

Our Chartist Heritage

Health and Safety Guidance

What is health and safety?

'Health and safety' is a term that is often associated with red tape and not being able to do the things you want to do! However, paying attention to health and safety in your activities shouldn't stop you from running them – in fact, it should make them more enjoyable and accessible for people.

Health and safety in a community group means all the ways that you and your group think about the welfare of volunteers, members, participants, and the general public. It is about working together as a group to make sure you have done everything you can to prevent avoidable accidents and protect people from getting hurt.

Health and safety and the law

The main piece of formal legislation that sets out health and safety requirements in law is the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. This governs legal health and safety requirements for any organisation that uses any paid workers or controls any premises. It contains specific requirements aimed at protecting people who are doing paid work. This includes, "as far as is reasonably practicable", providing:

- safe equipment
- safe substances
- necessary information, instruction, supervision and training
- a safe and healthy workplace
- a safe and healthy working environment.

If your group is responsible for a building or room, or has any part time or full-time paid workers, you will be subject to the requirements of the Act, and failing to meet them could be a criminal offence. The Health and Safety Executive also "strongly recommend" that organisations make sure their volunteers are protected in the same ways.

This sheet is aimed at groups who do not employ people or control premises. Groups who are legally subject to the Health and Safety at Work etc Act should make sure they fully understand their obligations. The [Health and Safety Executive](#) is a good place to start.

Groups who do not have paid workers or control premises still have a general legal responsibility to take care not to cause injury to people. In the eyes of the law, your group has a duty of care to group members and others who may be affected by your activities, which means you need to do what you can to protect people from harm. It is a good idea to keep a record of what you have done, in case you ever have to prove that you have taken care to avoid accidents.

Practical steps for small groups

1. What can you do to avoid accidents?

When you are planning activities, meetings or events, discuss within your group steps you can take to avoid people getting hurt. It is useful to consider:

The place the activity will take place.

Are there any hazards that you could remove or warn people about? For example:

- You have hired a room for a coffee morning. When you arrive, you find there are some boxes just inside the door. You might decide to move these out of the way so that people don't trip over them as they come in.
- Your group is organising a street party. There is a large pothole the street. You might decide to put up a little fence or rope around the pothole, and a sign warning people, to help ensure nobody trips and falls in it during the party

The people who will be taking part.

Do the participants have any particular needs that would make them more likely to hurt themselves? For example:

- You regularly run a jumble sale, but this month you know there is a party coming from a local retirement home. You might decide to provide extra chairs so that the larger number of elderly people will be able to sit down if they need to.
- You run a regular bingo evening in your community hall. Your group has decided to run a one-off children's bingo session, in the same venue. You might decide to have a look around to see if there is any "child-proofing" you could do to the hall, such as removing heavy or breakable items that children might pull over onto themselves.

The equipment that you will use.

Are there checks you could do to make sure that the equipment is in good working order? Do people need any particular skills or knowledge to enable them to use it safely?

For example:

- You use a hot water boiler every week at your coffee morning. You might decide to check the cable and plug each week before you use it, to make sure there are no bare wires or burnt patches.
- Your group maintains the gardens in your estate. You have bought an electric lawnmower for volunteers to use. You might decide to make sure that anyone who will be using it understands how it works, and the precautions they need to take to keep themselves and others safe when using it. You could get some of this information from the instruction manual that comes with the lawnmower.

The activity itself.

Is there anything about the activity you are running that could lead to someone becoming injured? Could you change the activity to reduce this risk, or give people information that will help them to keep themselves safer? For example:

- Your group runs weekly hill and mountain walks. You have planned a walk along a coastal path, which includes a section along a cliff edge. The walk is very beautiful, so you don't want to change the route. Instead, before you reach the cliff edge section, you warn the participants that it is coming up and that they should take care to keep away from the edge.
- Your group is planning an exercise class for your members. You know that quite a few of your members have medical conditions such as bad backs and arthritis. To make sure the activity is suitable, you find a teacher who is able to run gentle activities for people with limited movement.

Write down the decisions you make so that you can refer to them later. If, in exceptional circumstances, you need to provide evidence that you have taken care to avoid people becoming injured, having a written record of your decisions can help. You could either take note of your decisions in the minutes of the meeting in which you have the discussion, or as a separate risk assessment.

