SSSTS revision notes

Original independent study material · 18 topics · Reviewed 12 November 2026

Choose a topic, work through the notes and test what you have learned. Each topic includes key facts, a worked example, common mistakes and five original practice questions with explanations for every answer. Use the notes alongside your current course workbook and trainer's guidance.

Use these original notes and practice questions alongside your taught course and current delegate materials. They are not official CITB exam questions, an exam prediction or a substitute for attendance. The safety guidance is for Great Britain; Northern Ireland has separate legislation. All worked situations are fictional learning examples.

Choose a topic

1. Supervisory duties, CDM and health and safety law
2. Risk assessment, RAMS and permits to work
3. Inductions, toolbox talks and safety culture
4. Inspections, near misses and incident reporting
5. COSHH, dust, fumes and respiratory protection
6. Asbestos: information, disturbance and training
7. Noise and hand-arm vibration
8. Manual handling and musculoskeletal health
9. Welfare, wellbeing and first-aid arrangements
10. Working at height, ladders and scaffolds
11. Site traffic, access and protecting the public
12. Work equipment, guarding and maintenance
13. Lifting operations and lifting equipment
14. Electrical safety and underground and overhead services
15. Excavations and temporary works
16. Fire prevention, hot work and emergencies
17. Confined spaces and rescue planning
18. Environmental protection, storage and waste

1. Supervisory duties, CDM and health and safety law

Separate your supervisory tasks from legal dutyholder roles, and explain how legislation affects everyday decisions.

What you should understand

- Distinguish a job title from a CDM dutyholder
- Explain the difference between law, an ACOP and guidance
- Recognise improvement and prohibition notices

The general duties

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 sets the general framework in Great Britain. Employers must protect employees and others affected by their work, including providing safe systems, suitable equipment and necessary information, instruction, training and supervision. Employees must take reasonable care and cooperate with their employer. Regulations apply more detailed requirements to particular work or hazards. [HSE37] [HSE41]

Who has which responsibility?

A supervisor organises and checks the work of a team: people need clear instructions, suitable controls and a way to raise problems. A contractor has duties for construction work under its control. Under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 (CDM 2015), on a project involving more than one contractor, the principal contractor coordinates the construction phase; the principal designer coordinates health and safety during the pre-construction phase. The client must make suitable project arrangements. Workers must cooperate and take care of themselves and others. One person or organisation can hold more than one role, but the duties come from the actual role, not from an SSSTS certificate. [HSE01]

Why the legal distinctions matter

Acts and regulations create legal duties. An Approved Code of Practice gives a recognised way of meeting particular duties and has special status in legal proceedings: an alternative approach must still comply with the law. Ordinary guidance explains good ways to comply; it is not automatically legislation. Company rules can be stricter than a legal minimum, but cannot remove a legal duty. [HSE02]

An improvement notice requires a breach to be remedied by a specified date. A prohibition notice prevents an activity where there is a risk of serious personal injury; it may take effect immediately or at a specified time. A supervisor should understand and follow the restriction, rather than assume every notice allows work to continue. [HSE30]

Apply this on site

Ask who plans the task, who supplies competent people and equipment, who coordinates interfaces and who checks that the controls work. Delegating a daily check helps deliver an employer's arrangements; it does not transfer every legal duty to the person holding the checklist. These CDM notes concern Great Britain. Northern Ireland has its own CDM 2016 regulations. [HSENI01]

Key points to remember

- A supervisory job title is not a separate CDM dutyholder category.
- The principal contractor coordinates the construction phase on a multi-contractor project.
- A certificate contributes to training; it does not establish competence for every task.
- Legal duties remain relevant even when work has been delegated.

Know these terms

Dutyholder: A person or organisation on whom legislation places a responsibility.

Competence: The relevant skills, knowledge, training and experience to carry out the particular work safely.

ACOP: Approved Code of Practice: practical advice with special legal status.

Two contractors in one work area

A plumbing supervisor is asked to decide the overall sequence for plumbing and demolition because they are the first supervisor to arrive.

Why it matters: The plumbing supervisor can explain their team's needs and risks, but coordination across contractors must sit within the principal contractor's arrangements. Establish the agreed sequence and responsibilities before briefing the plumbing team. Being first on site does not confer authority over every contractor.

Common misunderstanding: SSSTS makes me the legally responsible person for every site activity.

Remember: Responsibilities depend on employment, appointments and control of the work. SSSTS is training for a supervisory role, not a universal appointment.

Recall it without looking

Who coordinates health and safety during construction on a project with several contractors?

The principal contractor coordinates the construction phase; individual contractors still manage and monitor their own work.

Primary references: HSE01, HSE02, HSE30, CITB01, HSE37, HSE41, HSENI01. See the source list at the end.

2. Risk assessment, RAMS and permits to work

Explain hazards and controls, read a safe work sequence and recognise what a permit adds.

What you should understand

- Distinguish hazard from risk
- Choose controls in a sensible order
- Explain the different purposes of assessment, method statement and permit

Hazard, risk and control

A hazard is something capable of causing harm. Risk considers how likely that harm is and how serious it could be in the actual circumstances. A control is an action or measure used to remove the hazard or reduce risk. For example, a moving delivery vehicle is a hazard; pedestrians crossing its route create a collision risk; a separate pedestrian route reduces the interaction.

Risk assessment identifies hazards, who could be harmed and how, evaluates existing controls and decides what else is needed. Findings must be put into practice and reviewed. Workers, visitors, other trades and the public may all be affected. The assessment is not complete just because a number has been written in a risk matrix. [HSE03]

Choose controls before writing the briefing

First consider eliminating the hazardous activity or changing the task. Next consider a safer substitution or physical controls such as separation or extraction. Procedures, training and supervision support those measures. PPE protects the wearer against remaining risk; it should not be the automatic first answer where a more effective control is reasonably practicable. Several layers may be needed.

Three documents, three jobs

- **Risk assessment:** explains what could cause harm and what controls are needed.
- **Method statement:** describes the planned work sequence and how the controls will be applied.
- **Permit to work:** is a formal authorisation and coordination process for specified work, conditions and time, where the site system requires it.

A permit does not replace an assessment or make an unsafe situation safe. The team needs to understand the work limits, conditions, handover and completion arrangements. Changes in people, materials, equipment, surrounding work or conditions can invalidate assumptions. Review the affected arrangements, then brief the change and check understanding. [CITB01] [HSE04] [HSE35]

Worked example: turn an assessment into a usable briefing

A fictional team is moving plasterboard from a loading bay to a room. The draft assessment says “use a trolley and wear gloves”. Those measures may help with handling, but the route also crosses a delivery vehicle entrance. Treat this as a reasoning exercise, not a complete method for a real delivery.

1. **Describe the harm and the people:** the load may strain or strike its handlers; the vehicle crossing exposes handlers, the driver and other pedestrians to a different risk. A control for the load does not automatically control traffic.
2. **Challenge the task:** could an agreed delivery location remove the carry and crossing? If not, the relevant site coordinator needs to establish a suitable route and control the vehicle interface. The supervisor should not invent a competing traffic arrangement independently.
3. **Make responsibility visible:** in this example, the logistics lead agrees the delivery arrangement; the trade supervisor checks the handling method, route and briefing with the team. “Everyone take care” gives neither role a clear action to complete.
4. **Verify before relying on the plan:** the supervisor checks that the agreed route is actually available and the interface arrangements are in place. The method statement then describes the agreed sequence, including where materials wait and how a changed delivery is reported.

A useful briefing asks a worker to explain the route and what they will do if it becomes obstructed. A signature alone would not reveal whether the worker intends to walk through the vehicle entrance. If the route changes, revisit the affected assessment and method before continuing that movement. Do not copy an old residual-risk score onto the new arrangement: first establish which controls remain effective. [HSE03] [HSE04]

Key points to remember

- Assess people and exposure, not just a list of objects.
- Elimination changes whether the hazard is present; PPE mainly limits exposure of the wearer.
- A method statement makes the safe sequence understandable.
- A signed permit or RAMS sheet is not evidence that every control exists.

Know these terms

Residual risk: Risk remaining after the planned controls have been applied.

RAMS: Risk assessments and method statements, usually used together to describe risks and the work method.

Permit to work: A formal process authorising specified work under defined conditions.

Avoid the cutting task

A team needs timber cut to repeated lengths. The proposed plan is to cut it in a busy access area and issue dust masks.

Why it matters: Ordering pre-cut lengths could remove the on-site cutting task and its dust and equipment risks. If cutting remains necessary, plan a suitable location and effective source controls before deciding the additional PPE. The assessment should also consider other people using the area.

Common misunderstanding: A low risk-matrix score proves the task is safe.

Remember: A score is a decision aid. It cannot compensate for missing controls, incorrect assumptions or hazards left out of the assessment.

Recall it without looking

What is the difference between a risk assessment and a method statement?

The assessment identifies and evaluates risk and selects controls; the method statement explains the safe sequence for carrying out the work with those controls.

The trolley has arrived, but the agreed pedestrian route is blocked. Which part of the plasterboard plan has failed, and what evidence is needed before restarting the movement?

