

// OHS PURCHASING GUIDELINES



EARLY
LEARNING
ASSOCIATION
AUSTRALIA

The voice for parents and service providers

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1 // INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a framework that assists services and their employees consider the adverse impact on health and safety that may occur if unsuitable furniture, equipment or substances are purchased.

This guideline uses a hazard management approach where the elimination or reduction of the risks stemming from workplace hazards is not only regarded the most effective method of controlling these “problems”, but this approach is enshrined in Australian occupational health and safety (OHS) legislation.

Hazards can be eliminated by preventing them from being introduced into the workplace in the first place. This guide should be used to assist services and their employees understand the main sources of risk that may be present with different items of equipment, furniture and substances. This information can be used to better inform the risk assessments that should be conducted as part of the selection process for these items.

While many suppliers will intend to design their products for optimal safety, this level of design is not always achieved and, unfortunately, it is not possible to completely rely on supplier claims regarding their products.

Services should use a risk assessment process to identify the key design features of the item(s) being sought, to determine the likely impact on workplace health and safety prior to purchase. This risk assessment will enable the service to include their specific needs relative to the size and layout of the area where items will be stored or used as well as the expected use of these items. This risk assessment should extend to a review of items once they are delivered and before they are used to ensure that the expected design features have been provided.

Items that are assessed as not having the preferred or recommended design criteria are more likely to be hazardous when introduced to the workplace. Purchasing equipment that is less likely to introduce these hazards can be a powerful and effective risk control strategy for all people who work within or attend the service.

This risk assessment process for purchasing furniture, equipment and substances can be summarised by two questions:

- Does the inherent design of the item(s) being purchased eliminate or sufficiently reduce known or assessed risks?
- If not and residual risks are present, what needs to be done at the workplace to minimise these risks and the impact of obtaining and using the item(s).

2 // SCOPE

This guideline is intended as a support reference to supplement any existing purchasing policies or guidelines used by services and their employees to evaluate and select suitable furniture, equipment and substances. It is suggested that the guideline also be used by services where they hire or lease such items or receive them as gifts.

However, in using this OHS guidance information, services should also adhere to their own purchasing policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure that they comply with the requirements of their organisation.



3 // RESPONSIBILITIES

Managers of services are responsible for providing and maintaining a healthy and safe workplace. They will also usually be responsible for purchasing furniture, equipment and substances. The determination of who has authority for purchasing must be clearly articulated with the understanding that the responsibility for providing a healthy and safe environment resides with the employer.

However, the roles of evaluating, (risk) assessing, purchasing and implementing the use of these items are likely to be shared between a range of employees with each organisation or service. Any employees, including managers, who have this responsibility, should ensure that the items chosen are fit for purchase and do not pose unacceptable risks for employees, children and other persons who may use them or be exposed to them. This includes the implementation of any strategies needed to ensure that any risks stemming from the use of the item(s) are managed and controlled.