2. How can you help keep people well and comfortable?

Health and safety is not just about avoiding accidents. It is also about making sure people have what they need to stay well. Think about what you will need to provide to make sure that people who are affected by your activities are taken care of well. For example, if you are running an event that people will be at for several hours, it is important to make sure there are toilet facilities and drinking water available. Make sure your venue isn't too hot or cold, and that there is adequate space to comfortably accommodate the people who will be coming. If there are things people will need that you are not providing, it is useful to include this in your publicity. For example, if your activity goes over lunchtime and you are not catering, invite people to bring a packed lunch.

3. Do volunteers need any training?

In the day to day running of your group, you will probably find that you already have the information you need to judge whether something is unnecessarily dangerous. For example, you don't need any specialist knowledge to tell that a pile of boxes just inside a door could be a trip hazard! However, there may be some cases in which more information than just "common sense" is needed to run an activity as safely as possible.

There may be activities that your group would like to organise that require specialist knowledge and skills in order to keep it as safe as possible. If you do not have anyone in your group who has this specialist knowledge, you will need to either organise training for an existing member or find a new volunteer who is competent to run the activity.

For example, imagine you are a school PTA and would like to encourage more children to cycle to school. You decide to organise a group bike ride from a local estate to the school each day. Although you have several volunteers who are experienced cyclists, no-one has any expertise in running group rides for children. You decide to send two of your volunteers on a training course in leading bike rides. When they come back, they have good ideas about improving the safety of the activity that you would not previously have thought of.

4. What will you do if there is an accident?

It is useful to have an agreement about who is responsible for taking charge in an emergency situation. This could be one named individual all the time, or a different person could be appointed for different activities (e.g. you could decide that the Secretary will be responsible at a committee meeting, but the Events Officer will be responsible at larger events).

If you organise events or activities, it is also a good idea to have trained first aiders. It is sensible, if possible, to train more than one person, so that there is likely to always be one trained person available. You may decide that there are certain types of activity at which you will ensure that there is always a first aider present.

When an accident happens, it is important to keep a record that you can refer to later if you need to. You should keep an accident book, where you write down every accident, who was hurt, how they were hurt, and what you did to treat them (if anything).

5. Fire safety

If you regularly use the same venue, you could adopt a set of regular procedures for checking fire safety. These could include checking that fire exits and escape routes are clear, that smoke alarms are working, and that fire extinguishers are present. If you use different venues, you could agree a set of requirements you have, such as that all venues must have smoke alarms, clearly labelled fire exits and fire extinguishers. It is also very sensible, if possible, to ask people to put their name on a list as they enter a building, and cross it out when they leave. This way, if there is a fire at your event, you have a list of people who are at your event, and can check whether everybody has been evacuated safely.

6. Equipment

If you use electrical equipment, you might want to consider adopting a procedure for checking its safety, such as always checking the cables, plugs and connections for bare wires, frayed cables, burnt patches etc before use.

In general, it is important to think about whether you have any equipment that could be hazardous if not used correctly, and put processes in place for ensuring it is used by a competent person.

7. Dangerous Substances

If you use any dangerous substances, you should ensure that they are used appropriately and are stored safely. Employers have a legal responsibility to do this, but it is also an important part of your general duty of care. More information about Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (CoSHH) is available from the [Health and Safety Executive](#).

8. Responsibilities

You need to know who is responsible for making sure that your group meets its duty of care. In most cases, this will be your management committee, as they are legally responsible for the actions of your group.

However, you may wish to delegate day to day responsibility to a particular person or group of people. It is useful to know that somebody has the specific job of thinking

about health and safety, and ensuring the committee's decisions are put in place. For example, if you have decided to always check fire exits at your meetings, it is more efficient to decide that one or two people will do this at every meeting than everybody thinking about it. This also helps to ensure it doesn't get missed out and forgotten.

9. *Getting the balance right*

When you start thinking about health and safety, it is easy to become anxious about everything that could possibly go wrong. It is important to remember that people are used to taking risks in order to take part in interesting things. When someone comes along to a football training session, it is because they want to play football. It is fair to assume that they understand there is some risk inherently involved, and that they might end up with some bruises!

What you need to do is make sure you avoid *unnecessary* risk. So, when someone comes along to your football training, they could reasonably expect to get a minor injury in the course of playing the game. However, if you are using goal posts that are unstable, and they fall and injure someone, this is something that you could easily have avoided whilst still running a perfectly good football session.

The person who has come along to your activity could have reasonably expected not to hit by a falling goal post. It could be considered part of your duty of care to make sure the posts are stable before the activity begins.

Similarly, those of you who work for the organisation, albeit in a voluntary capacity, have a responsibility to each other to help make sure you can go about your voluntary duties without *undue* risk of injury.

Reviewed and approved 25 April 2023