The ease in which a substance will catch fire.

## Flammable Gas

A gas with a low flammability limit that can be readily ignited when mixed with air.

## Flammable Liquid

A liquid which can readily catch fire.

## Flammable Solid

Solids that are liable to cause fires through friction or absorption of moisture.

## Flash Point

The minimum temperature in which the vapour of a substance, when mixed with oxygen, will ignite when a flame is applied.

## Fume cupboard

A method of ventilation, typically in the form of a cabinet with a moveable safety-glass front window. The air is drawn away from the worker or workspace to prevent contact with harmful vapours or gases given off by hazardous substances.

## Glare

Bright lights that reflect off a display screen (see DSE) and impede a person's sight, often causing excessive eyestrain and headaches.

## Guarding

A device that prohibits access to a hazardous part of a machine or equipment.

## Hazard

A situation or behaviour that has the potential to cause harm, injury, ill-health or damage to property and the environment.

## Health – see also Wellbeing

The state of being free from illness or injury.

## Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

An authoritative organisation that enforces health and safety legislation in the UK, including statute, approved codes of practice, regulations and guidance on work-related health issues.

## Health and Safety Representatives

A person that has been appointed by trade unions to represent their colleagues in regards to various issues of health and safety in the workplace.

## Health Surveillance

A process of observation that involves monitoring any early symptoms of work related ill-health in employees who may be exposed to certain health risks, such as hazardous chemicals.

## Heat Exhaustion

A condition caused by excessive exposure to hot temperatures, usually caused by profuse sweating in warm, poorly ventilated working environments.

## Hypersensitive

An extreme physical response to particular substances or environments.

## IIRSM

The International Institute of Risk and Safety Management.

## Improvement Notice

A formal notice that is given by an authoritative health and safety body following a breach of law. The notice will state the committed offence, what action needs to be taken for improvement and the specified date by which it must be taken.

## Incident Investigation

The process of gathering information regarding the causes of an incident, with the purpose of formulating control measures to prevent the incident from reoccurring. View our Incident Investigation courses

## Incident/Near Miss

A term for those events that have not resulted in significant harm but have the potential to cause an accident, injury or damage under different circumstances.

## IOSH

The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health. View our IOSH courses

## Irritant

A non-corrosive substance which can cause inflammation on the body through contact.

## Manual Handling Operations

Tasks that require a person to exert bodily force to transport a load by lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling or carrying an object.

## Material Data Safety Sheet

A document that details information on potentially hazardous substances, along with guidance on how to handle them safely.

## Method Statement – see also Risk Assessment

A document that details how a particular working process will be conducted in a safe manner, typically used for construction or installation procedures. Often combined with a Risk Assessment in the form of a RAMS document.

## NEBOSH

The National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health.

## Noise Induced Hearing Loss

An incurable condition caused by both acute and chronic exposure to a loud noise.

## National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) - see also SVQ

NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) are based on national occupational standards.

## Occupation Health

The relationship between a person's health and the working activities that they undertake.

## Occupational Illness

An illness that occurs in employees who have been exposed to hazards whilst at work.

## Permit to Work

Formal, written specifications for controlling risks when carrying out hazardous work, usually for non-routine activities that require special precautions to control the hazards.

## Policy

A legally required statement of a company strategy, consisting of their objectives to attain a safe working environment, their responsibilities, and the arrangements for implementing the strategy and achieving their aims.

## Preventive Maintenance

The regular maintenance of work equipment to reduce the risk of failure.

## Prohibition Notice

A formal notice that is issued by an authorising health and safety body on discovery of a breach of statute that has the potential to cause an accident or injury. A Prohibition Notice commonly follows a serious accident, with the aim of preventing the hazard from developing or to put a stop to it if it is already in motion.

## Risk Assessment Method Statement (RAMS)

See separate entries for Risk Assessment and Method Statement

## Reasonably Practicable

When the degree of risk can be weighed up against the cost, in terms of time, money and difficulty of implementing control measures. If the cost outweighs the risk, then it is deemed inappropriate for an employer to implement the measures to prevent the risks.

See also (ALARP) as low as reasonably practicable and so far as is reasonably practicable (SFAIRP) Rerer also to HSE [www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index](http://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index)

## **Risk Assessment – see also Method Statement**

An examination of the potential risks in the workplace, with the aim of assessing whether enough precautions have been put in place to prevent harm. A risk assessment focuses on the relationship between the worker, the work being carried out, the equipment being used and the conditions of the working environment. Often combined with a Method Statement in the form of a RAMS document.

## **Risk Management**

The process of putting control measures into practice and monitoring the results, with the intention of reducing, or eliminating, the potential risks to health and safety.

## **Routes of Entry – see also Access Routes**

Ways in which hazardous substances can enter the body, including inhalation, injection, ingestion and absorption.

## **Self-Assessment**

An assessment carried out by the individual to determine how safely they are working and fulfilling their health and safety duties.

## **Site Management Safety Training Scheme (SMSTS)**

SMSTS (and the SMSTS-R: refresher course). These courses are for those considering, or already have, responsibilities for planning, organising, monitoring, controlling and administering groups of staff. See [www.citb.co.uk](http://www.citb.co.uk)

## **Site Supervisors Safety Training Scheme (SSSTS)**

SSSTS (and the SSSTS-R: refresher course) This course is for those considering, or already have, supervisory responsibilities. See [www.citb.co.uk](http://www.citb.co.uk)

## **Statute law**

A statute law is a written law produced by Parliament which originates from decisions made in other courts and the country's written constitution..

In the United Kingdom (UK) an Act of Parliament (also called a statute) is a law made by the UK Parliament. All Acts start as bills introduced in either the Commons or the Lords.

## **Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) – see also NVQ**

SVQs operate broadly in the same way as NVQs, but are used mostly in Scotland. All SVQs are credit rated and levelled and feature in the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF) in order to enable clear learner progression between other Scottish national qualifications and the SVQ provision, including Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks.



## Toxic

Substances, usually poisonous, that cause irritation and have detrimental effects on health.

## Wellbeing – see also Health

Well-being, or wellbeing, also known as wellness, prudential value, prosperity or quality of life and often considered as part of someone's general health. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions.

## Workstation

The conglomeration of equipment that an employee requires to fulfil their working practices. In regards to Display Screen Equipment (DSE), the workstation is likely to include a desk, a chair, a computer monitor and a keyboard.

The above list of terms and expressions is designed to be comprehensive but not necessarily exhaustive.