Everything changes. Get ready!

SID

When it comes to the management of a building and its risks, the health and safety file is indispensable. Our guide explains the contribution you can make to it.

A health and safety file is a requirement of any construction project where there are more than two contractors and so a principal designer exists or is appointed. Its purpose is to provide health and safety information to anyone working on a structure in the future – whether this is for maintenance, construction, refurbishment or demolition.

A well-prepared health and safety file will be an invaluable source of information. Those referring to it will find it easy to navigate, and will find details of all risks relevant to their work – whether or not they were looking for them.

The health and safety file must exist for the lifetime of a structure. It became a requirement in 1994 – so you should ask to see the existing file for any structure that has been built or substantially altered since this date.

Length and format of the file

The client must decide the length and format of the file, on advice from their expert team.

The size and type of the project is likely to have a bearing on this decision. In the case of a major retail park, for example, it is sensible for the file to take the form of a detailed electronic structure-management system. For small buildings, a paper-based document may be more appropriate – this being quality-controlled by nominated members of the client team.

When it comes to preparing the health and safety file, it can be helpful to annotate drawings with symbols and notes. Such an approach communicates health and safety information clearly, and in context. It also allows people to see, at a glance, the location of a risk.

Who is responsible for the file?

Under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 (CDM 2015), it is the responsibility of the principal designer to prepare the file. Once this has been done, it is the client's duty to retain the file and keep it up to date. So, it is important for them to understand the file layout in relation to their operating procedures. Equally it is important for the principal designer to produce a file in the format that helps the client team rather than a principal designer standard document.

Designers and the health and safety file

Although it is the principal designer who prepares the health and safety file, every member of the CDM team has a part to play in contributing to it.

Designers will be selecting, specifying and otherwise making decisions on what is to be built by contractors. Many of these will be relevant to the health and safety file.

This guide sets out a number of file sections to which designers could contribute.

Content of the health and safety file

The file should contain enough information to allow future hazards to be identified, and the risks from these hazards managed.

The physical elements of a structure can easily be described, photographed or referenced. But it is also important to include other, less obvious, information, such as the basis for the structural design or the assumptions that have been made by decision-makers early on in a project. This is particularly important where design-philosophy changes could have a radical impact on safety for use, maintenance, repair or decommissioning. It is important too, to explain key decisions so that subsequent value engineering takes such design-philosophy into account. The following list is produced by designers, for designers and decision makers and contains the information they have stated would be helpful. It exceeds the detail of the content set out in Appendix 4 of the Guidance to CDM 2015.

Typically, the health and safety file should contain at least the following:

General details

This section is very basic, and should form an introduction to the file. Information to incorporate includes:

- **The address of the premises**
- **The name of the building owner (to be updated each time ownership changes)**
- **The names and addresses of the CDM team, which might include:**
  - The architect
  - The structural/civil engineer
  - The geotechnical or other specialist engineers
  - The quantity surveyor
  - The building services engineer
  - The principal designer
  - The principal contractor
  - All subcontractors
  - Any other party who has duties under CDM 2015

The introductory section should also make clear:

- **Whether the file is up to date**
- **The number of pages it contains**
- **If it has been revised, then why**

General arrangement drawings

Subsequent designers should have access to general arrangement drawings that provide information on:

- **The location and footprint of the site – especially in relation to adjacent features**
- **A building's architectural form**
- **A building's structural layout (including foundations)**
- **The materials used – their type, and strength**
- **Any retained features, such as existing structures or encapsulated material**
- **The layout of internal and external building services, including:**
  – Drains
  – Mechanical plant and ducting
  – Electrical wiring
  – Plumbing
  – Utilities

When it comes to incorporating these drawings into the health and safety file, there are two options. The first option is to include them in the health and safety file itself. The risk of this, though, is that important health and safety information may be lost among a large amount of project detail.

To circumvent this, it may be preferable to include the drawings in an operation and maintenance (O&M) manual, highlight the risks in the health and safety file, and cross-refer to the O&M manual where appropriate.

The decision about where to include the drawings will need to be made at an early stage. It is likely to be influenced by the scale of the project, and the client's preferred method of retaining information.