Model-answer check: identify the failed route/vehicle-separation assumption; refer the change through the agreed site coordination arrangements; establish a suitable route and interface control; check that they exist in practice; and brief the people affected. The trolley only assists handling and does not resolve the traffic conflict.

A revised assessment says "supervisor to ensure safety". What would you add to make that action useful?

Model-answer check: state the specific arrangement to establish or check, who has authority to provide it, when it must be ready and how completion will be verified. For the fictional delivery, distinguish the logistics lead agreeing the vehicle interface from the trade supervisor checking and briefing the handling movement.

Why might a completely signed RAMS sheet still leave the delivery team unprepared?

Model-answer check: signatures do not prove the described route exists, the controls work or the team understands the response to change. Check the real conditions and ask a worker to explain the agreed sequence and the point at which they must pause and report a problem.

Primary references: HSE03, HSE04, CITB01, HSE35. See the source list at the end.

3. Inductions, toolbox talks and safety culture

Choose the right briefing, check understanding and encourage workers to report concerns.

What you should understand

- Distinguish induction from a task briefing and toolbox talk
- Use check-back questions
- Recognise behaviour that supports reporting

Match the information to the situation

A site induction introduces the particular site: access, traffic, restricted areas, welfare, first aid, emergencies and reporting arrangements. It should suit the person and the visit. Someone working alone needs different detail from an escorted visitor. An induction at a previous site does not explain the current site's risks. [HSE04]

A task briefing explains the work that is about to happen, its sequence, controls, responsibilities and what changes must be reported. A toolbox talk concentrates on one relevant safety subject. A general talk about dust does not replace a task assessment, effective extraction or instruction in the equipment being used.

Check understanding through action

Signing an attendance sheet shows a record of attendance, not that the message was understood. Ask someone to explain the safe route, demonstrate a control they are trained to use, or describe what they would do if conditions changed. Use language, pictures, demonstrations or interpretation that meet the team's needs. Simply speaking louder does not solve a language barrier.

Make it possible to speak up

Supervisors influence what happens when a worker spots a problem. Thank the person, establish the facts, explain the next action and report back when it is resolved. If people are criticised whenever they interrupt production, they may stop reporting. Look beyond individual behaviour to workload, unclear instructions, unavailable equipment and conflicts between trades. Lead by following the same agreed rules you expect the team to follow.

On the full SSSTS course, delivering a short toolbox talk is part of the trainer review. Build a talk around a real topic: the hazard, the agreed control, what each person must do and a question that checks understanding. Refresher assessment arrangements differ. [CITB01]

Key points to remember

- Inductions are site-specific; task briefings are task-specific.
- A toolbox talk supports controls but does not replace them.
- Check understanding with an explanation or demonstration.
- Close the feedback loop after someone reports a concern.

Know these terms

Check-back: Asking the listener to explain or show the important action in their own words.

Safety culture: Shared attitudes and everyday behaviours that influence how health and safety is managed.

A quiet worker at the briefing

A new worker signs the briefing sheet but cannot point out the designated pedestrian route afterwards.

Why it matters: The signature has not established understanding. Re-explain the route using a plan or walk-through that suits the worker, then ask them to identify the route and crossing points. Record the relevant briefing, but judge success by comprehension rather than the signature alone.

Common misunderstanding: No one has complained, so everyone understands.

Remember: Silence can mean uncertainty, language difficulty or reluctance to speak. Use active checks and invite questions.

Recall it without looking

Name one check-back question stronger than “Do you understand?”

For example: “Show me where you will walk when the delivery arrives, and explain what you will do if that route is blocked.”

Primary references: HSE04, CITB01. See the source list at the end.

4. Inspections, near misses and incident reporting

Distinguish proactive checks from incident learning and understand the supervisor's reporting role.

What you should understand

- Explain why an old inspection does not prove current condition
- Recognise near misses and underlying causes
- Separate internal reporting from RIDDOR

Check before harm occurs

A pre-use check, a routine supervisory inspection and a statutory inspection are not interchangeable. Some checks help a user spot defects; others require specific competence and formal records. Establish who is authorised, what must be examined, when it is due and what happens when a fault is found. A completed record describes a check at a particular time, not a guarantee about later conditions.

Record the location, defect or observation, immediate control, action owner and completion check. "Reported to the office" is only a stage in the process. If the item remains dangerous, the arrangements must prevent its use until it is made safe. New damage, alteration or severe weather can require another competent inspection even before a normal interval expires. [HSE15] [HSE20] [HSE23]

Learn from events as well as checks

A near miss is an event that could have caused harm but did not. Investigating it can reveal the same control weakness that would matter after an injury. Separate the immediate event from underlying causes: a person tripped over packaging, but delivery timing, lack of a designated storage area and unclear housekeeping responsibility may have helped create the obstruction.

Know the reporting routes

Follow the site's emergency arrangements first, then ensure facts are recorded and passed promptly to the appropriate people. Internal reporting should cover concerns and near misses even when they do not meet an external reporting threshold. RIDDOR applies to specified work-related events, not every accident or every near miss. The legally responsible person depends on the circumstances, often the employer for an employee; the supervisor is not automatically that person because they witnessed the event. Keep personal information within the authorised reporting system. [HSE05] [HSE33]

Worked example: turn "reported" into a useful record

Compare "near miss at delivery area; operatives reminded" with this fictional account: "At 09:10 beside the east delivery gate, a worker tripped over loose packaging on the marked pedestrian route and recovered without falling. No injury was reported at the time. The route was made clear through the site arrangements and the logistics lead was informed."

The second account identifies an event, place, time, observed condition and immediate response. It does not claim that the worker was careless or that the absence of an injury makes the arrangement acceptable. Record additional witness information separately and distinguish what someone saw from what they assume. Use the authorised system for personal information.

The follow-up asks why packaging reached a pedestrian route: was the unloading space unsuitable, was clearing responsibility unclear, or did an earlier action fail? A useful action record then specifies the agreed change, responsible role and completion check. For this example, the logistics lead arranges a suitable packaging collection point; the supervisor verifies that the pedestrian route remains usable during the next delivery. Clearing the first obstruction deals with the immediate condition; checking the next delivery helps establish whether the repeated cause has been addressed.

Do not classify a report from its headline alone

"No injury" and "went to hospital" are incomplete descriptions for a RIDDOR decision. Establish what happened, the connection with work, who was affected, the injury or other relevant event details and the person's employment/status information. Pass those facts promptly to the responsible person so the applicable category and reporting requirements can be checked. Some dangerous occurrences are reportable without an injury; many ordinary near misses are not. Internal recording and action remain important in both cases. [HSE05] [HSE33]

Key points to remember

- A current record cannot override newly observed damage.
- Assign an owner and verify completion of corrective actions.
- Near misses provide information before an injury occurs.
- Internal incident reporting and RIDDOR are different processes.

Know these terms

Near miss: An unplanned event that did not cause harm but had the potential to do so.

Underlying cause: A condition in organisation, planning or management that helped an event occur.

RIDDOR: Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations; external reporting duties for specified events.

Repeated objects in an escape route

Two workers trip over delivered packaging on separate mornings, without injury.

Why it matters: The absence of injury does not remove the lesson. Record the near misses, clear and protect the route, and examine why deliveries repeatedly leave packaging there. A designated unloading area, clear responsibility and a completion check address the cause more effectively than telling each worker to watch their step.

Common misunderstanding: If no one was hurt, no action is needed.

Remember: A near miss can reveal failed controls. Internal reporting and corrective action should not wait for an injury.

Common misunderstanding: Every near miss must be reported to HSE under RIDDOR.

Remember: Only events meeting the relevant RIDDOR categories are externally reportable; many other near misses still require internal action.

Recall it without looking

What information makes an inspection action useful to follow up?

The specific defect and location, the immediate control, who owns the remedy, when it is due and how completion will be confirmed.

An action log says "near miss discussed at toolbox talk-closed". What would you check before accepting closure?

Model-answer check: identify the original hazard and agreed remedy; confirm who completed the action; check the physical or organisational control is now in place; and consider whether it works during the relevant task. A discussion can support the remedy but does not show that the cause has been removed or controlled.

A report states "the worker was careless". What information would make the investigation more useful?

Model-answer check: obtain factual details of the sequence, location, task, condition and immediate controls, and separate witness accounts from assumptions. Examine work organisation, available equipment, instructions and interfaces that may have contributed. The purpose is to identify effective corrective measures, not substitute a label for an explanation.

A colleague says an event cannot be RIDDOR-reportable because nobody was hurt. How would you respond as a supervisor?

Model-answer check: injury is not required for every reportable category; specified dangerous occurrences can be reportable. Record and pass the event facts to the responsible person to check the applicable rules. Do not infer that every near miss is reportable, and do not delay the internal safety response while the reporting decision is made.

Primary references: HSE05, HSE15, HSE20, HSE23, HSE33. See the source list at the end.

5. COSHH, dust, fumes and respiratory protection

Identify exposure routes and explain why controlling a substance at source matters.