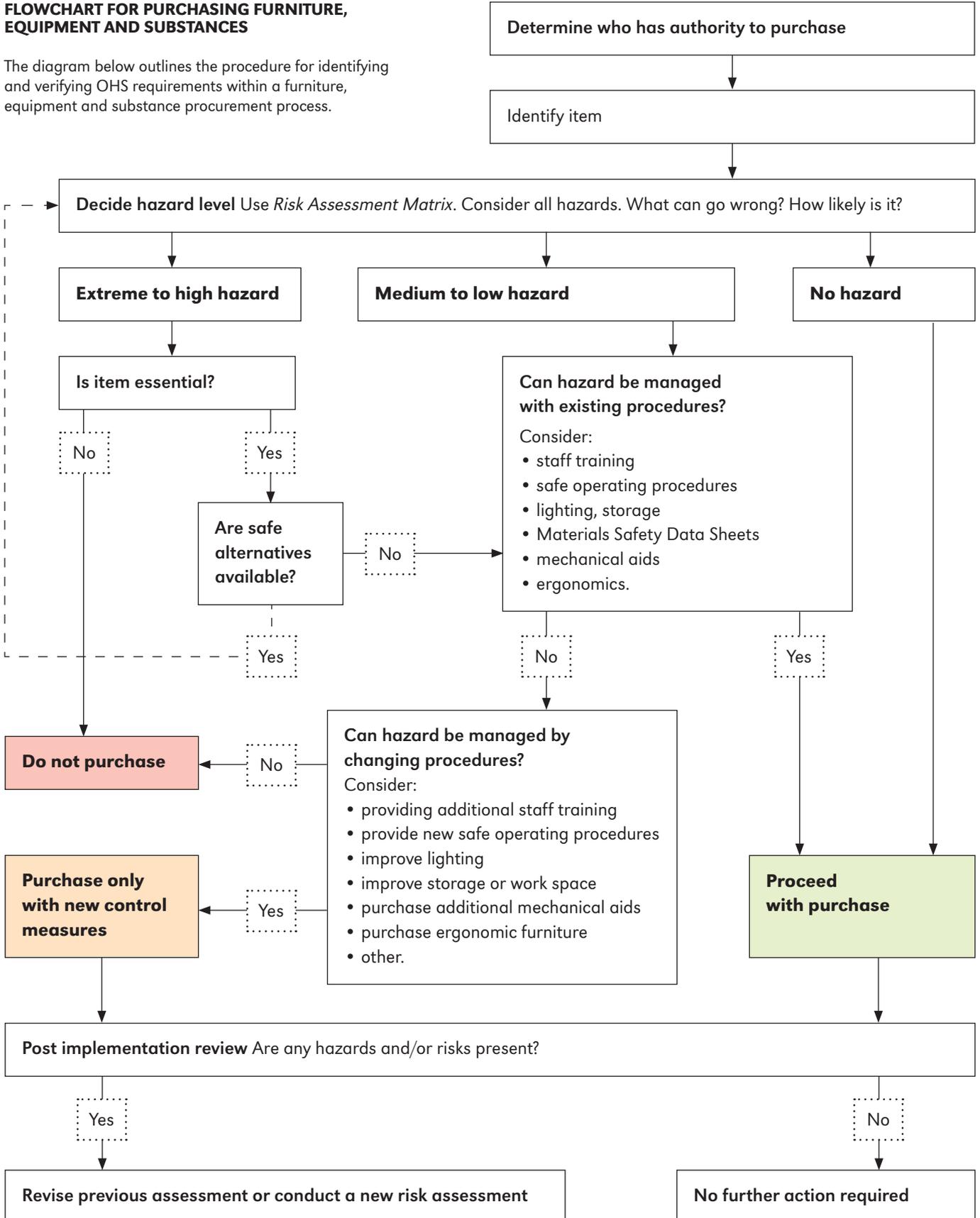
If a service considers that they do not have the expertise to be able to evaluate and assess possible risks then they may need to engage an external person with these skills and competencies to ensure that the required level of scrutiny is applied to items being considered for purchase.

For more information contact Early Learning Association Australia on (03) 9489 3500.

4 // PROCEDURES

FLOWCHART FOR PURCHASING FURNITURE, EQUIPMENT AND SUBSTANCES

The diagram below outlines the procedure for identifying and verifying OHS requirements within a furniture, equipment and substance procurement process.



PROCEDURES *continued*

4.1 Determining the possible Health and Safety impact of purchasing the item(s)

Any item to be purchased should be evaluated to determine whether the item poses a risk to health and safety. The following questions are an aid in determining whether the item could raise an OHS issue:

- Could a reasonably foreseeable injury or incident occur in the course of normal or unanticipated use, handling of the item within its area of use or handling it to and from a storage location or area?
- Are there any specifications which are required to ensure safe operation or use?
- Does the item need to comply with legislation, codes of practice or Australian Standards?
- Will a safe work procedure need to be developed to ensure health and safety?

If the answer to any of the above is 'yes', then OHS requirements are to be identified to ensure that all safety related specifications are communicated to the supplier and verified upon receipt.

4.2 Risk Assessment

Many items used by services will carry some degree of residual risk. The risk assessment process should be used to determine if the inherent design features of the item and its intended use will be sufficient to prevent (eliminate) or lower risks to employees, children and others who would be exposed to it.

4.2.1 Using risk assessment to evaluate items for purchase

If the assessment determines that no or only minimal risks are likely to remain then the item would be favoured for purchase from an OHS perspective and no or only minimal risk control strategies should need to be implemented once the item is available and ready for use. However, other selection criteria, including cost and overall suitability within a services environment would need to be evaluated to finalise the purchasing decision.

