

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Volunteer Centre Greenwich—Members Factsheet

HEALTH AND SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES

In general volunteers are not referred to by health and safety legislation that applies to employees. However, Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, imposes a duty on every employer "to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that persons not in their employment, who may be affected by their undertaking, are not exposed to risks to their health or safety" and "to give to persons (not being their employees) who may be affected in a prescribed manner information as might affect their health or safety."

Your organisation has a duty of care to avoid carelessly causing injury to your volunteers. You may be found liable following an accident if a court decides your organisation failed to take reasonable care. This means you should make adequate risk assessments. Once hazards are identified your organisation should take appropriate steps to lower the risk. This could be through training, the provision of safety equipment or changes to work practices, for example.

Best Practice Tip

It is good practice to risk assess volunteer roles. Risk assessing can be an easy task where you simply look at what risks there are and what you can do to minimise them. This allows you to make more informed decision when selecting volunteers and designing roles.

The management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 place a duty on employers to carry out risk assessments, looking at potential risks to their employees and other (which includes volunteers). If your organisation has more than five employees, these assessments must be in writing however volunteer-only organisations do not have a statutory duty to carry out assessments.

Good practice would suggest that all organisations involving volunteers should take the point of view that all aspects of the role should be risk assessed. Carrying out risk assessments helps your organisation to demonstrate its duty of care towards volunteers.

As a guide use the following bullet points to help you risk assess your volunteer roles:

- Look for hazards
- Decide who might be harmed and how
- For each hazard, evaluate the chance, big or small, of harm actually being done and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
- Record the significant findings of the risk assessment and list the measures you are taking to deal with them
- Regularly review your assessment

More information can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/risk/practice.htm

Your organisation should already have a health and safety policy, check now to see if it includes reference to volunteers. If your policy doesn't include volunteers then suggest to your Management Committee that they include reference to volunteers and volunteering.

Breaching the Health and Safety Law is a criminal offence. The HSAW Act 1975 states that where someone has committed an offence under health and safety law which was due to the act of default of some other person, that other person can be charged with the offence.

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