

Volunteer Health and Safety

Why is good health and safety practice important?

Having the right Health and Safety practices can reduce the risk of accidents, damage to property or incidents of physical, emotional or financial harm. It will also make the volunteers experience more enjoyable as a result and they'll appreciate that you have considered their safety. By highlighting your commitment to the safety of volunteers you are more likely to be viewed positively externally, especially by potential volunteers.

Health and Safety Legislation

The Health & Safety at Work Act (1974) is the main legislation covering occupational health and safety in the United Kingdom. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are responsible for enforcing the act. This sets out general duties for employers to ensure that as far as possible their employees, and others who may be affected by their activities including volunteers and members of the public, are protected from physical, financial and emotional harm. Organisations have a duty of care, outlined in section 3 of the Health & Safety at Work act 1974. This is to ensure that an individual does not suffer any unreasonable harm or loss as a result of an organisation or group's activity. If a duty is found to be breached, a legal liability may be imposed. A duty of care can arise in many ways which are not always obvious for example:

*Loaning equipment to others;

*Sponsored runs;

*Holding a fair or Christmas party;

*Organising day trips;

*Selling food at a jumble sale.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulation 1999, identifies situations where health and safety training is particularly important. For example, a volunteer in a hospice who is driving patients to their appointments and escorting them to the vehicle may need information and training, where as a volunteer who is running a stall at a fete might not. The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 and the Health and Safety (consultation with employees) Regulations 1996 require organisations to consult employees, or their representatives, on health and safety issues. The Workplace Regulations 1992 states that the building must be safe and compliant with relevant legislation; this includes access, work stations, ventilation, heating and lighting. In Scotland, fire safety duties are contained in Part 3 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, and the Fire Safety (Scotland) Regulations 2006.

Suggestions of how to approach health and safety in your organisation

Your approach to ensuring the health and safety of volunteers will vary depending on the nature of your organisation and the way in which volunteers are involved.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have produced a guide – ‘Managing health and safety: Five steps to success which should be referred to. We have included a summary below.

Step 1: Set Your Policy

Your health and safety policy should influence all of your activities, including the selection of people, equipment and materials, the way work is done and how you design and provide goods and services. It is the foundation to develop good health and safety practice and procedures and shows your commitment to health and safety standards. Employers with fewer than five employees are not obliged to have a written policy, however Volunteer Scotland would strongly encourage that this is in place. The HSE has created an example policy that you can download.

Step 2: Organise

Organise your staff Volunteer coordinators need to ensure that volunteers, and paid staff working with them, have been fully trained and informed about the activities that they will carry out. They should feel competent and supported at all times.

Ensure that everyone knows what they must do and how they will be held accountable. Make sure that time and resources are in place to carry out health and safety activities. Everyone needs to understand any risks and any steps that have been taken to reduce them.

Communication should provide direction with written and visible instructions and clear lines of reporting. Try to involve staff and volunteers in the planning and reviewing of your health and safety practice and procedures and consider implementing a health and safety committee with volunteer representation.

Step 3: Plan and set standards

Planning is the key to ensuring that your health and safety efforts work. Planning for health and safety involves setting objectives, identifying hazards, assessing risks, implementing standards of performance and developing a positive culture. Your planning should take account of how you identify risks, understanding if the activities comply with health and safety laws, how health and safety decisions are made when purchase goods or designing roles and tasks or how you might deal with serious danger such as a fire. It is beneficial to record your plans in writing. The plans should identify who does what, when and the planned outcome. They need to include a set of standards in your policy to measure your performance so that you can review whether what you have done has been effective and to make sure that the standards are specific, measurable and achievable.

Step 4: Check

Check that the arrangements and controls put in place to stop injury, damage and ill health are working as planned. Consider carrying out:

Active monitoring before things go wrong: carry out regular inspection and check to ensure that your standards are being implemented and management controls are working.

Reactive monitoring after things go wrong: learn from your mistakes, whether they have resulted in injuries and illness, property damage or near misses.

You need to ensure that information from active and reactive monitoring is used to identify situations that create risks, and to act on this. Priority should be given where risks are greatest.

Step 5: Review

Review the activity to ensure that health and safety arrangements are adequate and proportionate and then feed any changes into the next activity.

