

WHS Risk Management & Safe Design

Accreditation Readiness Workbook | August 2026

Practical guidance and tools for residential and construction businesses preparing for OFSC WHS Accreditation.



How to use this workbook

Understand what good risk management and safe design look like, test your current readiness and build a stronger evidence trail.

PURPOSE

Use this workbook to understand what good risk management and safe design look like in practice, identify gaps, strengthen evidence and prepare your project teams for accreditation audit conversations.

What you should get from it

- ▶ A clear builder-specific Hazard Identification, Risk Assessment and Control (HIRAC) methodology.
- ▶ Project-specific risk assessment that reflects actual work, site conditions and change.
- ▶ Safe design and buildability risks integrated into project risk management.
- ▶ Defined risk thresholds, escalation and higher-order control decisions.
- ▶ Evidence that risk and design decisions are implemented, communicated and reviewed.

A simple way to work through the resource

01

UNDERSTAND

Know what accreditation-ready risk management looks like.

02

CHECK

Test your current systems and evidence.

03

STRENGTHEN

Use the practical tools to close priority gaps.

04

EVIDENCE

Build a traceable record of implementation.

05

PREPARE

Practise the conversations teams may need to have at audit.

IMPORTANT

Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner (OFSC) accreditation does not replace State or Territory WHS/Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislation. The applicable jurisdictional laws continue to apply to the construction work. This workbook focuses on the additional OFSC risk management, safe design, assurance and implementation evidence a builder may need to demonstrate. It is a readiness resource and does not guarantee accreditation or legal compliance.

Why risk management and safe design matter

For OFSC accreditation, a risk matrix or safe design report on its own is not enough.

The [Residential Builders' Guide](#) tests whether the builder has a defined HIRAC process, applies it consistently at builder and project level, integrates buildability risks from design and can show that controls are implemented and reviewed.

ACCREDITATION LENS

The audit process looks beyond the existence of a risk procedure. It tests whether documented HIRAC and safe design requirements are implemented consistently in practice and supported by evidence. Risk decisions should connect project hazards, design/buildability issues, task controls, change and verification.

What this means in practice

SYSTEMATIC	Hazards are identified individually, risks are assessed using the builder methodology and controls follow the hierarchy of control.
PROJECT-SPECIFIC	Project HIRAC reflects the actual scope, site, stakeholders, design and changing work.
DESIGN-INTEGRATED	Buildability risks are considered whether the builder controls design or receives a completed design.
CONNECTED	Residual design risks flow into project risk controls and, where relevant, SWMS and site arrangements.
REVIEWED	Risk controls, HIRAC outputs and design changes are checked for effectiveness and updated when conditions change.

Where this category maps to the OFSC guide

- ▶ WH12.1-WH12.7 - Hazard Identification, Risk Assessment and Control (HIRAC).
- ▶ FP2.1-FP2.4 - Integration of design issues into the risk management process.

What good looks like

Compare your current practice with stronger accreditation-ready practice. The aim is not to create paperwork; it is to make risk and design decisions consistent, project-specific, traceable and usable in the field.

AREA	WEAK / INFORMAL PRACTICE	STRONGER ACCREDITATION-READY PRACTICE
HIRAC methodology	A risk matrix exists, but different teams use it differently.	The methodology defines identify-assess-control-review, roles, risk levels and control expectations.
Project risk	A generic corporate risk register is copied into projects.	Each project identifies and maintains risks that reflect its actual scope, conditions, stakeholders and changes.
Risk acceptance	High risks can remain open without a defined escalation.	Unacceptable risk thresholds trigger defined management action, including stop, redesign, escalation or approval.
Control selection	Controls rely heavily on procedures, PPE or supervision.	Elimination and higher-order controls are considered first and relevant legal, code and standard requirements inform decisions.
Safe design	A designer report is filed but not actively reviewed.	Buildability hazards are identified, assessed and controlled, with residual risks deliberately transferred into project HIRAC.
Design change & review	Drawing changes occur without a WHS review, and actions close when paperwork is complete.	Design changes are assessed through HIRAC, communicated to affected workers and significant controls are verified as effective.

Your four readiness levels

Use the level that best describes the consistency and evidence behind your current risk management and safe design system.

1

NONE AT ALL | Establish

What it means: No defined builder HIRAC method or safe design process.

