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Your Safety Matters

This information letter is distributed to those people who are ensuring that their workplace is safe and healthy. This includes members of OHS Committees, OHS Representatives, Safety Officers, Supervisors, Managers and Directors. "Your Safety Matters" (formerly "Committee Member") is free information letter which has been distributed since 1996.

Hazards - the Game of Chance

In the world of occupational health and safety a hazard is commonly defined as "anything that has the potential to harm the health and safety of the person."



A look at the origin of the word hazard and its journey through various languages before finding its way into the English language will help to give a clearer idea of what this word means in OHS.

- Hazard is thought to have started out life as an Arabic word, "al-zahr" meaning "the dice".
- From this, came the Arabic word "khatar", meaning "to gamble"
- This word found its way to Spain around 1100AD where it became the word "azar", "a game of chance".
- From Spain it crossed over the border and into the French language as the word "hasard", meaning "a dice game; a chance of being injured or harmed".
- From France it was an easy sail over the English Channel to enter the English language where it is spelt hazard, and means;

*a chance of being injured or harmed; danger, or;
a dice game similar to craps, or
an obstacle, such as a sand trap on a golf course.*

- And finally it arrived in OHS to mean " anything that has the potential to harm the health and safety of the person."



So historically this word has been linked with games of chance and activities and things that are outside direct human control – a hazard is associated with danger and unforeseen events that may happen against ones wishes.

Which is why, obviously, it is so important to identify hazards in the workplace and make sure that people are not killed or harmed by them.

This publication provides general information about ohs. It is not a legal opinion and does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law to be applied to a particular problem.

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