

Contractor auditing

Contractor auditing and the need to consider contractors' health and safety arrangements

Background

Most organisations have a need to work with contractors, some of which will be engaged to undertake work on a regular basis. Contractors, particularly those working at site, often find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings which may contain hazards they are not used to dealing with such as chemicals and extremes of noise and temperature.

If care is not taken to ensure the correct health and safety procedures are in place, then contractor activities may lead to an increased level of risk not only to the contractors themselves but also to employees, subcontractors and any members of the public that they may come into contact with on site.

What are the legal duties and obligations regarding the use of contractors?

It is a requirement of current legislation including the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and the CDM Regulations that organisations establish the competence, in terms of the health and safety arrangements, of all contractors who carry out regular work for their company whether this is at their own offices or at any of the premises or sites they manage on their clients behalf.

Clients and contractors also have special responsibilities under the health and safety regulations for dealing with special hazards such as chemicals and asbestos.

Selecting competent contractors

When you appoint a contractor you need to ensure they have the ability to carry out the contract to the desired standard without causing any risks to health and safety. It is good practice to develop a defined list of appropriate selection criteria which can be used to help evaluate a contractor. A contractor appraisal form is often used to help with this process.

As part of the evaluation process you may wish to request certain pieces of documentation including evidence and details of:

- Work experience in a similar field/project
- Qualifications, skills and accreditations
- Training particularly health and safety training
- Risk assessments and method statements for the work to be carried out
- Accident and sickness reports
- References

It is also important to make sure you provide sufficient information regarding the requirements of the project and its specifications at the pre-tender stage to allow the contractor the chance to adequately assess their ability to do the work.

Working effectively with contractors

Once a contractor has been selected it is important to maintain regular communication to make sure everyone is clear as to their own and each other's responsibilities and everyone has up to date information regarding the progress of the work being undertaken. It may be useful to implement the following checklist of actions prior to the contractor beginning any work on site:

- Identify any risks apparent on site which the contractors may be exposed to as a result of the work, eg. location of asbestos.
- Ensure that the contractors are informed as to any risks and hazards which may be already present and are fully trained to deal with these risks.
- Employees should also be made aware of any hazards that may result from the contractors work activities.
- Make sure contractors are fully briefed on the emergency procedures, site rules and welfare facilities available.

The contractor's health and safety performance needs to be monitored throughout the course of the project. On completion of the project a review session should be set up with the contractor to assess what went well and discuss any learnings and improvements that could be put into practice in the future. At this stage a decision can also be made as to whether a contractor should be put on an approved contractor list for future contracts.

How can we help?

Metro SRM LLP's 'Contractor Appraisal' service can help in the vetting of contractors leaving you confident that you are using contractors who are deemed to be working safely and in compliance with current legislation.

What would be involved?

The process varies in depth and complexity dependent upon the level of risk your company may be exposed to in the event of an incident occurring and also the extent and degree of the hazardous nature of the activities undertaken by the contractor. As a minimum it involves a review of the contractor's

- Corporate health and safety documentation.
- Generic risk assessments and method statements.
- Ensuring validity of insurance documentation.
- An evaluation of the contractors health and safety culture/philosophy.
- Validating any date specific qualifications or accreditations.

Our 'Contractor Appraisal' service usually involves the following stages:

- Initially contacting contractors to outline the process and why it is being undertaken.
- Contractors are requested to sign a 'competency statement' complete a contractor appraisal questionnaire and submit any relevant documentation required to assess their competency and to ensure your liabilities are not being unduly exposed whilst they work for or on your behalf.
- Undertaking 'table top' reviews to assess and rate each contractor against a set of pre-determined criteria.
- Following the appraisal of a contractor they would be verified as 'Competent' or we would recommend they are removed from the list of service providers.
- Providing an ongoing review over a subsequent twelve month period of the validity of contractors' insurance documentation and any other associated certification which may have an expiry date with updates being requested accordingly.
- Site visits can be arranged to verify competency.