To create a culture of accountability you might feel it is helpful to promote the rights and responsibilities for the organisation and the volunteers in relation to health and safety. This could form part of your volunteer agreement. For example:

Rights of organisation

- *Expect volunteers to act responsibly.
- *Work within the boundaries that have been agreed.
- *Expect volunteers to be alert to potential hazards.

Rights of the volunteers

- *To be informed of guidelines.
- *To be informed of boundaries.
- *To be informed of potential / identified risks.
- *To be insured appropriately.
- *To know that the organisation recognises its duty of care to volunteers. Responsibilities of the organisation
- Responsibilities of the volunteers

Responsibilities of the organisation

- *To have appropriate insurance.
- *Carry out risk assessment.
- *Have a risk management plan.
- *Inform volunteers of identified risks/hazards.
- *Agree boundaries with volunteers.
- *Agree the role of volunteers and ensure the use, or introduction of volunteer agreements.

Responsibilities of the volunteers

- *To adhere to guidelines and policies.
- *To ask questions.
- *To avoid difficult situations where possible.
- *Make organisation aware of potential hazards.

Suggested areas to include in your volunteer health and safety practice

A short, user friendly health and safety policy which refers to other separate documents (for example, lone working) is worth considering, as a long document can be overwhelming. Try viewing the policy as a statement of intent, with the day-to-day nuts and bolts covered in separate policies, or in a volunteer handbook. You do not have to include everything, but it is a good idea to include information about the following areas:

Registering your organisation's activities

All employers must register their existence with the Health and Safety Executive or the environmental health department in the local authority. This does not apply to volunteer only organisations unless they:

- *Are involved in dangerous activities such as putting on a fireworks display;
- *Own, control or are responsible for a premises and buildings (in which case registration is needed with the local fire authority);
- *Prepare, store, supply or sell food on five or more days in any five week period (in which case registration is needed with the local environmental health department).

Risk assessment

Risk assessments are a way of identifying and reducing potential hazards involved in an activity. There are five steps involved in preparing a risk assessment. These are:

- Step 1: Identify the hazards
- Step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how
- Step 3: Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions
- Step 4: Record your findings and implement them
- Step 5: Review your assessment and update if necessary

Risk management is an ongoing process and should be fully integrated into project management and review processes. Guidance on completing a risk assessment is available from the HSE website.

First Aid

The need for first aid provision will be different depending on the volunteering activities. For example, an outdoor adventure playground for children and young people with additional support needs will have different needs from a charity dinner dance at a bowling club. As a minimum, an organisation with employees must provide at least one first aid box and display a notice that tells staff:

The location of the first aid box;

Who the first aider or appointed person is;

Where the first aider or appointed person can be found. An appointed person is someone who has basic first aid knowledge. They will have the confidence to take charge in an emergency and are responsible for calling the emergency services. In some situations, an event organiser has a duty to plan, manage and monitor the first aid facilities at an event to make sure that workers, volunteers and the public are not exposed to health and safety risks.

Fire

All public and community buildings, whether owned or managed by an employer or an organisation without employees, must meet minimum levels of standards so that the risk of fire is minimal. Good practice is that organisations have a system in place to regularly test smoke detectors and fire alarms and

that all volunteers understand the procedure to follow in the event of a fire. This includes knowing who the fire wardens are and the emergency exits and meeting points. You should contact your local fire brigade for further assistance.

Working with young people

The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) has launched Wiseup2work, an interactive, web based resource aimed at getting teenagers to think about health and safety.

Promoting health and well being at work

Good practice suggests that organisations involving volunteers should try to promote a holistic, proactive approach to managing health and well being issues for volunteers. This may mean:

Continuing to protect volunteers from work related health and safety risks;

Helping volunteers who have common minor health conditions to return to, or remain in, volunteering. This might include reviewing their role description, reducing tasks, providing specialist equipment, offering a mentor or buddy or perhaps providing additional one to one support;

Encourage volunteers to look after their own health and wellbeing and provide opportunities that enable them to do. This may include health and wellbeing weeks, increased flexibility in work practices, support networks, introducing a volunteer forum, discount membership at health clubs, cycle mileage, encouraging discussion and feedback, healthy canteen options, access to counselling service, training to deal with difficult situations.