'Basis of design' statements

This information is intended to enable subsequent designers to identify and assess any hazards associated with the building and its finishes. That way, they can design in a way that will minimise those hazards.

As a minimum, this section should contain the following statements:

Basis of civil and structural design
This statement is provided by the geotechnical, civil or structural engineer. It gives an indication of whether the existing structure holds any potential for harm, and allows designers to avoid specifying processes that might release this. The statement should include information about:

- **The basic structural form – for example, a pin-jointed steel frame with bracing**
- **The methods of structural analysis, including the names of any computer programmes used**
- **How the characteristic loads (occupancy and environmental) were derived, together with a list of the British or European standards used**
- **The wind loads – basic wind speed and a brief summary of how the building was defined, for the purpose of calculating wind coefficients**
- **How the structural elements were designed, together with a list of the standards used (and their dates)**
- **Any deviations from the requirements in the listed standards**
- **Critical components and how they work, for example the fixing of pre-cast walling**
- **Requirements/provisions for future maintenance – for example the repainting of steel and the resurfacing of roads**
- **How calculations may be obtained – for example, file reference numbers**
- **How the building could be demolished or dismantled, where unusual residual risks (such as hidden services or suspended features) could make these processes dangerous**

Basis of design for external services
This statement is provided by the designer of the services. It is intended to help subsequent designers minimise the risks associated with work on, or close to, existing services. The statement should provide information about:

- **The general form of the ground on which the services were installed, including any areas of significant hazard (for example, made ground)**
- **The location of services, referenced from a fixed point on the building**
- **The average depth of the services and utilities, and their maximum depths**
- **The types of backfill used**
- **For drainage runs:**
  – The falls of the drains
  – The length, size and unit weight of the pipes
  – The location of any drains that carry highly hazardous waste from, for example, pathology laboratories and petrol interceptors
  – A manhole schedule giving diameters, depths and the form of access arrangements (e.g. mild steel ladders)
  – Provision for future maintenance

Basis of architectural design
This is provided by the architect, to allow successive designers to avoid specifying processes that may release any potential for harm held in the fabric of the building. As a minimum, the statement should include information about:

- **Cladding and partitions – general materials and finish***
- **Fixtures and fittings – for example, MDF**
- **Ceilings – materials and type**
- **Paint – general type, location and CLP data sheets/COSHH risk assessments***
- **Roof assemblies – materials and, where applicable, non-fragile life**
- **Glazing – type, weight and location**
- **Adhesives – general type, location and CLP data sheet/COSHH risk assessments***
- **Provision for future maintenance, including assumptions about how it will be carried out – for example external painting, and the cleaning of glass and gutters**
- **Provision for demolition and dismantling**

*Including any deviations from the general type, and their locations, where unusual risks are embedded

Basis of design for building services
This is provided by the designer. It enables future designers to minimise the risks associated with the maintenance of, or addition to, existing services. The statement should include information about:

- **The location of services, referenced from a fixed point on the building**
- **The average height of the services in an area, together with their maximum and minimum heights**
- **The general maximum length, size and unit-weight of service-run components, together with a schedule of deviations from this (and their locations)**
- **Significant hazards associated with pieces of equipment, and their locations – for example high voltages, high pressures and high temperatures**
- **Provision for future inspections and maintenance, including assumptions about how they will be carried out (from a stepladder, for example)**
- **How the services could be dismantled**

Other relevant information

The health and safety file should highlight any site-specific hazards that existed when the project was executed. These may include:

- **Site constraints – for example, delivery times, vehicle size restrictions, limitations on working hours and restrictions on generation of dust**
- **Unusual local permissions – for example, work on listed buildings, or close to railways, canals or trunk roads**
- **The stability of adjacent structures**

The file should also include drawing schedules. These should list the working drawings that were issued, and the address from which they are available. Those listed should always be 'latest construction' drawings.

Each time work is carried out that changes the fabric or the form of the building, or its associated services, the health and safety file should be revised. Where information is superseded, this should be made clear.

Helping you to help others

The health and safety file will be the main source of information for any designers and contractors subsequently appointed to work on a structure. So it makes sense for it to reflect the preconstruction information that must be issued prior to any project.

Useful resources

Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015

See elsewhere on SiD:

ADM004 What designers should know