If the assessment determines that residual risks are likely to remain, then a determination of the level of risk that will be present and whether these risks can be effectively controlled by requesting modifications to the manufacturer/supplier or by the implementation of risk control strategies at the workplace will need to be made.

For low to moderate risks if the assessment finds that the risks can be effectively managed and controlled then it may be suitable to proceed with the purchase provided these risk control measures are implemented. These risk control measures will need to be defined and implemented prior to the use of the item (see section 4.3 Risk Control Measures).

For high to extreme risks the item should not be purchased if it is not essential or the risks cannot be effectively controlled. For example, if adequate changes to the item cannot be made by the manufacturer/supplier or the risk control strategies appear to be too complex, costly or difficult to implement or maintain then the item should be rejected and should not be purchased by the Service.

For some items of furniture and equipment and for some substances the risk assessment will be a straightforward process and relevant information will be available from the manufacturer/supplier to assist the assessment.

Sophisticated manufacturers/suppliers will have conducted their own risk assessment as part of their design. This process should outline the perceived risks and how the design eliminates or controls these risks as well as defining any additional risk control measures that will need to be implemented once the item is installed.

If this type of information is not available from a manufacturer/supplier, then this may be an indicator of the lack of design scrutiny and consideration of risks as part of the design or development process for the item. A higher level of risk assessment may need to be applied to these items as part of the purchasing and risk assessment process to counter this lack of scrutiny or information from the manufacturer/supplier.

Manufacturers/suppliers that can supply this information and appear to be knowledgeable about the industry, expected use of the item and any residual risks are more likely to be able to assist the assessment process and be prepared to have them independently reviewed. They may also be more responsive to requests for modifications or improvements, particularly where they are part of a required risk control strategy.

The risk assessment should seek to identify and evaluate risks arising from different types of hazards that may be present as a result of the anticipated use of the item(s).

When considering items for purchase, the manufacturer/supplier should be asked to provide a copy of their risk assessment. This will assist the product to be reviewed as well as indicate the level of scrutiny that has been applied by the manufacturer/supplier in the development of the product.

4.2.2 Hazard types

While a broad range of hazard types can be present in industrial (workplace) settings, the most common types of hazards that may be present for services in their use of furniture, equipment and substances are:

- manual handling where the adoption of awkward postures and movements and the exertion of repeated or sustained forces can pose an injury risk (*note that most risks associated with working at a workstation and using a computer can be assessed using manual handling risk assessment criteria*)
- general safety, where slip or trip hazards, exposure to sharp or protruding points or edges, pinch points or abrasive surfaces can pose an injury risk
- hazardous substances where exposure and/or contact with certain chemicals and substances can be harmful to human health, both as a result of single or repeated exposure.

4.2.3 References

References to support the risk assessment process include:

Victorian Government

- Occupational Health and Safety Act (2004)
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (2007)
- Manual handling (Code of Practice # 25) (2000)
- Hazardous substances (Code of Practice # 24) (2000)

WorkSafe Victoria Guidance Information/Health and Safety Solutions

- Lifting children to and from cot, highchairs and change tables in children's services (2010)
- Moving equipment in children's services (2010)
- Storing supplies and equipment in children's services (2010)
- Using office areas in children's services (2010)
- Working at low levels in children's services (2010)
- Preventing slips, trips and falls at work (no date reference)

Australian Standards

- Standards that relate to specific items of equipment, such as cots

PROCEDURES *continued*

Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA)

Tipsheets

- OHS guidelines for purchasing
 - Adult chairs (for use in children’s rooms)
 - Cots
 - Highchairs
 - Step ladders
 - Office desks (workstations) and chairs
 - Shelving and storage
 - Trolleys

Early Childhood Management Manual – OHS Section

- OHS policy procedure checklist
- Detailed guidance on hazard management steps
- Hazard identification, risk assessment and corrective action form (Part A)
- Hazard identification, risk assessment and corrective action form (Part B)
- Chemical assessment and chemical register (Part A)
- Chemical assessment and chemical register (Part B)
- Manual handling risk assessment checklists

4.3 Risk Control Measures

Risk control measures are the strategies that must be put in place to eliminate or reduce the risks associated with the hazard to an acceptable level to prevent or minimise injury or illness. The type or method of risk control used should follow the hierarchy of controls outlined in the ELAA “Detailed Guidance Hazard Management Steps” where risks with a higher rating of severity and/or consequence will require a higher level of control.