What you should understand

- Recognise substances generated by work
- Distinguish a safety data sheet from a COSHH assessment
- Explain source controls and suitable RPE

Start with exposure, not the label

Hazardous substances include purchased products and substances created by work. Cutting masonry can release respirable crystalline silica; sanding wood produces dust; welding produces fume. A substance can enter the body by breathing it in, skin contact or absorption, swallowing it, or entry through damaged skin. People nearby, cleaners and maintenance workers may also be exposed.

A safety data sheet gives supplier information about a product. A COSHH assessment considers how it is actually used: the task, amount, duration, people, exposure routes and controls. It also covers harmful material generated by the process that may have no product label. Asbestos and lead have separate specific regulations. [HSE06]

Control the source and the spread

Consider avoiding the material or process, using a safer alternative, or changing the method. Where exposure remains, controls might include enclosure, suitable on-tool extraction or water suppression. The correct combination depends on the material and task. Dry sweeping can put settled dust back into the air, so cleaning arrangements also need assessment. Dust that is hard to see can still reach deep into the lungs; visibility is not an exposure measurement. [HSE07]

PPE and RPE must fit the job and person

Respiratory protective equipment must be suitable for the hazard and wearer and used with the other required controls. Tight-fitting facepieces need fit testing for the wearer and facepiece, and an effective seal when worn; facial hair in the sealing area can prevent that seal. A loose-fitting alternative may be appropriate following competent selection. Fit testing does not remove the need for instruction, maintenance and correct use. [HSE31]

Do not overlook skin exposure. Wet cement can cause burns and dermatitis. Prevent contact, use suitable protective equipment and washing arrangements, and act promptly if contamination occurs. Barrier cream is not a substitute for preventing contact or washing contamination away. [HSE29]

Worked example: check the control, not just its presence

A fictional cutting task specifies suitable on-tool extraction and selected RPE. The supervisor sees an extractor beside the saw and assumes the dust arrangements are ready. Presence is only the first check: the equipment must match the assessed task, be connected and used as intended, and have the required condition and maintenance checks.

Work through three questions. **What exposure are we controlling?** Identify the material, process, people nearby and cleaning work. **What has the assessment selected?** Check the agreed method and equipment rather than accepting any machine called an extractor. **What shows the arrangement is working?** Use the specified equipment checks, instructions and maintenance information, and report defects or signs that control is failing. If the arrangement does not match the assessment, resolve that mismatch before relying on it. A motor running is not proof that the whole extraction system provides the required control.

The same distinction applies to RPE. A successful face-fit test concerns a particular wearer and facepiece. The wearer must still use the selected make, model, type and size and check the fit each time it is put on, following instruction. Issuing a different tight-fitting mask because the usual stock has run out cannot be justified only by an old fit-test result. [HSE31]

Checking controls is different from measuring a person's exposure, and both differ from health checks intended to identify possible effects. The employer's competent arrangements determine what assessment, monitoring or surveillance is needed. A supervisor helps those arrangements work and reports problems; a worker feeling well or no visible dust cloud is not a substitute for them. Include the cleaner and the nearby trade in the discussion, because controlling the operator's exposure alone may leave others exposed. [HSE06] [HSE07]

Key points to remember

- Dust or fume created by a process can be hazardous without a warning label.
- A safety data sheet informs an assessment; it is not the completed task assessment.
- Control exposure at source and consider nearby people.
- Tight-fitting RPE needs a suitable face seal and fit testing.

Know these terms

COSHH: Control of Substances Hazardous to Health: the framework for controlling exposure to most harmful substances at work.

LEV: Local exhaust ventilation: extraction capturing contaminants near the point where they are produced.

RPE: Respiratory protective equipment worn to reduce inhalation exposure.

A product sheet misses the process

A supervisor has the supplier sheet for paving slabs and assumes it covers the risks of cutting them indoors.

Why it matters: The cutting process can generate fine silica-containing dust. The assessment must consider how cutting is performed, ventilation, source controls, nearby trades and cleaning. The product sheet alone does not describe that exposure or establish suitable protection.

Common misunderstanding: If I cannot see a dust cloud, exposure is controlled.

Remember: Fine respirable dust may be difficult to see. Use the specified effective controls and any required exposure assessment rather than judging safety by visibility.

Common misunderstanding: Any dust mask is suitable for any dusty task.

Remember: RPE must match the contaminant, required protection and wearer; it may be needed alongside engineering controls.

Recall it without looking

Why can cleaning create an exposure even after cutting has stopped?

Settled dust can be disturbed and become airborne again. The cleaning method therefore forms part of the exposure-control arrangements.

An extractor is running, but its connection to the cutting tool is damaged. The operator says the noise proves it works. What should your reasoning address?

Model-answer check: operating noise only shows something is running; it does not establish effective capture through the damaged arrangement. Compare the setup with the assessed method and instructions, prevent reliance on the defective control and use the reporting/repair or alternative-work arrangements. Consider nearby people and cleaning as well as the operator.

A replacement respirator has a similar protection marking but is a different tight-fitting model from the one used in the wearer's fit test. What has not been established?

Model-answer check: a protection marking does not establish that the different facepiece fits that wearer. The selected make, model, type and size must be covered by appropriate fit testing, and each use still requires the instructed fitting check. Resolve suitability through the employer's RPE arrangements rather than treating one past test as approval of every mask.

Why would a worker reporting no symptoms be insufficient evidence that today's dust controls are effective?

Model-answer check: health effects may not be immediately apparent. Establish whether the task and controls match the assessed arrangements and use any required exposure assessment or monitoring. Health surveillance has a different purpose and does not replace prevention or verification of controls.

Primary references: HSE06, HSE07, HSE29, HSE31. See the source list at the end.

6. Asbestos: information, disturbance and training

Explain when asbestos becomes a risk and the limits of awareness training.

What you should understand

- Explain why asbestos information is needed before disturbance
- Recognise that appearance does not prove absence
- Distinguish awareness from training for asbestos work

Why asbestos is a planning issue

Asbestos-containing materials can release fibres when disturbed or damaged. Breathing fibres can cause serious diseases that often take many years to develop. A worker feeling well immediately afterwards does not demonstrate that an exposure was harmless. The purpose of planning is to prevent disturbance and exposure before they occur.

Before intrusive work, the people planning it need adequate information about asbestos in the area and whether that information is suitable for the proposed task. The required investigation depends on the work; do not assume that any document called an asbestos survey covers demolition, opening a void or drilling a previously inaccessible area.

What awareness training does

Asbestos awareness helps people recognise the possibility of asbestos, avoid disturbing it and understand what to do if it is unexpectedly encountered. It does not train or authorise someone to sample, remove or otherwise work on asbestos. Other training and, for some work, a licensed contractor are needed. Whether particular work is licensable depends on its circumstances and the material, not simply whether the job looks small. [HSE08]

Unexpected suspect material

If unfamiliar material is exposed during a task, do not break another piece off to inspect it, sweep up debris or continue because it resembles a familiar harmless product. Stop disturbance, keep people away from the affected area and follow the site's asbestos response arrangements so competent advice can establish what the material is and what action is required. Tell the responsible person where it was found, what activity occurred and who may have been affected.

For revision, remember the sequence: obtain suitable information before work, avoid disturbance where possible, use the correct specialist arrangements where work is necessary, and respond to unexpected material without creating further exposure. [HSE08] [HSE39]

Key points to remember

- Appearance alone cannot reliably identify or rule out asbestos.
- Information must be suitable for the location and intrusive work proposed.
- Awareness training is not training to work on asbestos.
- The absence of immediate symptoms does not prove there was no risk.

Know these terms

Asbestos-containing material: A material containing asbestos fibres, which may be released if it is disturbed or damaged.

Latency: The delay between an exposure and a resulting disease becoming apparent.

A survey with a limitation

A ceiling survey says an enclosed service void was not accessed. A new task involves drilling through the void lining.

Why it matters: The available information does not establish what is inside or whether the drilling area is free of asbestos. The limitation must be resolved through the responsible planning arrangements before disturbance. Reading the survey's title without its scope and exclusions would miss the knowledge gap.

Common misunderstanding: A small sample is safe to take after awareness training.

Remember: Awareness training does not provide competence for sampling. Breaking material to identify it can release fibres.

Common misunderstanding: If a colleague has worked there before, the material must be safe.

Remember: Past work and personal recollection cannot replace suitable asbestos information for the present task.

Recall it without looking

Why does a survey limitation matter to a supervisor?

The limitation identifies an area or material not established by that survey. Work must not proceed on an unsupported assumption about that area.

Primary references: HSE08, HSE39. See the source list at the end.

7. Noise and hand-arm vibration

Understand exposure, prevention and early reporting of health effects.

What you should understand

- Explain how exposure depends on level and duration
- Distinguish controlling noise from only wearing hearing protection
- Recognise symptoms that should be reported

Exposure builds up

Noise can damage hearing and make it harder to hear warnings or communicate. The risk depends on the level and duration of exposure, including different noisy tasks during a shift. Hearing protection may be necessary, but equipment choice, quieter processes, maintenance, separation and reduced exposure should also be considered. A worker becoming accustomed to noise has not become immune to hearing damage. [HSE10]

Vibration is more than discomfort

Regular use of vibrating hand-held tools can damage nerves, blood vessels, muscles and joints. Tingling, numbness, loss of grip or fingers going white can be warning signs. Report symptoms promptly through the employer's arrangements. Health surveillance is intended to detect problems early; it does not replace controlling exposure.