Your focus: Create the core methodology, responsibilities, project risk process and safe design pathway.

2

GETTING STARTED | Implement

What it means: Some assessments occur, but practice may be generic, inconsistent or person-dependent.

Your focus: Make the process repeatable, train the right people and start retaining implementation evidence.

3

BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS | Embed

What it means: Core systems exist, but project consistency, design integration or control review needs strengthening.

Your focus: Standardise, monitor and verify that risk and design processes are being used as intended.

4

STRENGTHENING IMPLEMENTATION | Assure and improve

What it means: Risk and safe design systems are operating and evidence is available.

Your focus: Test effectiveness, analyse recurring risk themes and use assurance to improve project outcomes.

DO NOT TREAT A HIGH SCORE AS COMPLETION

A strong diagnostic result means the business appears to have stronger foundations. Formal accreditation still depends on the OFSC application and on-site audit process.

Risk Management & Safe Design Readiness Check

Use Yes / Partly / No and note the evidence you can actually produce. If you answer Yes but cannot locate evidence, treat the item as Partly until the evidence trail is clear.

#	READINESS QUESTION	Y / P / N	POSSIBLE EVIDENCE
1	Is there a documented builder-specific HIRAC methodology?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	HIRAC procedure; risk matrix; hierarchy of control; review process
2	Does the methodology define how hazards are identified, assessed, controlled and reviewed?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Procedure; assessment template; risk criteria
3	Are roles that conduct or participate in HIRAC clearly defined and trained in the builder method?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Training matrix; content; attendance; competency evidence
4	Can you show a recent project-specific risk assessment that reflects the actual project scope?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Project risk register; project safety plan; review records
5	Does project HIRAC address risks affecting clients, the public or other parties and record liaison?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Stakeholder risk records; consultation/Request Information log (RFI) records; project risk register
6	Are acceptable and unacceptable risk levels defined with mandatory actions for higher risks?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Risk matrix; escalation rules; approvals; permits; stop-work controls
7	Do risk controls explicitly consider hierarchy of control and relevant legal/code/standard requirements?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Risk assessments; Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) review checklist; control standards
8	Is the effectiveness of builder, project and task-level HIRAC reviewed?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Management review; audits; risk register reviews; task/SWMS observations

9	For design-and-construct work, is there a process to assess WHS buildability risks during design?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Design risk procedure; design workshops; Design Risk Assessment (DRA)
10	For construct-only work, is there a process to obtain and review the designer/client DRA before construction?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	RFI/request records; received DRA; review evidence
11	If a suitable DRA is not provided, is there a contingency process to assess buildability hazards?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Builder-developed DRA; review/approval records
12	Are residual design/buildability hazards deliberately transferred into project HIRAC?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	DRA-to-risk-register traceability; transfer record; assigned owners
13	Can you show how residual design risks flow into task planning or SWMS where relevant?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Project risk register; SWMS; prestart/toolbox records
14	Are design changes during construction identified and subjected to HIRAC?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Design change/RFI log; change risk assessment; approvals
15	Are changed hazards and controls communicated before work proceeds, with records traceable for audit?	Yes [] Partly [] No []	Updated SWMS; toolbox/prestart; DRA; change log; worker acknowledgement

USE THE EVIDENCE TEST

If the process exists but you cannot locate a recent implementation record, treat the item as Partly until the evidence trail is clear.

Tool 1: Project HIRAC pathway

Use this matrix to make risk management consistent from project planning through to task execution and review.

STEP	WHAT TO DO	EVIDENCE TO RETAIN
1. DEFINE & IDENTIFY	Confirm project scope, site conditions, stakeholders and applicable requirements, then identify hazards individually.	Project brief; risk workshop; project risk register
2. ASSESS	Apply the builder-specific risk methodology to each hazard and record the rationale.	Risk score; assessment record; participants
3. CONTROL	Eliminate where reasonably practicable; otherwise select the highest reasonably practicable controls using the hierarchy of control.	Control decision; design change; engineering control; SWMS
4. ESCALATE & APPROVE	Apply defined management actions where risk remains above the builder acceptable level.	Senior approval; work hold; permit; redesign
5. IMPLEMENT	Translate controls into project plans, procurement, SWMS, prestarts and work methods.	Project plan; subcontractor requirements; SWMS
6. VERIFY & REVIEW	Observe work, verify controls and update HIRAC when scope, design, conditions, incidents or information change.	Inspection; task observation; risk register revision; review record

MINIMUM DECISIONS TO DEFINE

Define who can accept each risk level, when senior management involvement is required, what triggers stop/redesign/escalation, and how project and task controls are verified and reviewed.

