

Factsheet 17: Health and Safety

Health and safety rules and regulations must be part of how you operate. You have a "duty of care" to your volunteers, members of the public and staff - if you employ them. Health and safety is a complex issue and we cannot hope to cover it all here. This Factsheet aims to give you some of the basics. For more information or guidance, see the Further Help section at the end of this Factsheet.

It is good practice for all organisations to have a health and safety policy, although the law which requires it only applies to organisations with 5 or more employees. The basic components of a health and safety policy are covered below.

1: Risk assessment

All organisations should assess systematically any potential risks or hazards to staff, volunteers and members of the public. Doing a risk assessment shows that you have considered all possible hazards and implemented methods of avoiding accidents. A risk assessment might include:

- Looking for potential hazards
- Deciding who might be harmed and how
- Evaluating these risks and deciding whether your existing precautions are adequate
- Recording your findings
- Reviewing your assessment and revising it if necessary
- Carrying out any necessary work if you have found your existing precautions to be inadequate

2: Registering your premises

You must register the existence of your premises and activities if at least one of the following applies:

- you have paid staff
- you prepare, supply, store or sell food
- you are carrying out a dangerous process or putting on an event (e.g. a fireworks display)

Most voluntary organisations would need to register with the environmental health department within the City Council. Some organisations might need to register with the local Health and Safety Executive office, but your starting point is the local environmental health department.

3: First aid

Different organisations will need different first aid arrangements, according to their size and activities. As a minimum you must have someone who has basic first aid knowledge and is available to take charge in an emergency. This is known as an Appointed Person. Each organisation will need to carry out a risk assessment in order to determine the level of risk. On the basis of the level of risk and size of the organisation, you must decide how many first-aiders you need, and of what type. For more information on how to carry out an assessment, see the Further Help section below

4: First aid box

You must have a first aid box, although there are no rules to say what you must have in it. Some of the basics would include: bandages, triangular bandages, sterile wound dressings, sterile wipes, a leaflet on basic first aid. You must have a notice indicating where the first aid box is, who the first-aider or appointed person is and where they can be found.

5: Fire certificate

Every organisation is required to register with the Fire Service who will issue a fire certificate or exemption certificate, which you should keep in a safe place. The Fire Certificate outlines:

- details of the use of the premises
- fire fighting equipment that is required
- fire escape routes
- fire drills and other fire precautions

If your premises are only partly leased by your organisation, then the landlord is responsible for contacting the fire service. However, if you are concerned that you do not have a fire certificate, you can contact the Fire Service yourself.

Make sure you have clear guidelines for your staff, volunteers and visitors about procedures in the event of a fire. Everyone should know where the nearest fire exit is, how the alarm will be raised (not all premises have a fire alarm), where to assemble, how the roll call will be done and who will do it. If you hold an event, you should make these procedures clear before you start.

6: Insurance

Insurance is very important as it ensures your organisation is covered in the event of an accident, but it is complex and covered in more detail in *Factsheet 18: Insurance*.

7: Hazardous substances

There are regulations which require you to do an assessment of any substances, such as chemicals, that are used on your premises and which are "*hazardous to health*". Most voluntary organisations will not use many of these, beyond cleaning agents. In which case, you need to ensure those people who use them are aware of:

- how to store the substances
- how to deal with any spillages
- any potential hazards to skin, hair, eyes etc.

The Health and Safety Executive has further information on such assessments.

8: Food hygiene

If your organisation prepares and serves food on your premises, whether it is for sale or not, then food safety regulations apply. These require that people handling food must be properly trained and properly supervised. There are also specific requirements regarding clean work areas and equipment, suitable premises, suitable arrangements for food waste and so on.

9: Recording accidents and incidents

It is good practice to record any accidents that occur on your premises. By law, any workplace that has more than 10 employees must have an Accident Book. This can be used to record not only accidents, but also illness possibly caused by work and any "*near-miss*" accidents.

Serious injuries must be reported to the Health and Safety Executive or the Environmental Health Division, depending on who you are registered with. Serious injuries are defined as death or major injury (including assault); an injury that means the person is off work for three days or more; work related disease or dangerous occurrences.

10: General health and safety advice

In an office environment the following basic tips are useful (and should be picked up by your risk assessment!):

- don't leave wires from electrical equipment and computers trailing
- don't keep lots of your paper for recycling piled up where it could be a fire risk
- ensure that you have appropriate desks and chairs for your computer workstations
- ensure fire exits are clearly marked, kept unlocked and not obstructed in any way
- bend at the knees when lifting and use a trolley for moving heavy objects
- ensure your office is at an ambient temperature

11: Further Help

Health and safety law and enforcement:

Health and Safety Executive 08701 545500, www.hse.gov.uk

Publications

Hinde, A., Kavanagh, C., and Barlow, J. (ed.). *The health and safety handbook for voluntary and community organisations, Second edition*. Directory of Social Change, 2001.