Vibration exposure depends on the vibration magnitude and how long the hands are actually exposed while the tool operates. A tool booked out for eight hours is not necessarily used for eight hours, but several short uses can add up. A single universal “safe time” for every breaker or grinder would ignore differences in tools, materials, maintenance and use. [HSE09]

What a supervisor should understand

Check that the equipment and work pattern match the assessed arrangements. A worn cutting accessory may increase the time needed and change exposure. A replacement tool may have different vibration and noise characteristics even if it does the same job. Use the employer's assessed exposure information and controls; do not invent time limits from memory or wait until workers complain.

Rotating tasks is useful only if it actually reduces each person's total exposure to an acceptable level. Moving from one vibrating tool to another still contributes exposure. Gloves can keep hands warm but should not be treated as a dependable way to remove vibration risk. [HSE09] [HSE10] [HSE36]

Key points to remember

- Noise and vibration risk depends on exposure, not just the tool’s name.
- Several tasks can contribute to a worker’s total daily exposure.
- Report tingling, numbness and other symptoms early.
- Health surveillance detects effects; it is not an exposure control.

Know these terms

Trigger time: The time a worker is actually exposed while operating a vibrating tool, rather than simply possessing it.

Health surveillance: A planned system of health checks where required to identify possible work-related effects early.

Rotating between two tools

A worker spends the morning using a breaker and the afternoon using a vibrating compactor. The supervisor calls this rotation away from vibration.

Why it matters: Both activities can contribute to vibration exposure. The whole pattern must be considered using the employer's assessed information. Moving to a different task reduces exposure only if its actual exposure is lower enough; changing the tool name is not the same as removing the hazard.

Common misunderstanding: Experienced workers become resistant to noise and vibration.

Remember: Experience does not prevent biological damage. Familiarity can hide the need for exposure control.

Common misunderstanding: A health check makes longer tool use safe.

Remember: Surveillance can identify harm; it does not neutralise the exposure causing it.

Recall it without looking

Why does replacing a tool require checking the existing arrangements?

A different tool, accessory or condition can change vibration, noise and the time needed to complete the task.

Primary references: HSE09, HSE10, HSE36. See the source list at the end.

8. Manual handling and musculoskeletal health

Assess the whole handling task and choose changes that reduce strain.

What you should understand

- Apply avoid, assess and reduce
- Identify load, task, person and environment factors
- Explain why technique training alone is insufficient

Start by avoiding the hazardous handling

Manual handling includes lifting, lowering, carrying, pushing and pulling. The preferred approach is to avoid hazardous manual handling where reasonably practicable, assess what cannot be avoided and reduce the remaining risk. Delivery directly to the point of use, mechanical assistance or a change in assembly sequence may remove repeated carrying before lifting technique becomes relevant. [HSE32]

Assess more than weight

Consider the task, load, individual capability and working environment. A light item can still create risk if it is handled repeatedly at arm's length, above shoulder level or while twisting. A bulky sheet can restrict visibility or be difficult to grip. Steps, poor lighting, slippery surfaces and a long carrying distance change the task. Existing health conditions, fatigue and different capabilities may affect what is suitable for the individual.

There is no single legal maximum weight that guarantees a lift is safe for everyone. Assessment tools and guidance help identify risk; they are not a promise that a particular weight can always be lifted. Team handling also needs planning: load sharing, grip, communication and coordination are not achieved simply by dividing the weight by the number of people. [HSE11] [HSE32]

Make the work easier to do safely

Consider smaller units, storage at a suitable height, shorter routes, clear access and a suitable handling aid. Check that the aid can be used on the route and that people know how to use it. A trolley that cannot cross a threshold may lead to an unplanned extra lift. Consult the people doing the task: they often know where repeated awkward handling occurs.

Training supports the improved arrangement, but it cannot make a badly designed task safe by itself. Monitor whether the chosen method works in practice and review it when quantities, routes or loads change. [HSE11]

Key points to remember

- Avoid hazardous handling first, then assess and reduce what remains.
- Weight is only one of several relevant factors.
- Pushing and pulling are manual handling too.
- A team lift and a training certificate do not automatically make a task safe.

Know these terms

Musculoskeletal disorder: An injury or disorder affecting muscles, joints, tendons or other parts of the musculoskeletal system.

Handling aid: Equipment that helps move or position a load, where suitable for the task and route.

A short carry becomes a long one

Materials were meant to be delivered beside the work area, but a blocked gate means each item now has to be carried upstairs from the far end of the site.

Why it matters: The route, carrying distance and repetition have changed. Reconsider the delivery arrangement, access and suitable assistance before relying on the previous assessment. Repeating a safe-lifting reminder does not resolve the new physical demands.

Common misunderstanding: Anything below a remembered weight limit is safe.

Remember: Weight alone does not determine risk. Posture, repetition, grip, distance, surroundings and individual capability also matter.

Recall it without looking

Name four factors to consider in manual handling.

The task, the load, the individual and the environment; for example repetition, awkward grip, capability and uneven ground.

Primary references: HSE11, HSE32. See the source list at the end.

9. Welfare, wellbeing and first-aid arrangements

Explain why welfare is a health control and how support and first-aid arrangements fit the workforce.

What you should understand

- Identify the main welfare provisions
- Recognise work-related stress and impairment concerns without diagnosing
- Distinguish a first-aider from an appointed person

Welfare must be usable throughout the work

Construction workers need suitable toilets, washing, drinking water, changing arrangements where needed, and places to rest and eat. Provision must be planned from the start and maintained. Think about cleaning, replenishment, access, opening hours and workers in remote areas. A facility listed in a plan does not help a worker who cannot reach it or finds it locked.

Welfare also controls exposure. Suitable washing helps remove harmful contamination before eating or drinking. Wet or contaminated clothing may need separate changing or drying arrangements. The type and amount of provision should match the work and workforce; a small or short-duration job still needs appropriate arrangements. [HSE12]

Health includes how work is organised

Excessive demands, poor support, unclear roles and badly managed change can contribute to work-related stress. A supervisor can listen privately, identify work factors and raise practical changes such as clearer priorities or appropriate support. Avoid diagnosing a colleague. Where fatigue or possible drug or alcohol impairment could affect safe work, deal with the immediate risk and use the employer's policy and support arrangements; do not make a disciplinary conclusion from a single assumption. [HSE13] [HSE34]

First aid is based on need

The employer assesses the workforce, hazards, work patterns, locations and likely access to emergency services to decide first-aid provision. An appointed person takes charge of arrangements, equipment and calling emergency help; that role is not the same as being a trained first-aider. Check cover across shifts, leave and remote work, and ensure people know how to obtain help. A telephone number alone is not the whole arrangement. [HSE26]

Key points to remember

- Welfare must be accessible, clean and available when people are working.
- Washing facilities can be an exposure-control measure.
- Discuss wellbeing concerns constructively and privately.
- First-aid provision follows a needs assessment, not a universal ratio.

Know these terms

Appointed person: A person taking charge of first-aid arrangements, including equipment and summoning help; not automatically a trained first-aider.

First-aider: A person trained to the appropriate first-aid level identified by the employer's needs assessment.

An early shift without access

A team starts at 06:00, but the agreed neighbouring welfare building opens at 08:00. The first-aider also starts at 08:00.

Why it matters: The arrangement does not cover the early shift simply because facilities and a trained person exist later. Check welfare access and appropriate first-aid provision for the whole period of work. Update the arrangements and explain them to the early team.

Common misunderstanding: An appointed person has the same training as a first-aider.

Remember: The roles differ. Appointment alone does not confer first-aid training or competence.

Common misunderstanding: Stress is only a personal issue outside work.

Remember: Work demands, support and other organisational factors can create or worsen stress and need assessment.

Recall it without looking

Why should first-aid arrangements be reviewed when shifts change?

Cover, access, workforce distribution and availability of trained people or emergency help may differ on the new shift.

Primary references: HSE12, HSE13, HSE26, HSE34. See the source list at the end.

10. Working at height, ladders and scaffolds

Apply the work-at-height hierarchy and distinguish collective protection, personal protection and inspection.

What you should understand

- Recognise work at height without a minimum-height shortcut
- Apply avoid, prevent and minimise
- Explain scaffold competence and inspection triggers

What counts as work at height?

Work at height involves a place where a person could fall a distance liable to cause injury if precautions were absent. It includes edges, openings and fragile surfaces; it is not limited to work above two metres. Assess the task, access, surface, duration, conditions and people affected below.

Use the hierarchy in order

First avoid the work at height where reasonably practicable, for example by assembling at ground level. If it cannot be avoided, prevent falls with an already safe place or suitable equipment. Where a risk of falling remains, reduce the distance and consequences. At each stage consider collective protection before measures depending on an individual taking action.

