

HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE NOTE

PERMIT TO WORK



NFU Mutual

Risk Management Services

INTRODUCTION

Employers are required to provide systems of work that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to the health of their employees and to others who may be affected by the work.

Certain types of work carry a particularly high risk of serious personal injury, serious ill health or property loss and as a result they require more formal safety planning and control. This can be achieved by the use of, and strict adherence to, a permit to work.

WHAT IS A PERMIT TO WORK, AND WHAT ACTIVITIES SHOULD ONE BE USED FOR?

A permit to work is a type of formal written safe system of work, used to control specific hazardous activities. It is an authorisation document which incorporates a system of checks to ensure that hazards are identified, risks are controlled and all people involved in the job have been made aware of the arrangements. The planned safe system of work is then formally authorised (or permitted) and completed within a pre-defined time period.

Examples of the types of work for which a permit to work should be implemented include:

- Entry into a confined space;
- Hot work;
- Live electrical work;
- Excavation work;
- Use of lifting cranes;
- Work at height.

Permits to work should not be applied to all activities, as experience has shown that their overall effectiveness may be weakened if used too often. A permit to work is not normally required for controlling everyday tasks or routine maintenance tasks in non-hazardous areas. Safe systems of work would ordinarily be considered sufficient for those types of activities. Specific guidance for developing safe systems of work is provided in a separate guidance note.

Permits to work should:

- Specify precisely the work area (including the items of plant and equipment involved, if appropriate);
- Describe fully the work to be done and the hazards presented;
- Specify the safety precautions which must be put in place and adhered to throughout the course of the work;
- Identify who is going to do the work (the Competent Person);
- Identify who is responsible for giving authorisation for the work to commence (the Authorised Person). This person must be competent to do so and not be involved in undertaking the work;
- Include a sign-off process between the Competent and Authorised Persons, to ensure that everything is left in a safe state at the end of the work.

The issue of a permit to work does not by itself make a job safe. That can only be achieved by those preparing for the work, those supervising the work and those carrying it out. In addition to completing the permit to work documentation, other precautions will need to be taken to make the job safe (e.g. process or electrical isolation, access barriers etc.) and these will need to be identified before any work is undertaken.

SO WHAT SHOULD I DO BEFORE I ALLOW THE WORK TO START?

Before any work that requires a permit to work starts, you should carry out a risk assessment, put all the necessary precautions and controls you have identified in place and prepare a permit to work form.

RISK ASSESSMENT

As with all risk assessments, you must identify the hazards present and who could be harmed, assess the risks and determine what precautions to take. Specific guidance on how to carry out risk assessments is provided in a separate guidance note. For tasks requiring a permit to work it is helpful to use a checklist, which will help to identify the things that must be checked as part of the work.

Your assessment should include:

- The task to be carried out;
- The working environment - including the actual work area and the area around it;
- Working materials and tools that are to be used - include the method of getting the equipment to and from the work area and their suitability for the working environment (e.g. in flammable atmospheres you may need explosion protection equipment to prevent sparks);
- The suitability of those carrying out the task - ensure both physical (e.g. mobility, size, etc.) and mental considerations (e.g. ensure that they are able to understand the true risks associated with the hazardous nature of the task etc.) are considered;
- Arrangements for emergency response and rescue.

Once you have completed your risk assessment and you have put all the necessary precautions and controls in place, you should prepare your permit to work form.

PERMIT TO WORK FORM

An example permit to work form has been included at the end of this guidance note. The permit to work form consists of four defined parts:

- **Details of the work:** The person responsible for conducting the work should complete this section, which is usually best done with the person(s) that will actually carry out the work. It should detail exactly what work is to be undertaken, including the location and details of the plant or equipment to be worked on and with.

Details from your risk assessment on the hazards, together with the control measures that must be implemented should also be specified (e.g. electrical 'lock-off' procedure, posting of safety signs and suspension of certain operations whilst the work is undertaken, etc.).

Clearly state the period of time over which the permit to work will be valid. This period should not usually exceed one working day.

Once the information is completed and the special precautions and control measures listed are in place, this section of the form should be signed by the Competent Person. In doing so, the Competent Person acknowledges their (and any others involved in the work) understanding of the risks involved in the work, is agreeing to undertake only the work detailed on the permit to work and will ensure continued implementation of the special precautions and control measures listed. Once signed, the form should be handed to the Authorised Person.

Anyone else involved in the actual work should also sign the form to declare that they understand the conditions of the permit to work.

- **Agreement:** The Authorised Person must check the location of the work and check that all precautions and control measures listed are actually in place. Once satisfied, the Authorised Person will then sign the form to give authorisation for the work to start.
- **Following completion of the work:** On completion of the work, the Competent Person must ensure that each of precautionary measures taken during the course of the work are removed safely. When this has been achieved, the permit to work should be signed again and returned to the Authorised Person.
- **Final sign off:** It is the responsibility of the Authorised Person to satisfy themselves and acknowledge that the plant or equipment and the work area are returned to service in an orderly fashion. The permit to work must be signed when this has been achieved.

It is also the responsibility of the Authorised Person to ensure that all users are informed that normal operations / processes may resume.

It is important that throughout the work, regular checks are made by the Competent Person and the Authorised Person to ensure that the precautions are still effective and that the agreed way of working is adhered to. If any issues come to light the work should be stopped immediately until all issues are resolved. The permit to work may need to be updated to reflect any changes. Completed permits to work should be retained.

INFORMATION, INSTRUCTION, TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Training for Competent Person(s), Authorised Person(s) and any employees assigned responsibilities under permit to work systems should include these elements:

- The principles of risk assessment techniques;
- An explanation of the responsibilities of the various parties;
- The tasks for which permits to work must be used;
- How the permit to work should be used;
- How to complete each of the sections of a permit to work;
- An explanation of the allowable timescales for the issue of permits to work and expiry requirements;
- Control of contractors and their allowable roles in permit to work systems.

It is important that workers are appropriately supervised. Effective supervision can help you monitor the effectiveness of the training that people have received, and whether employees have the necessary competence to do the job.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

- HSE Web Site
www.hse.gov.uk/humanfactors/topics/ptw.htm
- HSE Web Site
www.hse.gov.uk/safemaintenance/permits.htm

EXAMPLE PERMIT TO WORK FORM

Section 1 – Details of Work (to be completed by Competent Person)

Permit Number:

Exact Location of Work:

Nature of the work to be undertaken:

Work to commence:

Date:

Time:

To be completed by:

Date:

Time:

Specific Hazards and Precautions:

Physical Controls (e.g. safety devices / lock off procedures / Checks after work complete etc.):

I declare that I understand the identified risks involved in the work, agree to undertake only the work detailed on the permit to work and will ensure continued implementation of the special precautions and control measures listed.

Signature of Competent Person:

Date:

Time:

Worker Declaration - "I have read and I understand the permit to work"

Names and signatures of all relevant workers:

Section 2 – Acceptance

The work location has been examined and the precautions listed have been complied with. I consider that the above mentioned location is safe for the Competent Person to commence work activities and agree that the work can be carried out for the specified duration.

Signature of Competent Person:

Date:

Time:

Section 3 - Following completion of the work

I hereby declare that the work described in Section 1 is complete. The area has been inspected and is deemed to be safe and all persons, tools and equipment have been withdrawn..

Signature of Competent Person:

Date:

Time:

Section 4 – Final sign off

I hereby declare that the work has been completed and that the area is safe to return to normal service.

Signature of Authorised Person:

Date:

Time:

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