

## Volunteers: essential information - 10

*This series of information sheets guides you through the complex, but essential, information you need to have at your fingertips when you are recruiting and training volunteers to support sailing programmes which include disabled people.*

### Health, safety and insurance

Your organisation has legal obligations towards your volunteers, and it is clearly good practice to treat volunteers, who commit time and energy without financial reward (other than expenses), with equal consideration to paid employees when it comes to health and safety.

This includes your duty of care - a general legal duty on **all** individuals and organisations, regardless status or size, to avoid carelessly causing injury to persons. If your organisation asks a volunteer to do a task which results in injury to him/herself or anyone else, the members of your governing body may be liable. A duty of care can arise in many ways which may not always be obvious, for example:

- loaning equipment to others
- charity walks and sponsored runs
- running fetes or fairs
- organising day trips
- selling food at a charity stall

### Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974

This sets out the general duties which employers, the self-employed and people in control of premises have towards their employees and others who may be affected by their work activities. It also gives employees the general duty to ensure the health and safety of themselves and others who may be affected by what they do, or pay to do.

Anyone controlling non-domestic premises must take reasonable steps to provide employees and volunteers with equipment and premises that are safe, including safe routes of exit.

*If your organisation has no employees, it may not be able to achieve the same standards of health and safety as required for employees in the short term. But by setting a timetable to aim to accomplish this, you will be demonstrating to your volunteers and the outside world the value you place on them and their efforts to support your organisation.*

*Such an organisation is also not obliged to have a health and safety policy, but is 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.*

## **Risk Assessment**

Risk assessment is a technique for identifying and controlling hazards of an organisation's activities. It is not just about chemicals and dangerous factories, and is relevant to you.

- A hazard is anything that has the potential to cause harm, such as a faulty electrical socket.
- Risk is the likelihood of it causing harm and the degree of harm it could cause, such as an electrical shock which could lead to a fatality.

Risk assessment involves identifying all hazards, assessing the risks, and putting in place measures to control unacceptable risks, including the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) and fire assessments to specify minimum safety standards.

If your organisation controls, or is responsible for premises and buildings, you must register with the local Fire Authority. Consult your local fire brigade for fire safety advice. Voluntary groups with no employees are not bound to do risk or COSHH assessments, but if you take your duty of care seriously, you would be well advised to carry them out.

## **Health, Safety and Welfare regulations and First Aid assessments**

These do not apply to organisations with no employees. However, you do need to ensure that your volunteers can work in a risk-free and safe environment. If you have any doubts whatsoever you should always contact the local Health and Safety Executive office for advice.

Similarly, organisations with volunteers only do not normally have to register their activities with the enforcement authorities unless involved in dangerous activities, such as putting on a fireworks display. However, if food is prepared, stored, supplied or sold in the premises on five or more days in any five-week period, you must register with the local Environmental Health Department.

## **General care**

Everyone should wear appropriate clothing, footwear and buoyancy aids when taking part in activities at your club. People must also use protective clothing, such as rubber gloves, for attending to the personal care needs of disabled participants.

Many children and adults with profound and multiple disabilities also have respiratory difficulties. From 1<sup>st</sup> July it will be illegal to smoke in any public building, but it is not acceptable for people to smoke in the same areas used by disabled participants, even outside.

## **Moving and handling**

Where volunteers are supporting people with impairments that affect their mobility, they will probably be required to help with moving or changing a person's position. In order to avoid any risk to anyone, it is vital that this is done properly and only after expert training. The moving and handling of 'manual loads' and people above a certain weight are governed by specific EEC legislation.

If your volunteers already work in school or other establishments with disabled people, they may already have undergone training in moving and handling. However, not all will have received this training. It is therefore essential that you check with your volunteers about their level of proficiency. You have a responsibility to ensure that full training is given

whenever there is any risk. The training must take place at the beginning of a volunteer's involvement, and should be refreshed regularly.

Moving and handling training may only be delivered by a qualified trainer, because severe injury may result from bad practice. To allow one volunteer to demonstrate to another is unacceptable, and could result in litigation.

For more detailed information on health and safety issues, go to:

[www.volunteering.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/7DD63E17-7B28-4624-B28A-339CDBCDE108/0/HealthandsafetyVE06.doc](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/7DD63E17-7B28-4624-B28A-339CDBCDE108/0/HealthandsafetyVE06.doc)

### **Insurance**

All organisations that use volunteers should ensure they have an insurance policy which covers them. Volunteers can be covered under Employer's Liability Insurance or Public Liability Insurance.

*Policies should explicitly mention volunteers because they may not automatically be covered. Insurance companies should also be aware of the types of work that volunteers are doing, because if the tasks are high-risk then the insurance policies may have to be changed to accommodate these risks.*

For further information on insurance issues, go to:

[www.volunteering.org.uk/managingvolunteers/goodpracticebank/Information/insurancepolicies.htm](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/managingvolunteers/goodpracticebank/Information/insurancepolicies.htm)

***With acknowledgements to Volunteering England for content and references***