Hierarchy of Controls

A control measure is simply what steps you are going to take to remove a hazard (eliminate) or at least reduce it to a low level (minimise).

Your control measures are the most significant part of the risk assessment, as they set out the steps that must be followed to protect people.

Some control measures may already be in place. You will need to decide if additional measures are needed. When deciding on the controls, you should consider the general principles of prevention. These are a hierarchy of controls that set out how to manage hazards. The focus should be to get rid of the hazard, so that people are protected. If this is not possible then you should work through the principles until you have made it as safe as reasonably practicable. Your reliance on personal protective equipment (PPE) should be one of the last steps in the process (not the first).

The General Principles of Prevention are summarised as follows;

- **Avoid the risk**: -If you can get rid of the hazard then people are not exposed to the risks. You should apply this principle first
- **Evaluate unavoidable risks -**: This requires you to undertake risk assessments. If you can't get rid of a hazard, you must assess it
- **Combat the risks at source**:- Here you are trying to deal with the hazard at its root. For example if you have a noisy machine in your workplace, giving employees hearing protection is not dealing with the root of the problem. If you enclose the machine so that it is not noisy or if you replace the machine with a quieter one, then you are combating the risk at source.
- **Adapt the work to the individual-**: This is the principle of arranging the workplace and tasks to take into account your employees and to reduce the affect of work on health.
- **Adapt your work place in line with technical progress -** Safer systems of work are always being developed. You should keep up to date with new systems, so that you can put them into use in your workplace. The HSA, trade associations, industrial bodies and trade unions will have information on safe systems of work that will help you
- **Replace dangerous systems with safer alternatives -** This applies to dangerous articles, substances or systems of work. For example, if you are using a solvent that may be toxic, then you should consider if there is a non-solvent alternative that is safer. Basic approach - if you can take steps to make it safer, then do it.
- **Develop a prevention policy -** This is where you would set out how you are going to protect your employees and other people from the hazards in your workplace. This forms part of your safety statement.
- **Give priority to collective protective measures -** Here it is better to put controls in place that protect everyone, rather than for example just handing out PPE to employees.

- **Give training and instruction -** Once you have assessed the risks and decided on your controls in line with the principles above, you will need to tell your employees about them and to make sure that they are competent to work safely.

In general the controls listed on BeSMART for each hazard are listed in order of importance, with the most important first. But you need to remember that multiple controls may be required in your workplace to control a hazard.