Guardrails protect everyone behind them without each person connecting a harness. A personal fall-protection system needs correct selection, fitting, connection and use, as well as suitable emergency arrangements. Fall restraint prevents the person reaching a fall position; fall arrest stops a fall after it has begun. They are not interchangeable. [HSE14]

Equipment must suit the work

A ladder may be suitable for an assessed low-risk, short-duration task; availability alone is not a reason to choose one. Consider stability, condition, secure positioning, access and avoiding overreach. A longer or strenuous task may need a different platform.

Scaffolds require competent design, erection, alteration and inspection. A user should notice missing protection or damage, but must not treat that observation as a formal inspection unless competent and authorised for it. Following high winds, impact or alteration, previous inspection evidence may no longer establish that the scaffold is safe. Keep loading within the agreed arrangements and do not remove ties or add sheeting without the appropriate review. [HSE15]

Compare access options against the whole job

Imagine a worker fitting one small bracket, then a second task fitting a long run of components. Similar working height does not make these the same access decision. Duration, repetition, the materials being handled, reach and the condition of the supporting surface can differ.

- **Ladder or stepladder:** suitability depends on the assessed task being appropriate for it, including light work, duration, secure positioning and avoiding overreach. “It fits through the door” describes convenience, not the whole assessment.

- **A guarded working platform:** consider whether it provides suitable space, access and protection for the work and materials. Its support, loading, condition and competent installation still matter; a platform is not automatically suitable merely because it has guardrails.
- **Personal fall protection:** establish why collective prevention is not reasonably practicable and whether the selected system, connection and rescue arrangements fit the work. Having a harness available is not an equipment-selection assessment.

A fragile surface presents a separate issue: an edge barrier does not prevent a person falling through a rooflight inside that edge. The plan must address the surface and the intended access as well as the perimeter. [HSE14]

Worked example: an inspected scaffold is changed

A scaffold has inspection evidence for its existing arrangement. A team proposes adding sheeting and storing extra materials on a working platform. The supervisory question is not simply whether the inspection is in date. The proposed arrangement changes what must be considered in its design and permitted use.

Identify the proposed changes and pass them through the authorised scaffold arrangements. The appropriate competent people establish suitability, any necessary alteration and inspection. Before the changed arrangement is used, the supervisor needs confirmation of the agreed loading/use conditions and that the required checks are complete, then briefs the team. A new signature on the old report would not explain how the changes were assessed. [HSE15]

Key points to remember

- Work at height is defined by potential injury from a fall, not a universal two-metre threshold.
- Avoid height work, prevent falls, then reduce remaining fall consequences.
- Collective protection does not depend on each worker connecting personal equipment.
- Changed condition can require inspection before the next planned interval.

Know these terms

Collective protection: A measure protecting those at risk without each individual having to activate or wear it.

Fall restraint: A system intended to prevent a person reaching a place where they could fall.

Fall arrest: A system intended to stop a fall after it has begun.

Lighting installed from the floor

A fitting can be assembled and lowered for maintenance from ground level. The alternative is repeated access to a roof edge.

Why it matters: Ground-level assembly and maintenance can avoid the work-at-height exposure rather than merely protect someone at the edge. Compare that option before selecting access equipment. If height work remains, choose controls for the actual task and plan rescue where relevant.

Common misunderstanding: No precautions are needed below two metres.

Remember: A fall from a lower height can still cause injury. The risk and suitable controls depend on the circumstances.

Common misunderstanding: An inspection tag proves a scaffold is safe after any later event.

Remember: A tag records status at a time; later damage, weather or alteration must be considered.

Recall it without looking

Why is a guardrail normally preferred to relying only on a harness where practicable?

It provides collective fall prevention without each individual needing to fit and connect personal equipment correctly.

Two tasks are at the same height. One is a small fitting; the other needs repeated handling along a wall. Why might the access choice differ?

Model-answer check: compare duration and frequency, the work and materials, reach, stability, usable working space and safe access. Then apply avoid, prevent and minimise, considering collective protection first. Equal height and an available ladder are not enough to establish equal risk or suitability.

A roof has edge protection, but the work route passes a rooflight. What does the edge protection fail to establish?

Model-answer check: edge protection addresses a fall over the perimeter; it does not establish that the rooflight or surrounding surface can support the person or prevent a fall through it. The work and access arrangements must account for fragile surfaces, with suitable competent planning before the task proceeds.

An inspection report predates proposed scaffold sheeting. What would a useful supervisory handover confirm before the changed use?

Model-answer check: the proposed change has been considered through the authorised scaffold arrangements; appropriate competent design/alteration/inspection requirements have been addressed; the permitted loading and use are understood; and affected workers have the updated instructions. A report about the earlier configuration is not evidence about an unassessed change.

Primary references: HSE14, HSE15. See the source list at the end.

11. Site traffic, access and protecting the public

Explain how separation, route design and communication reduce vehicle conflicts.

What you should understand

- Prioritise separation of pedestrians and vehicles
- Recognise reversing and visibility risks
- Understand site access and visitor controls

Keep people and vehicles apart

Site traffic includes delivery vehicles, mobile plant and people moving on foot. Plan routes, unloading areas and crossings around the actual movements. Separate pedestrian and vehicle entrances and routes where possible; provide clear crossings where interaction cannot be avoided. A high-visibility vest helps a person be seen but does not prevent a vehicle reaching them.

Routes must suit the vehicles using them, with appropriate width, ground condition, visibility and clearances. Consider the full movement, including turning, tipping, unloading and departure. A delivery driver may be unfamiliar with the site, so send useful arrival information and explain where to wait and who will direct them. [HSE16]

Reduce reversing and blind spots

One-way systems or drive-through unloading can reduce the need to reverse. Where reversing remains, use the assessed arrangements, suitable visibility aids and competent authorised assistance where required. A signaller and driver need an agreed method of communication; loss of contact is a reason to stop the movement, not guess. Do not allow people to stand in a crush zone between a moving vehicle and a fixed object.

Check that the route still exists in practice

Materials, excavation work or a new delivery can make an approved route unusable. Resolve the change through the site arrangements and communicate the revised route before people improvise around it. Check the area again after unloading.

Site boundaries and access controls also protect children, visitors and the public. Prevent unauthorised access, secure unattended plant and materials, and keep escape arrangements usable. Security should not create a locked escape route for people legitimately working inside. Induction and signs support the layout; they do not repair a missing barrier or unsafe route. [HSE04] [HSE01]

Recognise the main safety-sign messages

Signs communicate remaining risks and required actions; they do not replace physical controls. Read the shape and symbol as well as the colour.

Appearance	Meaning	Example
Red circle and diagonal bar	Prohibition: do not do this	No smoking
Yellow triangle	Warning of a hazard	Moving vehicles
Blue circle	Mandatory action	Wear the required head protection
Green square or rectangle	Emergency escape or first-aid information	Emergency exit
Red square or rectangle	Firefighting equipment location	Fire extinguisher

[HSE38]

Key points to remember

- Separation prevents interaction; visibility clothing only helps people be seen.
- Design out reversing where possible.
- Check routes during the actual delivery and after conditions change.
- Access controls should protect the public while preserving emergency escape.

Know these terms

Blind spot: An area the driver cannot see directly or through the available visibility aids.

Segregation: Keeping different movements or activities physically separate.

A blocked pedestrian path

A pallet delivery is placed across the only designated pedestrian path. Workers begin stepping into the vehicle route.

Why it matters: The original separation has failed. Restore a suitable pedestrian route or establish a planned alternative before normal movements continue. Telling drivers to be careful does not recreate separation. Review the unloading location so the same obstruction is not repeated.

Common misunderstanding: Hi-vis clothing is an alternative to pedestrian separation.

Remember: It improves visibility but cannot prevent collision or compensate for a blind spot.

Common misunderstanding: A reversing assistant can make any layout safe.

Remember: Assistance must form part of a suitable traffic arrangement; it cannot remove every layout or crush risk.

Recall it without looking

What should be checked for an unfamiliar delivery driver?

The agreed entrance, route, waiting and unloading location, pedestrian controls, communication and safe departure arrangements.

Primary references: HSE16, HSE04, HSE01, HSE38. See the source list at the end.

12. Work equipment, guarding and maintenance

Explain suitability, pre-use checks and safe control of energy during maintenance.

What you should understand

- Recognise the main PUWER principles
- Distinguish guarding from behavioural instructions
- Explain why switching off is not always isolation

Suitable equipment, suitable people

The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER) address equipment provided for use at work. Equipment must be suitable for its intended task and conditions, maintained and inspected where required, and used by people with appropriate information, instruction and training. Buying a new machine or finding a familiar brand does not by itself establish suitability for this task.

Pre-use checks can reveal obvious damage, missing parts, leaks or failed controls. Formal inspections and maintenance have their own requirements and competence. A supervisor needs to know the reporting and withdrawal arrangements so defective equipment does not pass from one worker to the next without the warning. [HSE17]

Guards control access to danger

Guards and protective devices separate people from dangerous moving parts or stop hazardous operation when access occurs. “Keep your hands clear” is not an equivalent replacement for a missing guard. Devices must not be bypassed to increase output. Check that the work can be carried out with the required protection in place; difficulty using it may reveal the wrong equipment or method.

