

## Good Practice Guides: Building Foundations

# No. 5 – Volunteers and Health and Safety

### Key Points

An organisation that employs at least one individual is required to manage its Health and Safety regardless of whether the organisation is public, private or voluntary. Organisations/groups that are entirely volunteer led are also obliged to adhere to legislation and should as far as possible comply with regulations in order to ensure best practice.

We know this isn't the most exciting subject, so this guide is quite short and to the point!

### Key Recommendations

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the current legislation on Health and Safety practice require organisations to comply with the following practice:

- Examine the risks inherent in their work place and in the working practices of paid staff and volunteers
- Act to mitigate or protect against those risks.
- Set up systems for reporting incidents and auditing performance.

In essence, if a volunteer is exposed to the same risks as that of a paid worker, the same Health and Safety standards should be adhered to.

### Health and Safety Legislation

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 sets out the legal obligations of an organisation to its employees. It also outlines organisations responsibilities to individuals that are not employees, such as volunteers and members of the public who may be affected by their work activities. In addition to this, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 also place a duty on employers to assess the risk to anyone who may be affected by any work activities.

## Managing Health and Safety

The HSE produced a publication *Managing Health and Safety: the five steps to success*, which outlines a really useful structure that organisations can work with to help them move towards complying with best practice.

1. Set out your policy – A health and safety policy is the foundation on which to develop good health and safety practices and procedures. It also outlines the organisation's commitment to good health and safety standards. Organisations with fewer than five employees are not obliged to have a policy, but are strongly advised to do so. Visit <http://www.hse.gov.uk/> for a sample policy.
2. Organise your staff - Managers need to ensure that volunteers and staff are adequately instructed and trained for the activities they carry out. Information should be shared about any risks, and the preventative measures that you have identified. There should be clear lines of communication between volunteers, staff and managers to ensure that safety issues are dealt with.
3. Plan and set standards - Identify hazards and assess risks. Consider the design of the various tasks that are undertaken by your staff and volunteers. Think about the procedures you need to have in place in order to deal with imminent dangers e.g. fires etc. Include a set of standards in your policy against which you can measure your performance
4. Measure your performance - There should be regular inspection and checking to ensure that your standards (your policy) are effectively implemented. Any Incident should be recorded and investigated.
5. Learn from your experience: Regularly audit and review the effectiveness of your Health and Safety policy. Does it still comply with legislation? Are there absent or inadequate standards? Is action being taken within appropriate timescales? What lessons can be learnt from the incidents that have occurred?

## Risk Assessment

As highlighted, employing organisations have a legal responsibility to assess and address any risk to the Health and Safety of their employees and others (this includes volunteers). HSE recommends the following five step approach to risk assessment:

1. Look for hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. For each hazard, evaluate the chance or harm actually being done and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done.
4. Record the findings of the assessment; the main risks and the measures taken to deal with them.
5. Review your assessment from time to time

See our Good Practice Guide No: 13 on Volunteer Risk Assessments

## Health and Safety Themes

**The Workplace:** the building must be safe and compliant with all relevant legislation. The Workplace Regulations 1992 apply to all work places and cover a range of health and safety issues including ventilation, heating and lighting, workstations, seating etc. A Risk Assessment will vary according to the nature of the workplace; Charity shops for example should examine issues such as handling unknown equipment or cash handling.

**Fire:** The HSE no longer has responsibility for Fire regulations. In Scotland, fire safety duties are contained in Part 3 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, as amended, and the Fire Safety (Scotland) Regulations 2006 you can find out more here <http://www.infoscotland.com/firelaw/v2.jsp?pContentID=239>

**First Aid:** The minimum provisions for every workplace are 1) a suitably stocked first aid box and 2) an appointed person to take charge of first aid NB: this does not have to be a fully qualified First Aider.

**Events:** when running an event, an assessment of risks should be carried out as part of the planning. An assessment might cover; cash, insurance, wiring and equipment, first aid etc.

**Working Off Site:** This is possibly a difficult one to foresee for volunteers working off site. Issues for offsite working could be; communication, access to first aid, personal safety and facilities such as toilet, lone working, drinking water and washing.

**Equipment:** There are many issues for working with equipment, risk assessment measures could include; training for safe operations and checking of equipment by a qualified person.



**Musculoskeletal Disorders:** This would include issues such as physical handling and disorders such as Repetitive Strain Injury.

**Work Related Violence:** Addressing issues if staff and volunteers are at risk from clients or members of the public. Think about both the preventative measures and support measures given if a staff or volunteer member of the team has experienced an assault (verbal or physical)

**Stress:** Is stress a likely occurrence for your staff and volunteers? Have volunteers and staff the right skills to undertake the tasks and are they recognised for their contribution?

### More help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this factsheet please contact the Volunteer Centre Edinburgh on the following details:

Tel: 0131 225 0630

Email: [admin@volunteeredinburgh.org.uk](mailto:admin@volunteeredinburgh.org.uk)

Or you can drop in and see us:

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