

Hazard and Risk

Hazard and Risk – Non-Routine Tasks

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What is a non-routine task?

A non-routine task or a non-routine hazardous task refers to a task or activity within the workplace that is infrequent, unexpected, or uncommon but carries an elevated level of risk, often beyond the routine hazards associated with regular job duties. These tasks are typically not part of a worker's everyday job responsibilities and may arise due to various circumstances, including maintenance and repair work, emergency situations, or unusual project requirements.

In some cases, workplaces may have procedures in place for these non-routine tasks; however, due to the infrequency of completing the task, the procedures may not have been reviewed for some time.

What are some key characteristics of non-routine tasks?

Key characteristics of non-routine tasks include:

- **Infrequent:** Non-routine tasks occur less frequently compared to routine job duties. They are not part of the regular workflow and may be sporadic or occur irregularly.
- **Unpredictable:** Non-routine tasks are often unplanned or emerge as a response to unexpected events or issues. They can be unpredictable and may require quick decision-making and adaptation.
- **Increased Risk:** Non-routine hazardous tasks tend to involve higher levels of risk compared to routine activities. The hazards and risks associated with these tasks may not be well-known or workers may not be familiar with the procedures, and appropriate control measures may not be in place.

Examples of non-routine hazardous tasks might include:

- Emergency response to incidents or natural disasters.
- Maintenance or repair work on machinery, equipment, or infrastructure.
- Hazardous material handling and cleanup.
- A blockage or jam in a pass or conveyor system.
- High-risk construction or demolition projects.
- Operating new or experimental equipment or processes.
- [Confined space entry](#), [hot work](#), or electrical troubleshooting on energized systems.

Any task that is out of the ordinary is non-routine. Always take the time to identify hazards and assess the risk at each step of the task.

Why should special care be given to non-routine tasks?

Given the increased risk and the potential for unfamiliarity with the task at hand, it is critical to identify and assess potential hazards and to implement appropriate control measures. Controls include ensuring that workers are adequately trained, equipped with the necessary safety equipment, and provided with clear guidelines and procedures for executing non-routine tasks safely.

Important considerations, depending on the task, may include:

- [Controlling hazardous energy](#) (e.g., [lockout-tagout](#)).
- Ensuring [adequate ventilation](#) and [air quality](#).
- Following or developing procedures for high-risk work (e.g., [confined spaces](#), [hot work](#), [working at heights](#), working with chemicals).
- Using proper [personal protective equipment](#).
- Complying with the applicable health and safety legislation.

A comprehensive risk assessment and planning are often required to mitigate the unique risks associated with these tasks. Additionally, having well-prepared [emergency response](#) procedures in place is essential for addressing unforeseen situations that may arise during non-routine tasks.

How can workplaces conduct a risk assessment for non-routine tasks?

A risk assessment for a non-routine task should include the workers involved with the task, the supervisor, and a health and safety committee member or representative. The team may also include a safety professional, an engineer, a mechanic, an electrician, or other relevant personnel to the task.

Creating a procedure for non-routine tasks is beneficial. The process for identifying hazards and implementing controls may be similar to how the workplace would conduct a regular risk assessment.

It is recommended to discuss each step of the non-routine task with the people involved in the task. Write down the steps in the order in which they will be completed. Then, identify the hazards associated with each step and assess the risk. After all the hazards are identified and the risks assessed, recommend controls to eliminate the hazard or reduce the risk.

For more information on Risk Assessments, see our OSH Answers: [Hazard and Risk - Risk Assessment](#).

What are the benefits of conducting a risk assessment for non-routine tasks?

Conducting risk assessments for non-routine tasks can serve as a valuable learning opportunity and are often legally required. The information gained from these assessments can be used to refine safety practices and inform future risk assessments, contributing to an organization's continuous improvement in safety management.

Similarly, involving workers in the risk assessment process promotes a culture of safety within the organization. Workers are more likely to actively participate in safety measures and provide valuable input when they understand the hazards and risks associated with non-routine tasks.

If it is expected that the non-routine task will become more routine, such as monthly maintenance or monitoring, it is recommended that workplaces adopt the non-routine procedure as a safe work procedure that is regularly reviewed and updated as required.

What is a sample non-routine task form?

Sample: Non-routine task form.

Date: _____ Supervisor: _____

Persons Involved: _____

Task: _____ Department: _____

Description: _____

Should this non-routine be a safe work procedure? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Step	Description	IDENTIFY Hazard(s)	ASSESS Risk(s)	CONTROL Hazard(s)

Recommended controls

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

What are some helpful tips for employers when conducting non-routine task risk assessments?

- Include all workers, supervisors, or teams that will be involved with the non-routine task.
- Review existing procedures (if available) and modify as required.
- Use the [hierarchy of controls](#).
- Establish emergency response procedures and ensure all are trained in these procedures.
- Monitor the task in real-time to make sure the task is progressing safely and as planned.
- Stop the non-routine task and re-evaluate if a step was missed, new information becomes available, or new hazards are identified.
- Review the task afterwards to assess how well the control measures worked and identify opportunities for improvement.

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