Control every relevant energy source

Maintenance and clearing blockages may expose people to unexpected movement or energy. Electrical supply is only one source: pressure, springs, gravity and stored movement can also matter. Switching an operating control off does not necessarily isolate all energy or prevent another person restarting the machine.

Use the planned isolation, securing, release and verification arrangements carried out by competent authorised people. The supervisor should check that the arrangement is in place and understood, rather than improvise electrical testing or a repair. After maintenance, return to service must follow the authorised checks, with guards restored and people clear. [HSE18]

Key points to remember

- PUWER concerns suitability, condition, guarding and competent use.
- Pre-use checks do not replace all formal inspection or maintenance.
- A warning cannot replace a required physical guard.
- Isolation must address all relevant energy and unexpected restart.

Know these terms

PUWER: Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations: requirements for work equipment and its use.

Stored energy: Energy remaining in a system, such as hydraulic pressure or a raised component, after normal operation stops.

Isolation: Separation from relevant energy sources under a controlled safe system, including preventing unintended reconnection where needed.

A stopped conveyor with stored movement

A conveyor is switched off to clear a jam, but a raised part can fall and another person can restart it from a remote control.

Why it matters: The operating switch has not controlled all hazards. The maintenance arrangement must address electrical restart and the raised part's stored energy. Competent authorised people establish and verify the necessary isolation and securing measures before access.

Common misunderstanding: A machine is safe to clear as soon as the stop button is pressed.

Remember: An operating stop may leave energy available or allow restart. The planned isolation and verification arrangement is needed.

Common misunderstanding: An experienced operator can safely bypass a guard.

Remember: Skill does not remove the hazard created by access to dangerous parts.

Recall it without looking

Name two energy hazards that can remain after electrical power is switched off.

For example hydraulic pressure, a compressed spring or gravity acting on a raised component.

Primary references: HSE17, HSE18. See the source list at the end.

13. Lifting operations and lifting equipment

Understand planning, roles, exclusion and the difference between examination and current condition.

What you should understand

- Explain the planning, supervision and execution principles
- Recognise factors affecting a lift
- Distinguish thorough examination from pre-use checking

Plan the operation, not only the load

The Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER) require lifting operations to be properly planned by a competent person, appropriately supervised and carried out safely. Planning considers the load, equipment, lifting accessories, people, ground or support, route, nearby hazards and where the load will be placed. The detail must be proportionate to the lift; repeating a familiar movement does not make changed conditions irrelevant.

A general site supervisor may coordinate surrounding work without being competent or appointed to plan the lift. Understand the assigned roles and communication. The operator, slinger or signaller and people controlling the operation need the relevant competence for their work. An SSSTS certificate alone does not establish that competence. [HSE19]

Control the working area

Prevent people entering the danger area, including the suspended-load path and potential crush zones. Arrange adjacent trades and deliveries so they do not undermine the plan. Weather, visibility, ground conditions and changed access can affect whether an operation can proceed as intended. Do not substitute a different accessory or alter a planned route without appropriate review.

Different checks answer different questions

A thorough examination is a systematic examination by a competent person at required times. It is different from maintenance, routine inspection and pre-use checks. The report does not prove that equipment has suffered no damage since the examination. Users and supervisors still need to respond to visible damage or other defects through the agreed arrangements.

Lifting equipment and accessories must be suitable for the actual use and capacity requirements. The marked capacity is not permission to ignore configuration, the lifting method or the plan. The learner's task here is to recognise the checks and roles, not to calculate or approve a lift beyond their competence. [HSE20]

Key points to remember

- Every lift needs competent planning proportionate to its complexity.
- General site supervision is different from a specialist lifting appointment.
- Keep people out of the planned danger area.
- Thorough examination and daily condition checks serve different purposes.

Know these terms

Lifting accessory: Equipment used to attach a load to lifting machinery, such as a sling.

Thorough examination: A systematic examination of lifting equipment by a competent person to detect defects that could be dangerous.

LOLER: Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998: duties concerning lifting equipment and lifting operations.

A delivery changes the landing area

A load was planned to land in a clear area. Before the lift, another delivery fills that area and a worker proposes landing it beside the pedestrian gate.

Why it matters: The placement area and its interaction with pedestrians have changed. The operation needs the relevant competent review and an agreed safe landing area; moving it informally can change stability, access and exclusion requirements. Brief the affected people on the agreed arrangement.

Common misunderstanding: A current examination report makes a damaged sling acceptable.

Remember: The report concerns the examination at that time. New damage still requires prevention of use and appropriate competent action.

Recall it without looking

Name four things a lifting plan may need to consider besides the load's weight.

For example the equipment and accessories, ground/support, route and landing area, people, nearby services, weather and communication.

Primary references: HSE19, HSE20. See the source list at the end.

14. Electrical safety and underground and overhead services

Recognise electrical danger and explain why information, locating and controlled work are all needed.

What you should understand

- Explain why switching off is not proof of safe isolation
- Understand the limits of service drawings
- Recognise overhead-line danger without contact

Electricity can injure without an obvious warning

Damaged cables, unsuitable equipment, wet conditions and contact with live parts can expose people to electric shock, burns and fire. Electrical work requires the appropriate competence and planned precautions. A supervisor should identify visible concerns and ensure the agreed equipment and arrangements are used, rather than perform repairs or testing beyond their competence. A protective device reduces a particular risk; it does not make every way of using electricity safe.

For maintenance, the relevant energy must be isolated, secured against unintended restoration and verified through the authorised system. A label, a switch in the off position or somebody saying the circuit is dead is not the same as a competent safe-isolation process. [HSE18]

Underground services: combine information and safe work

Service plans help identify likely locations but may be incomplete or inaccurate. A safe system combines planning, locating and identifying services, and a suitable excavation method. Locating equipment must be used by people who understand its limitations. Finding one service does not establish that no others are present, and a line on a plan does not guarantee an exact depth. [HSE21]

Overhead lines: proximity can be enough

A plant boom, tipper body, scaffold pole or other long item can approach an overhead line. Electricity may arc across a gap, so actual contact is not necessary for danger. Assume lines are live unless their owner confirms otherwise through the proper arrangements. Consider avoiding the work or having lines diverted or made dead. Where work must remain nearby, obtain the relevant line-owner information and use the planned restrictions, clearances, barriers and supervision.

Do not invent one universal clearance for all lines. Voltage, equipment movement and the site arrangement matter. Check the full travel and working envelope, not only the machine's parked height. [HSE22]

Key points to remember

- Electrical safety needs competent arrangements, not informal testing.
- Plans indicate likely service positions; they do not guarantee exact locations.
- Live overhead lines can be dangerous without direct contact.

- Consider the whole movement of plant and long materials.

Know these terms

Arcing: Electric current passing across a gap, which can cause severe injury without direct contact with a conductor.

Service location: The process of establishing the position of buried utilities using appropriate information, equipment and methods.

The tipper fits when parked

A tipper vehicle can pass below an overhead line with its body down. Unloading would raise the body near the line.

Why it matters: Checking travel height alone misses the unloading movement. The plan must cover the complete working envelope and suitable arrangements agreed with the relevant competent people and line owner. The driver should not judge electrical clearance by eye.

Common misunderstanding: A drawing tells us the exact depth of every buried cable.

Remember: Plans are useful information but need appropriate locating and safe excavation arrangements.

Common misunderstanding: The vehicle is safe if it never actually touches the line.

Remember: Arcing can occur across a gap; proximity itself can be dangerous.

Recall it without looking

What are the three broad elements of a safe system near underground services?

Planning the work, locating and identifying services, and using a safe excavation method.

Primary references: HSE18, HSE21, HSE22. See the source list at the end.

15. Excavations and temporary works

Understand collapse, loading and change risks without relying on a remembered safe depth.

What you should understand

- Recognise the main excavation hazards
- Explain inspection triggers
- Identify temporary works and why changes need design control

There is no automatically safe excavation depth

Ground can collapse, material can fall in, and people or plant can fall over an edge. Water, buried services, nearby foundations, vehicle loads and exhaust fumes can add risks. The precautions depend on actual ground and working conditions. A trench being shallow or having stood yesterday does not establish that it will remain stable today.

Support or other suitable measures must be planned before entry is allowed. Safe access, edge protection and the location of plant and spoil need consideration alongside stability. Excavation can undermine neighbouring structures or scaffold foundations, while loads near the edge can increase pressure on the sides. Technical decisions about support and slopes belong to appropriately competent people. [HSE23]

Inspection must respond to events

Relevant excavation inspections are carried out by a competent person at the start of the shift and after events that may affect strength or stability, or a fall of rock or earth. Record the required findings and resolve dangers before work continues. A morning inspection cannot settle the question after heavy rain, a collapse of material or changed loading later that day.

