

Contractors on construction sites



The presence of contractors on a construction site is almost inevitable, but the risks they bring and that they may be exposed to need just as much attention as you would give for your employees, customers and the general public.

A contractor is anyone who directly employs or engages construction workers or manages construction work. Sub-contractors, any individual self-employed worker and businesses that carry out, manage or control construction work all fall under the definition of 'contractor'.

If there is little or no communication between everyone involved in a construction project, hazards can be left unidentified, not assessed and not controlled. There are many examples where a failure to manage and effectively communicate with contractors has resulted in avoidable accidents, incidents of ill health and damage to property.

Besides injury and damage, the consequences can include prosecutions, resulting in considerable fines and, on occasion, custodial sentences for anyone who, in the eyes of the law, has a duty to ensure health and safety – including contractors and those who employ them. Contractors therefore have an important role in managing and monitoring their work to ensure any risks are controlled. They must have the skills, knowledge, experience and, where relevant, the organisational capability to carry out the work safely and without risk to health.

A key theme of the Construction (Design and Management) (CDM) Regulations is the need for all duty holders to co-operate and co-ordinate their activities. Some of the key actions and responsibilities for relevant duty holders under CDM are highlighted below.

Key actions for the co-ordination of construction work

Clients

Clients decide which contractor will carry out the work and how much money, time and resource is available.

The decisions made by the client will therefore impact the health, safety and welfare of workers and others affected by the work.

Consequently, clients need to carefully consider and execute the following actions:

- Appoint the right contractor(s) for the right job, ensuring that they have the skills, knowledge and experience to identify, reduce and manage health and safety risks.
- Make sure that appropriate arrangements are in place for planning and managing the work and associated risks.
- Allow adequate time for the work to be undertaken.
- Provide relevant information to the designer and contractor(s), including information about the site and existing structures, overhead or underground services, asbestos containing materials and fragile surfaces, for example.
- Confirm that your contractor has suitable site welfare facilities.
- Verify that the principal contractor or contractor has produced a construction phase health and safety plan that explains how health and safety risks will be managed during the works.
- Obtain evidence, before work has started, that the contractor holds appropriate employers and public liability insurance.

Principle contractors/contractors

Some of the considerations for the principal contractor or contractor in relation to the selection and appointment process for other contractors will be similar to the client's.

In addition there is a need to:

- Plan, manage, monitor, control and co-ordinate the construction phase of the project, taking into account and appropriately addressing all of the health and safety risks to everyone affected by the work (including members of the public).
- Have on-going arrangements in place to ensure health and safety is appropriately managed and controls are implemented and maintained throughout the construction phase.
- Consult and engage with workers about their health, safety and welfare.
- Secure relevant references and other evidence to ensure that those appointed have the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience for their role and, where relevant, the organisational capability to carry out their work safely and without risk to health.
- Ensure all workers have site-specific inductions, and any further information and training they need.
- Liaise with the principal designer to share any information relevant to the planning, management, monitoring and coordination of the pre-construction phase; and

- Confirm, before construction work starts, that all contractors have adequate employers and public liability insurance.

Recognising the duties highlighted above, it's also important that clients and principal contractors/contractors:

- Identify any legal requirements that may apply to specific activities, for instance, under CDM 2015, the Work at Height Regulations and the Control of Asbestos Regulations.
- Appoint individuals with adequate health and safety competence to provide assistance in relation to the management and control of contractors.
- Consider authorised/approved contractor status for contractors used regularly, based on a questionnaire as part of a formal selection process, with agreed formal risk control procedures and arrangements including risk assessments and method statements, where appropriate.
- Develop similar practices for the work of contractors that are to be used on a one-off or infrequent basis.