Ideally a well designed product will be fit for purpose and present zero, or only minimal, hazards and risks. This impact of good design on controlling risks supports an approach of specifying preferred design criteria for items, particularly where a risk assessment has been used to identify those elements that will both prevent or minimise risks as well as those that will increase risks.

However, when reviewing the range of different designs of an item that are commercially available for the services sector, it is likely that some items will not control all risks and some residual risks will remain that will require workplace based strategies .

For such items it will be important to implement risk control measures when the item is introduced into the workplace. Some of these measures stem from the manufacturer/supplier recommendations. Other risk control measures will originate from the risk assessments conducted as part of the purchase evaluation process or be available via industry wide risk assessments that have been conducted on common items of furniture or equipment or types of substances.

Regardless of the source of these risk control measures, it is essential that these measures be implemented to achieve the maximum level of sustained risk control for items purchased.

Risk controls can only be effective and durable when properly implemented. So the implementation of risk control measures should be assigned to managers and/or employees who have the responsibility and authority to put them in place. This may require certain items of furniture or equipment to be provided in addition to the item(s) being purchased as well as procedures and work methods developed and staff trained in using them.

If an item is being purchased via tender, the risk assessment and control information developed as part of the preparation of that tender should be distributed to all tenderers so they are aware of the OHS and design requirements of the item.

4.4 Supplier's Capacity to Comply

Many services providers will purchase items by liaising directly with a supplier. Larger services may use a tender process to get manufacturers/suppliers to submit costings and information on features.

For both methods, the risk assessment process should be used to assist services evaluate and select items and while the purchasing scale may vary the process should be similar with regard to obtaining and providing OHS information about the item(s) sought.

Services should seek risk assessment and risk control compliance information from the manufacturer/supplier as part of the selection process as well as provide them with the results of risk assessments to confirm the OHS and design parameters that are being sought.

The level of compliance with the risk assessment should then be used as a key determinant of the item to be purchased. Where manufacturers/suppliers can exceed the defined OHS requirements the expected benefits should be defined and evaluated to ensure that any claims are genuine and not just part of their marketing approach. However, favour should be made for items that can be demonstrated to exceed specified OHS requirements.

4.5 Verification of OHS Requirements

4.5.1 Pre implementation

Upon arrival of the item(s) at the service the person(s) responsible for ordering the item(s) and co-ordinating or conducting the risk assessment should conduct a review to verify that the OHS requirements or control measures have been met. Verification should also ensure that all required labeling or signage is installed.

This review and the outcomes should be documented for future reference.

If the review finds that the item does not comply with the OHS requirements then consideration as to whether the item can be installed or not should be made. The item should not be installed for use until all OHS requirements can be verified. It may be necessary to place the item in storage or label it to prevent it from being used until verification is complete.

Any deficiencies that prevent verification from being achieved will need to be improved before the item can be installed for use. If these improvements cannot be made then verification will not be achieved and the item should be rejected and returned to the manufacturer/supplier.

Once verification is achieved, the item(s) should still not be installed for use until any associated risk control measures are in place and any staff training has been conducted.

4.5.2 Post implementation

A follow up or post implementation review should be conducted approximately 4 to 8 weeks after the implementation of this item. The post implementation review should re evaluate the risk control measures covered by the design of this item and any additional measures put in place with its implementation. This review should include observation of the item being used and feedback from those employees who use it or other who may be exposed to it, such as other employees or parents.

If a hazard that was not identified prior to purchase but becomes apparent once the item has been received or used a hazard report should be submitted using the organisation's standard reporting format. This report should describe the improvements and risk control measures needed to eliminate or minimise the risk of injury.

The risk assessment documentation and specified risk controls for this item should be updated to include any changes or new or extended risk controls measures that are developed as part of the post implementation verification process.

4.6 Future Purchases

A risk assessment and the specified OHS requirements can be re-used for future purchases of the same item. However, if the nature of use of the item or the quantity of the item differs and there may be a greater impact on health and safety, the risk assessment should be reviewed and modified accordingly.