Temporary works are engineered parts of the job

Temporary works can include excavation support, propping, falsework, scaffolds, plant working platforms and hoarding. They need planning, design where required, suitable installation, inspection and controlled use. Their temporary nature does not mean they are unimportant or safe to improvise.

Follow the project's arrangements for coordination and authorisation. Loading, removing a prop, changing a sequence or adding sheeting can alter what the structure must resist. A supervisor should understand the permitted use and recognise a proposed change; a general course does not authorise them to redesign or sign off temporary works. [HSE24]

Work through a change in excavation conditions

In a fictional service trench, the start-of-shift inspection has been completed. Later, water enters and a delivery is proposed beside the edge. These are separate changes: the water may affect the ground or support, while the delivery introduces a new load and a possible falling-material hazard.

1. **Identify what is no longer established:** the morning record concerned earlier conditions. Keep people from the affected danger through the site's arrangements and report the changes promptly.

2. **Give useful information:** explain where water is appearing, what is changing near the edge and whether material has fallen. Do not enter an unsafe area to gather a better photograph or measurement.
3. **Use the competent decision:** the relevant people review stability, support, access and the proposed loading, including the required inspection. Merely pumping out visible water would not prove that every stability issue has been resolved.
4. **Confirm the return conditions:** the supervisor checks that required corrective actions and inspection arrangements are complete, the permitted layout is clear and the team has been briefed. “Someone is coming to look” is not the same as completed action.

The reasoning is to connect the changed condition with the assumptions it affects. A supervisor identifies and coordinates the issue; they do not calculate a support system or invent a safe edge distance. [HSE23]

Follow temporary works through their stages

For temporary props supporting an opening, distinguish the intended arrangement, its correct installation, permission to use it and permission to alter or remove it. The project's management arrangements establish the roles and checks at each stage. An instruction to install props does not itself establish that they have been installed correctly; correct installation does not authorise a later change of purpose.

If a service installer wants a prop moved, give the authorised coordinator the location, proposed change and reason. The relevant competent review must establish how stability is maintained and the permitted sequence. Brief the resulting arrangement before affected work resumes. The title of the coordinating role or document can vary; the essential point is controlled design, installation and use, not creating a universal form to sign. [HSE24]

Key points to remember

- Depth alone does not determine excavation safety.
- Plant and spoil near an edge can affect stability.
- Relevant inspections are needed after events that may change stability.
- Temporary works must be used within their planned and designed conditions.

Know these terms

Temporary works: Engineered arrangements used temporarily to support, protect or provide access during construction.

Falsework: Temporary support for a structure while it cannot yet support itself.

Surcharge: An additional load near an excavation or structure, such as stored materials or plant.

A loading area moves

A planned delivery point is moved beside an open excavation because it is closer to the work. The excavation was inspected before the shift.

Why it matters: The extra loading near the edge can affect stability and may fall into the excavation. The earlier inspection did not approve that new loading. Keep the delivery within agreed arrangements or obtain the appropriate competent review before changing the layout.

Common misunderstanding: A trench below a particular remembered depth does not need assessment.

Remember: Collapse and other dangers depend on conditions, not a universal depth exemption.

Common misunderstanding: Temporary props can be removed when they obstruct another trade.

Remember: Removing or changing support can affect the structure and must follow the authorised sequence and design arrangements.

Recall it without looking

Name three changes that may affect an excavation after a morning inspection.

For example heavy rain or water inflow, a fall of material, nearby vehicle loading, vibration or a change affecting adjacent support.

Water enters a trench after the morning inspection, and a foreman suggests pumping it out and relying on that record. What is missing from that reasoning?

Model-answer check: water may have changed strength, stability or support conditions; removing visible water does not establish that these effects are resolved. Report the change, prevent exposure through the site arrangements and obtain the required competent review/inspection and corrective action before affected work resumes.

What information would you pass on when a trade requests movement of a temporary prop?

Model-answer check: identify the exact prop/area, its current authorised arrangement, the proposed movement and the work it is intended to enable. Ask for the change to be resolved through the project's temporary-works arrangements. Do not present a promise to replace it later as evidence of stability during removal.

Why are "installed", "checked" and "authorised for the proposed use" different statements about temporary works?

Model-answer check: installation says the arrangement has been put in place; checking concerns whether it matches the relevant requirements and is suitable; authorised use confirms the intended purpose and conditions under the project's arrangements. None of those statements automatically authorises a different load, alteration or removal.

Primary references: HSE23, HSE24. See the source list at the end.

16. Fire prevention, hot work and emergencies

Connect ignition and fuel controls with escape, warning and a planned response.

What you should understand

- Explain the fire triangle
- Identify hot-work and changing-site risks
- Understand what emergency arrangements must achieve

Prevent ignition and control fuel

Fire needs heat or another ignition source, fuel and oxygen. Construction can bring these together through hot work, temporary electrical equipment, smoking, fuel storage and accumulated packaging. Preventing the combination is more reliable than expecting an extinguisher to deal with every incident. Keep combustible materials controlled and consider hidden spaces where sparks or heat could travel.

Hot work includes activities such as welding, cutting or grinding that can produce heat or sparks. Use the task's assessed controls and permit arrangements where required. A permit identifies conditions and responsibilities; it does not remove combustible material or complete the agreed post-work fire checks. Those actions must actually happen. [HSE25]

Plan escape as the site changes

The emergency arrangement needs a recognisable warning, suitable escape routes, a place to assemble and a way of accounting for people. Routes must remain clear and available. During refurbishment, construction work must not undermine the occupied building's escape routes, fire separation, alarms or other protective systems. Reassess arrangements when the building, workforce or access changes.

Know the response before the event

People should know how to raise the alarm, contact emergency help, give the site location and reach the assembly point. Consider how an emergency vehicle reaches the casualty and who meets it. First-aid and specialist rescue arrangements need appropriate people and equipment; writing a telephone number is only one part.

Firefighting equipment must suit the hazards, and nominated users need training. Do not encourage untrained people to tackle a fire or delay evacuation to protect equipment. A supervisor's first task is to follow the established emergency plan and keep people from entering further danger. Fire law differs across UK nations; the practical controls here must sit within the requirements for the site. [HSE25] [HSE26] [HSE40]

Key points to remember

- Control ignition sources and combustible materials before relying on firefighting.
- Hot-work permission is conditional on controls being in place.
- Keep warning, escape and access arrangements effective as the site changes.
- Use the emergency plan and trained people; do not improvise rescue or firefighting.

Know these terms

Fire triangle: The combination of ignition/heat, fuel and oxygen needed for fire.

Hot work: Work producing heat, flame or sparks that can ignite material.

Assembly point: The designated place for people to gather and be accounted for after evacuation.

Grinding beside a service opening

A grinder is used beside an opening leading into a concealed void. The visible floor is clear of packaging.

Why it matters: A clean visible floor does not rule out combustible material beyond the opening. The assessment must consider where sparks and heat can travel and what protection and checks are required. The hot-work arrangement should address the actual area, including any post-work checks.

Common misunderstanding: The presence of an extinguisher makes hot work safe.

Remember: An extinguisher is one provision; preventing ignition, controlling fuel, permission conditions and emergency arrangements still matter.

Recall it without looking

Why must fire arrangements change during refurbishment?

Routes, occupancy, fire separation and protective systems can change as work progresses, so an earlier plan may no longer provide suitable warning and escape.

Primary references: HSE25, HSE26, HSE40. See the source list at the end.

17. Confined spaces and rescue planning

Recognise the definition and explain why safe entry and rescue require advance planning.

What you should understand

- Recognise enclosure plus specified risks
- Explain why appearance and smell are unreliable
- State the sequence of avoid entry, plan safe work and arrange rescue

Size is not the definition

A confined space is enclosed or largely enclosed and has a reasonably foreseeable specified risk, such as a dangerous atmosphere, fire or explosion, loss of consciousness, drowning or asphyxiation. A large tank can qualify; a small cupboard does not qualify merely because it is cramped. Consider the space, contents and work being done, because a process can introduce a risk that was not present before.

Oxygen deficiency, toxic gas or flammable atmospheres may not be apparent by looking or smelling. Opening a cover or seeing someone enter safely earlier does not establish that conditions are safe now. Atmospheric testing, where required, is a competent activity within the safe system, not an improvised check by an untrained person. [HSE27]

Avoid entry where possible

First consider whether inspection, cleaning or other work can be done from outside. If entry is necessary, competent assessment and planning must establish the safe working arrangements. These may involve isolation, ventilation, appropriate monitoring, communication and suitable people and equipment, according to the actual hazards. A permit may form part of the arrangement, but does not replace those controls.

Rescue cannot begin with improvisation

Before work starts, there must be suitable arrangements for rescuing someone if an emergency occurs. Relying only on the public emergency services is insufficient. The plan needs to account for how a problem is detected, how help is raised and how rescue can be performed without exposing rescuers to the same danger.

If someone is overcome, raise the alarm and activate the established response. An unplanned entry by a colleague can turn one casualty into several. These notes develop recognition and understanding; they do not provide confined-space entry or rescue competence. [HSE27]

Key points to remember

- A confined space is defined by enclosure and specified risk, not just size.
- Invisible atmospheric hazards cannot be ruled out by smell or appearance.
- Avoid entry where possible; otherwise use a competent safe system.
- Suitable rescue arrangements must exist before entry.