Tool 2: Safe design risk review

Use this review to connect buildability hazards and design decisions to project HIRAC and field controls.

FOCUS	QUESTIONS TO ASK	DECISION / ACTION
Design pathway	Who controls design and what is the project type?	Owner: _____ Due: _____ Evidence: _____
Buildability hazards	What construction hazards arise from the design?	Owner: _____ Due: _____ Evidence: _____
Elimination	Can the hazard be designed out?	Owner: _____ Due: _____ Evidence: _____
Higher-order controls	What higher-order control can be designed in?	Owner: _____ Due: _____ Evidence: _____
Designer information	Was the designer/client DRA obtained and reviewed?	Owner: _____ Due: _____ Evidence: _____
Information gap	Is a builder assessment needed?	Owner: _____ Due: _____ Evidence: _____
Residual risk	What buildability hazards remain?	Owner: _____ Due: _____ Evidence: _____
Project transfer	What must move into project HIRAC?	Owner: _____ Due: _____ Evidence: _____
Task controls	What must flow into SWMS or site controls?	Owner: _____ Due: _____ Evidence: _____
Records	What evidence will be retained?	Owner: _____ Due: _____ Evidence: _____

Tool 3: Design change & residual risk handover

Use this during construction so design changes do not bypass the project HIRAC process and changed controls reach the people doing the work.

Project		Senior manager / lead	
Date		Design / site contact	

Ask, assess and verify

FOCUS	PROMPT	NOTES / ACTION
Change identified	What drawing, specification, material, detail or sequence has changed?	
WHS impact	Does the change introduce a new hazard, alter an existing hazard or change an existing control?	
Risk decision	What is the revised risk level and what controls are required?	
Project transfer	Which project risk register items need to be added or amended?	
Task transfer	Which SWMS, work method, permit, inspection or procurement requirement changes?	
Worker communication	Who is affected and how will the change be explained before work proceeds?	
Verification	How will the changed control be checked in the field?	
Close-out	Who confirms the change has been implemented and the residual risk remains controlled?	

EVIDENCE TO KEEP

Retain the design change reference, HIRAC assessment, updated risk register/DRA, changed SWMS or work method where relevant, worker communication and evidence that the changed control was implemented.

Build your evidence chain

For each requirement, connect the documented process to a real implementation record. The strongest evidence is traceable from expectation, to decision, to implementation, to verification and review.

01 EXPECTATION	02 DECISION	03 IMPLEMENTATION	04 REVIEW
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Accreditation evidence map

REQUIREMENT	DOCUMENTED PROCESS	IMPLEMENTATION TEST	POSSIBLE EVIDENCE
HIRAC methodology	HIRAC procedure	Project/team use the builder method	Risk assessments; training; risk records
Project-specific HIRAC	Project risk process	Actual scope and site hazards assessed	Project risk register; review history
Risk thresholds	Risk acceptance / escalation rules	High risk triggers required management action	Approvals; stop/hold; permit; redesign
Control selection	Hierarchy / legal control process	Controls reflect hierarchy and relevant requirements	Risk assessments; SWMS reviews; technical controls
Design-and-construct	Safe design procedure	Buildability risk reviewed during design	DRA; design workshop; decisions
Construct-only	DRA request / review process	Designer information obtained and reviewed	RFI; DRA; builder review
Residual design risk	Transfer process	Residual risks moved into project HIRAC	Traceable DRA-to-register entries
Design change	Change HIRAC process	Changes assessed and communicated	Change log; updated risk/SWMS; briefings
HIRAC effectiveness	Assurance / review process	Builder, project and task HIRAC tested	Audits; observations; management review

Auditor lens: questions to be ready for

The goal is not scripted answers. People should be able to explain how the system works in their own business and point to recent evidence.

