

## YOUR GUIDE TO

# Health and Safety of Volunteers



# Introduction to Health and Safety of Volunteers

## Health and Safety of Volunteers

Whether your organisation is exclusively run by volunteers or has a mixture of both volunteers and paid staff, keeping the health and safety of your volunteers in mind will help to provide them with a safe environment in which they can carry out their activities effectively with minimum risk to themselves, the public or your organisation.

Although the legal obligations that organisations have to their volunteers with regards to health and safety are less clear than they are for paid employees, there are good practice guidelines and examples that can guide your policy making.

This Essential Guide will not cover all the legal aspects of Health and Safety in detail, but instead gives an overview of the subject in relation to good practice. For further information on the legal aspects of Health and Safety, please refer to the 'Want more information?' section of this Guide.

## Health and Safety and the Law

Volunteer-involving organisations have a legal obligation to consider the 'duty of care' that they have to their volunteers. Duty of care is a common law duty which applies to all individuals and organisations and has been developed by the courts, to avoid carelessly causing injury to persons. The notion of duty of care needs to be considered in all aspects of an organisation's work and activities, whether it is running a large hospital trust, loaning out equipment or organising a fundraising event, and is regardless of the size of the organisation, its income or whether the organisation involves paid staff.

To give an example of duty of care, imagine a young volunteer left unsupervised, in charge of a garden shredding machine. The volunteer does not wear the goggles supplied and sustains an eye injury. The organisation could be held liable if they failed to train or supervise the volunteer in the safe use of the shredding machine. The court may decide that leaving an inexperienced young person left unsupervised in charge of a machine is unreasonable.



Other Health and Safety legislation sets out specific duties for employers in order to limit the risks to anyone engaging with their organization. It gives employees the general duty to ensure the health and safety of both themselves and others who may be affected by what they do, including people who are not employed by the organization, such as volunteers and members of the public.

# What health and safety aspects do you need to consider for your volunteers?

Not all of the following points are legally binding, especially for groups that do not have paid employees, but if you have volunteers you should consider:

- 1** **A Health and Safety Policy:** This will show your commitment to health and safety and will help to clarify the organisation's health and safety procedures and responsibilities. Also, if you involve volunteers in writing the policy, it will help them to become more aware of health and safety issues within your organisation. The obligation to have a written policy will be dependent on the number of employees at an organisation, but even if you are not obliged to have a written policy it is still good practice to have one.
- 2** **Induction:** Your Health and Safety Policy and making sure that volunteers understand the health and safety issues surrounding their roles should form part of your volunteer induction process.
- 3** **Insurance:** Every organisation should make sure that it has adequate insurance in place for the work and activities that it carries out. It is best practice to insure your volunteers against any harm to themselves or their property whilst volunteering for your organisation, and to protect your volunteers against claims from third parties whilst carrying out duties on behalf of your organisation. For further information on the different types of insurance please refer to our Essential Guide to Insurance for volunteers.
- 4** **Risk Assessments:** These will enable an organisation to identify hazards, assess the risk and put control measures in place to reduce the level of risk for an activity to an acceptable level.
- 5** **The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH).** Substances can take many forms and include, chemicals, products containing chemicals, fumes and dust. Organisations that do not have employees are not bound by COSHH, but would be well advised to carry out an assessment as part of duty of care.
- 6** **Fire Assessment:** All public and community buildings are obliged by law to specify minimum levels of standards so that the risk of fire is reduced. Consult your local fire brigade for advice.
- 7** **Health, safety and welfare:** To provide a safe place for volunteers to carry out their activities. Points to consider are: having the room temperature at a comfortable level, having adequate lighting, having enough space to carry out the activities, keeping areas clean and free from obstacles.
- 8** **First Aid:** The need for a first aid assessment (the level of first aid required) depends on whether you have paid staff or not and also the type of activity that you are involved in, for example putting on a public fire work display. Although a first aid assessment might not be required for all circumstances, it is good practice to have one. For further information please refer to the Health and Safety Executive.

### And finally...

Health and Safety should be considered a priority by all groups and organisations that engage volunteers and you should seek appropriate advice on your legal obligations.

### Additional resources:

In addition to contacting us directly for advice, you can also find information on Health and Safety in the **Volunteering England Good Practice Bank** website at <http://bit.ly/1pWN2Tk> and at the **Health and Safety Executive** website at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk).