

Health and Safety

In terms of legal requirements, there are two main considerations for organisations with volunteers.

Firstly, the 'duty of care' is a common law duty which applies to all individuals and organisations and has been developed by the courts.

Secondly, health and safety legislation such as Acts of Parliament and regulations set specific duties for employers in order to limit the risks to anyone coming into contact with their organisation.

Health and Safety Policy

A health and safety policy is the foundation on which to develop health and safety procedures and practices. The policy announces the organisation's commitment towards good health and safety standards. The policy can help to clarify procedures and areas of responsibility.

Organisations with paid staff and volunteers

Employers with fewer than five employees are not obliged to have a written policy, but are strongly advised to do so. If an organisation involves volunteers, they should always be included in the health and safety policy as a matter of good practice. The Health and Safety Executive has examples of model health and safety policies which can be used as a template for creating your own health and safety policy.

Volunteer-only organisations

If your organisation has no employees, you are not obliged to have a written health and safety policy, but are strongly recommended to draw one up. Developing a health and safety policy is a positive step and will help you clarify your procedures and responsibilities. If you also involve volunteers in the process, it will make them much more aware of health and safety issues within your organisation.

Health, Safety and Welfare

Organisations with paid staff and volunteers

All employers must provide a safe place to work which is clean and free from risks, to reduce the risk of ill health or injury. A safe system of working is required: for example, having proper procedures for handling dangerous substances and adequate guards for machinery. All employers should provide adequate supervision. Employees must be given training and information to give them sufficient skills and knowledge to carry out their work safely.

Volunteer-only organisations

These regulations do not apply to organisations with no employees. However, they do need to ensure that their volunteers can work in a safe environment where levels of risk have been reduced to a minimum.

First Aid

Organisations with paid staff and volunteers

All employers have a duty under law to make a first aid assessment. The need for first aid will depend on the organisation's activities. For instance, an outward bound centre will have very different needs from a morning coffee club. Again, an assessment of the workplace is the key to deciding what first aid to provide. There are, however, minimum standards for organisations with employees.

There **must** be **at least one first aid box** and a notice displayed in the workplace that tells staff:

- > The location of the first aid box
- > Who is the first aider or appointed person (see below)
- > Where the first aider or appointed person can be found.

An appointed person is someone who has basic first aid knowledge, and is available whenever people are at work. They can take charge in an emergency and are responsible for calling the emergency services. Details of one-day courses to train appointed persons are available from the Health and Safety Executive (see below for contact details).

Volunteer-only organisations

Voluntary groups with no employees are not bound to do a first aid assessment, although it is clearly good practice. However, in certain circumstances, such as a large public fireworks display, there may be a legal duty to provide first aid facilities. For example, if you hold a public exhibition without first aid facilities and someone is injured, you may have broken your duty of care. If you have any doubts whatsoever you should always contact the local Health and Safety Executive office for advice.

Risk assessments - A key element of managing health and safety is risk assessment, a technique for identifying and mitigating potential hazards involved with any activity. The HSE provides detailed guidance on risk assessment, including example risk assessments

Organisations are required to carry out risk assessments on all activities. This is a legal requirement under the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992.

In small organisations with straightforward operations the assessment can be carried out by a member of staff or committee member. In bigger and more complex organisations, with more hazardous activities, expert advice will be needed and there must be written records of any significant findings on risk assessments.

Although this is not a legal requirement, it is recognised as good practice for all organisations, regardless of their size, to keep records of the risks and what is being done to minimise them with a timescale for actions.

Your organisation can be held liable if you:

- Fail to assess and minimise risks.
- Fail to take sufficient care in selecting volunteers.
- Fail to provide appropriate training or supervision.

Useful links

- <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering>

The main organisation for health and safety related matters is the **Health and Safety Executive**. The HSE provides guidance for organisations and individuals on all aspects of health and safety. The HSE has a number of pages providing **specific advice for voluntary organisations and volunteers**. HSE (Health and Safety Executive) - <http://www.hse.gov.uk>

Useful publications and organisations

“The Health & Safety Handbook For Voluntary & Community Organisations”. Al Hinde and Charlie Kavanagh. Directory of Social Change in association with Health@Work 2nd edition. £16.95

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