WHO	PRACTICE QUESTION
Senior leader	What risk level requires your involvement? Show me a recent example where you intervened.
WHS / project manager	Show me how your builder HIRAC methodology is applied on this project.
Project manager	What are the highest current project risks and what has changed recently?
Project manager	Show me a design/buildability risk and where it appears in the project risk register.
Design / project team	How do you manage safe design where you control the design? What changes for construct-only projects?
Site manager	Show me a recent design change and how you assessed the WHS impact before the changed work proceeded.
Supervisor / worker	What changed in the work recently and how were you told about the new or changed controls?
Senior leader / WHS	How do you know your HIRAC process is effective at builder, project and task level?

Common gaps to look for

- ▶ A risk matrix exists but the full builder HIRAC methodology is not defined.
- ▶ Generic risk assessments are used rather than project-specific HIRAC.
- ▶ People complete risk assessments without builder-specific HIRAC training.
- ▶ Risk thresholds are defined but no management action is triggered when risk is high.
- ▶ The hierarchy of control appears in the procedure but is not evident in actual control decisions.
- ▶ A safe design assessment exists but residual buildability hazards are not transferred into project HIRAC.
- ▶ Design changes are technically reviewed but not assessed through HIRAC or communicated to affected workers.

Your 30 / 60 / 90-day action plan

Choose only the highest-value gaps. The purpose is to create a credible evidence trail quickly, not to generate unnecessary documents.

WHEN	PRIORITY ACTION	OWNER	DUE	EVIDENCE OF COMPLETION
0-30 days				
31-60 days				
61-90 days				

TIP

Prioritise actions that improve both implementation and the evidence trail. A new document is not automatically the best solution if an existing process can be strengthened and consistently recorded.

Suggested sequence if you are starting from a low score

Build the risk and safe design system in a logical order, then test whether the evidence chain holds together.

FIRST	Define the builder-specific HIRAC methodology, risk levels, hierarchy of control expectations and responsible roles.
SECOND	Train the roles that conduct or participate in HIRAC and establish a project-specific risk register process.
THIRD	Establish safe design pathways for design-and-construct and construct-only projects, including DRA review and residual risk transfer.
FOURTH	Build HIRAC into design changes, SWMS/task planning and communication to workers.
FIFTH	Review the first 60 to 90 days of risk records and test effectiveness at builder, project and task levels.

READINESS TEST

At the end of 90 days, select one active project. Trace one significant hazard from identification through risk assessment, design or control decision, project/task implementation, worker communication and verification. If the evidence chain breaks, that is your next improvement priority.

How to use this workbook with the WHS Readiness Diagnostic

DIAGNOSTIC RESULT	USE THIS WORKBOOK TO...
None at All	Establish the minimum HIRAC and safe design system and start building evidence.
Getting Started	Focus on consistent project-specific use, training and traceable records.
Building the Foundations	Test whether risk and safe design processes are embedded across projects and teams.
Strengthening Implementation	Use the auditor lens, evidence map and effectiveness reviews to improve assurance.

Reference points and use notes

Keep the resource proportionate, use existing records wherever possible and confirm current requirements before relying on this workbook.

Primary [OFSC](#) reference

Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner, WHS Accreditation Scheme Audit Criteria: Residential Builders' Guide. Relevant criteria for this workbook are WH12.1-WH12.7 and FP2.1-FP2.4. The Guide emphasises both documented process and evidence of effective implementation.

Housing Australia context

The OFSC provides specific guidance for residential and head contractor builders tendering for Housing Australia funding under the [Housing Australia Future Fund](#) and National Housing Accord Facility (NHAFF). Depending on the project and applicable exemptions, the Scheme may require the head contractor builder to be accredited before Housing Australia can fund the building work.

KEEP IT PROPORTIONATE

The objective is not to create a second risk management system for OFSC. Use the builder's existing HIRAC, project risk, safe design, RFI/change and SWMS records wherever they already demonstrate the required activity. Add only the governance, traceability, assurance or implementation evidence needed to close an accreditation-readiness gap. For SMEs, keep tools short and integrate them into normal project delivery.

Useful official sources

- ▶ WHS Accreditation Scheme Audit Criteria: [Residential Builders'](#)
- ▶ Scheme criteria guidance explained for head contractor builders - www.fsc.gov.au
- ▶ How to manage work health and safety risks - www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au
- ▶ Safe design of structures - www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au

DISCLAIMER

Readiness resource only. Confirm current OFSC criteria and the WHS/OHS requirements applying in each project jurisdiction.