Know these terms

Asphyxiation: Inadequate oxygen reaching the body, which can cause unconsciousness and death.

Specified risk: One of the types of serious risk relevant to the confined-space definition, such as dangerous atmosphere or drowning.

Inspection from outside

A tank needs a visual condition check. A suitable remote camera can provide the required information without anyone entering.

Why it matters: Using the camera may avoid entry and its associated exposure. If entry is still needed for other work, that is a separate decision requiring the appropriate assessment, safe system and rescue arrangements. A successful camera check does not authorise later entry.

Common misunderstanding: If the space smells normal, the atmosphere is safe.

Remember: Some dangerous conditions, including oxygen deficiency, cannot be detected by smell.

Common misunderstanding: A fit colleague can rescue someone by holding their breath.

Remember: Unplanned entry can expose the rescuer to the same lethal hazard; use the established competent rescue response.

Recall it without looking

Why is “call the emergency services” insufficient as the whole rescue plan?

Rescue needs suitable arrangements available for the actual space and hazards, including detection, communication, people, equipment and a safe method.

Primary references: HSE27. See the source list at the end.

18. Environmental protection, storage and waste

Apply the waste hierarchy and recognise how ordinary site work can cause pollution.

What you should understand

- Explain prevention, reuse and recycling in order
- Identify a pollutant source, route and affected place
- Recognise waste-storage and transfer responsibilities

Prevent waste before choosing a skip

The waste hierarchy starts with preventing waste, then preparing for reuse, recycling, other recovery and disposal as the last option. Accurate ordering, protected storage and cutting plans can prevent useful material becoming waste. Reuse means using an item again where suitable; recycling processes material into a new resource. Putting everything into one skip can reduce the opportunity to separate and recover material. [GOV01]

Think source, route and receptor

A pollutant needs a way to reach something that can be harmed. Fuel is a source; a drain or unprotected ground may provide a route; a watercourse or groundwater can be affected. Dust, noise and sediment from site work can also affect neighbours and the surrounding environment. Prevent releases through suitable storage, handling, maintenance and work methods, rather than relying solely on a spill kit after the event.

Know the drainage and spill-response arrangements for the site. Do not wash a spill or cement-contaminated water into a drain, assume every drain leads to treatment, or handle an unknown spill without the required training and protection. Protect people first, alert the designated person and use the planned response within your competence.

Store and transfer waste responsibly

Keep materials and waste in designated secure areas without obstructing access or escape routes. Prevent windblown waste, leaks and incompatible storage. Waste must be accurately described and transferred through the appropriate authorised arrangements; handing it to a carrier does not end the business's responsibility to check the transfer.

Waste and pollution requirements vary across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Use the site's national requirements and approved waste arrangements, especially for hazardous waste. A generic revision note should not be used as permission for a discharge or a waste movement. [HSE28] [GOV01] [GOV02]

Key points to remember

- Preventing waste comes before recycling or disposal.
- Storage affects safety as well as environmental protection.
- Drains can carry pollution beyond the site.

- Check the applicable national waste and pollution arrangements.

Know these terms

Waste hierarchy: An order of preference prioritising prevention, then reuse and recovery options before disposal.

Receptor: A person, habitat, water body or other part of the environment that could be harmed by a release.

Cement wash water beside a drain

At the end of a task, a worker proposes hosing cement-contaminated water into a nearby surface-water drain.

Why it matters: The drain may carry pollution beyond the site. Use the planned collection, treatment or authorised disposal arrangements for that material. The fact that water is being used for cleaning does not make the contaminated liquid suitable to discharge.

Common misunderstanding: Recycling is always the first step of the waste hierarchy.

Remember: Preventing waste is preferable; reuse comes before recycling where suitable.

Common misunderstanding: Once a carrier takes waste, the site has no further responsibility.

Remember: The business must use the appropriate checks, description and transfer arrangements; responsibilities do not disappear at the gate.

Recall it without looking

Give one example of preventing construction waste rather than recycling it.

For example ordering the correct quantity and protecting it from weather so usable material is not damaged and discarded.

Primary references: GOV01, HSE28, GOV02. See the source list at the end.

Course and assessment arrangements

The current SSSTS and SSSTS-R assessment has 25 questions worth 30 marks, a pass mark of 24/30 and 30 minutes to complete it. The applicable delegate workbook may be used in the final 10 minutes; the first 20 minutes are closed book.

Course completion also requires the mandatory exercises and a passed trainer review. Full-course delegates prepare and deliver a toolbox talk of about five minutes. Refresher delegates complete their own exercises, including a CDM scenario, and do not deliver that toolbox talk.

These topic questions are original learning checks, with one practice point per question. They are not official papers, do not reproduce the official mark allocation and cannot predict an examination result. Full-course and refresher learners can use the notes to identify gaps, then follow their provider's current instructions and supplied materials. [CITB01]

Primary sources

Sources reviewed on 12 November 2026. The notes and questions are independently written; the links let you read the underlying guidance.

[CITB01] SSSTS and SSSTS-R scheme rules, Appendix C v01.01, September 2026

https://www.citb.co.uk/media/p5npjxe3/appendix-c-site-supervision-safety-training-scheme-sssts-and-ssstsr.pdf

[HSE01] CDM 2015: summary of dutyholders and duties

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/cdm/2015/summary.htm

[HSE02] Legal status of HSE guidance and Approved Codes of Practice

https://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/legal-status.htm

[HSE03] Risk assessment: steps needed to manage risk

https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/steps-needed-to-manage-risk.htm

[HSE04] Site rules and induction

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/site-rules-induction.htm

[HSE05] RIDDOR: who should report

https://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/reporting/who-should-report.htm

[HSE06] How to carry out a COSHH risk assessment

https://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/basics/assessment.htm

[HSE07] Construction dust

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/construction-dust.htm

[HSE08] Asbestos information, instruction and training

https://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/training.htm

[HSE09] Hand-arm vibration: worried about your hands?

https://www.hse.gov.uk/vibration/hav/yourhands.htm

[HSE10] Controlling noise risks

https://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/controlrisks.htm

[HSE11] Assess manual handling you cannot avoid

https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/manual-handling/assess-manual-handling.htm

[HSE12] Construction welfare: overview

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/welfare/index.htm

[HSE13] Work-related stress: overview

https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/overview.htm

[HSE14] Introduction to working at height safely

https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/introduction.htm

[HSE15] Scaffolds: planning, competence and inspection

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/scaffoldinginfo.htm

[HSE16] Traffic management on site

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/vehiclestrafficmanagement.htm

[HSE17] PUWER: work equipment requirements

https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-equipment-machinery/puwer-overview.htm

[HSE18] Maintenance of work equipment

https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-equipment-machinery/maintenance.htm

[HSE19] Planning and organising lifting operations

https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-equipment-machinery/planning-organising-lifting-operations.htm

[HSE20] Thorough examinations and inspections of lifting equipment

https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-equipment-machinery/thorough-examinations-lifting-equipment.htm

[HSE21] Electricity: underground cables

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/underground.htm

[HSE22] Electricity: overhead power lines

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/overhead.htm

[HSE23] Excavations

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/excavations.htm

[HSE24] Temporary works

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/temporary-works.htm

[HSE25] General fire safety on construction sites

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/generalfire.htm

[HSE26] First aid: what employers need to do

https://www.hse.gov.uk/firstaid/what-employers-need-to-do.htm

[HSE27] Introduction to working in confined spaces

https://www.hse.gov.uk/confinedspace/introduction.htm

[HSE28] Material storage and waste management

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/safetytopics/storage.htm

[GOV01] Business and commercial waste: responsibilities and national guidance

https://www.gov.uk/dispose-business-commercial-waste

[HSE29] Construction hazardous substances: cement

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/cement.htm

[HSE30] Improvement and prohibition notices: distinctions

https://www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/og/ogprocedures/notices/noticetype.htm

[HSE31] Respiratory protective equipment: fit testing

https://www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment/fit-testing-basics.htm

[HSE32] Manual handling at work: overview

https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/manual-handling/index.htm

[HSE33] RIDDOR: reportable incidents

https://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/reportable-incidents.htm

[HSENI01] Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

https://www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/construction-design-and-management-regulations-northern-ireland-2016

[HSE34] Managing drug and alcohol misuse at work

https://www.hse.gov.uk/alcoholdrugs/index.htm

[HSE35] Permits to work

https://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/basics/permits.htm

[GOV02] Pollution prevention for businesses (England; links to other nations)

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pollution-prevention-for-businesses

[HSE36] Assessing noise exposure

https://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/risks.htm

[HSE37] Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974

https://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm

[HSE38] Safety signs and signals: L64

https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l64.pdf

[HSE39] Arrange an asbestos survey: scope and limitations

https://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/duty/arrange-asbestos-survey.htm

[HSE40] Fire safety in construction: HSG168

https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg168.pdf

[HSE41] Health and safety law: what you need to know

https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/law.pdf