Stress

Even though volunteering is intended to be an enjoyable experience, sometimes stress can occur. Symptoms can include anger, anxiety, food craving, lack of appetite, feeling tired, difficulty concentrating, chest pain, constipation, diarrhoea, dizziness, sweating and difficulty sleeping. To overcome this, it is important to facilitate an environment where volunteers understand their role and its boundaries, feel they have the right skills and information to carry out their role, feel able to raise concerns, know that they are able to make a complaint and feel supported and confident to chat about any challenges they are having with their role or the people they work alongside. Volunteers may have solutions to the problems so be sure to ask them what could help and support them to develop the techniques to take control and cope.

Working off site

Managing off site volunteering is very important as many people are volunteering away from the office. Off site working can have many advantages including greater flexibility for client support and different volunteering opportunities. Organisations with volunteers who are off site need policies and procedures to make sure that they manage hazards around lone working, access to first aid, personal safety, data protection, travelling, use of equipment, the volunteering environment and risk assessment. Institution of

Occupational Safety and Health has produced a useful guide on supporting those working off site, Out of sight, out of mind? Many of the issues discussed can apply to volunteers.

Lone working

Similar to working off site, lone working for volunteers carries many of the same health and safety issues. Volunteers may be working in your office premises alone, visiting clients in their homes, running a stall at an event or even visiting other organisations. Many organisations have a range of policies and procedures to protect volunteers in these circumstances such as a specific lone working policy, signing in and out policy or use of mobiles or personal safety policy.

Work related violence

Volunteers should never feel threatened in their volunteering environment by the public, staff or other volunteers. Having a code of conduct can help, so everyone understands what is acceptable with clear guidance of the measures that will be taken should they be breached. It is good practice to provide training to volunteers on dealing with difficult situations or aggressive behaviour and provide an emergency code or alarm system in case of an emergency. This should all be supported by clear policies on how to make a complaint or whistle blowing.

Equipment

There are many health and safety issues when working with equipment. It may help to show volunteers the relevant role risk assessment. You may want to conduct training on safe operation of equipment and run regular refresher talks. You may provide protective clothing for volunteers carrying out specific tasks.

Driving

Many people provide their time and service as volunteer drivers. Volunteer involving organisations have a duty of care under health and safety law to ensure the safety of their staff, volunteers, passengers and anyone else (such as other road users) who may be affected by their activities. Things to check are that the volunteers are legally entitled to drive the vehicle and that they are using a vehicle that is safe and road legal. You may wish to hold on file a copy of their driving licence, MOT certificate, service record and insurance document. These need to be checked at regular intervals. You will also want to make volunteers aware that they need to inform you of any cautions, summons or convictions. Volunteers need to be trained and competent to drive and carry occupants safely including using seat belts, child seats, head restraints and entering and leaving the vehicle. You may carry out a test to ensure volunteer drivers are respectful on the road and to occupants, follow speed limits and are not distracted by mobile phones or other equipment. It is important that you have procedures in place for accidents, emergencies and breakdowns. You may implement a fitness to drive policy so that volunteers are aware they need to be fit to drive at all times and not under the affects of alcohol, drugs, medicine or too ill or tired to drive. It is advised that volunteers have their eye sight tested every two years and if they wear contact lenses or glasses, then they must be worn when driving.

What next?

*Further support is available. There are a number of sources of advice, which include trade associations, safety groups, trade unions, local councils, registered occupational safety and health consultants (OSHCR), health and safety training providers and suppliers.

*Ensure you have the policies in place such as your health and safety policy, lone working policy, volunteer driver policy.

*Display your insurance certificate in a public place and let volunteers know what they need to do to stay insured.

*Think about the ways you will record health and safety issues including having an accidental book, risk log, risk assessment for each role and make sure everyone knows what to do in an emergency, if there is an accident or during a fire drill.

*Remember you will need to set aside time regularly to review your health and safety policy and procedures, to ensure it is up to date. Volunteers should be included in the review process where possible.

Based on Volunteer Health & Safety by Volunteer Scotland.

Need some more help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this guide please get in touch with us:

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