

Countryside Management Partnerships Community Toolkits Health and Safety Advice

The following are guidelines to help you organise a practical community conservation task with a group of volunteers. These should be read in conjunction with viewing the DVD to ensure the group works safely and enjoys the event.

1. Task prep & site condition.

Firstly, ensure landowner consent is given for the task you want to carry out.

Do a site visit as near as possible to the task date to assess the prevailing conditions as this information will be taken into account when compiling the risk assessment.

Fundamental considerations are:

Is the site suitable and large enough for the number of volunteers, e.g. coppicing trees in confined spaces where there is not enough room to allow 2 tree lengths between cutters could be dangerous?

Is the site too dangerous for a community event, e.g. next to a busy road?

Does the site have a Public Right of Way or other paths running through it, possibly exposing the public to danger from the proposed activities? If so, has provision been made to warn or divert the public? Have the KCC Public Rights of Way team been notified?

Is there livestock or other animals nearby which may be at risk from your activity or present a risk to your volunteer group?

Consider access and parking.

(i) Some volunteers may not be comfortable climbing over stiles or gates if required to gain access to the work site.

(ii) If parking is restricted to the road will there be sufficient room for motorists, cyclists, horse riders and pedestrians to safely negotiate the expected number of parked cars? Is there enough room to allow emergency service vehicles to pass through?

Facilities: Some work sites are remote and lack toilets and fresh water. Volunteers attending the task should be made aware of this as it may be an important consideration for some. If fresh water is needed for washing hands prior to eating, this will need to be transported to site.

Services: If there is a possibility that underground water pipes or electricity cables are present on the work site and could be punctured by stakes or bars driven into the ground, check with the landowner or obtain maps from relevant utility companies.

2. Risk assessments & site assessment:

A Risk Assessment is the process of identifying all the risks of an activity and assessing the potential impact of each risk by considering both the likelihood that it will occur and the consequences if it should occur. **A risk assessment must be completed before any work is carried out.**

From the information gained at the initial site visit and knowledge of the task to be undertaken on the day, create a risk assessment document from the template provided.

It is important to re-evaluate your risk assessment on the task day if conditions at the site have changed from your initial site visits, e.g., the weather may have changed and conditions may be icy underfoot or extremely wet and slippery. It may be unusually hot and sunny in which case volunteers will need to have appropriate clothing, drinks, hats and sunscreen.

Some of the physical conditions at the site may have changed. This could include dangerous or fallen trees after high winds or a new fence has been installed.

Do not allow volunteers to work at height!

The Loanable Tool Kit includes template and example risk assessments for you to complete and refer to for advice. This information should be made aware to all attending by the group leader so that everyone understands the risks associated with the activity.

Group leaders should be aware of any medical conditions which may limit the activities of some of the volunteers and know the grid reference and nearest hospital accident and emergency contact details. The first aid kit should always be taken out on site and it should be asked if anyone participating is first aid trained.

3 Before you start working

Appoint a group leader on the day. The leader will then need to explain what the objective of the task is and why it is being done and then run through the risk assessment, outlining the rules for safe working practice e.g. no drinking alcohol, taking drugs or other dangerous behaviour.

Give a "tools talk" on the safe use of the tools to be used on the day.

Take a head count and ask people who want to leave early to let the leader know.

In some areas e.g. close to public rights of way, it may be advisable to tape off the working area and put up signs.

If having a bonfire, select a suitable site where access is clear around it and be aware of whether the smoke is likely to affect the working area or nearby houses. Keep fuel and gas away from the fire site.

Distribute any necessary PPE, e.g. hard hats when coppicing or driving in posts and goggles where dust or splinters are likely to be produced.

Ask people to work in pairs and avoid lone working.

4 Safe tools transport

Tools must be transported to and from the site safely and should be separated from volunteers whilst in transit. Many tools have sharp edges and are heavy which could cause serious injury if left loose in a vehicle which has to brake suddenly. Keep tools away from windows and don't leave them on bonnets or roofs.

Take care when carrying tools to the work area - keeping sharp edges away from the body. Pack the tools carefully and sensibly to avoid damaging them and don't overload vehicles with volunteers and tools.

5 Tools Use

Make sure tools are used for the purpose they have been designed for.

eg: don't cut anything larger than a thumb's width with a pair of loppers as this can break them or strain the operator.

Don't use slashers as axes to chop branches down with.

Wear gloves apart from when using slashers and club hammer etc, where there is a danger of tools slipping out of people's hands.

6 Tools at rest.

Ensure tools are left safely when not in use and preferably at one location – it is easy to lose tools in long grass and brambles etc.. Rakes and forks should be left with the points facing downwards. Bow saws should not be left hooked over branches.

7 Manual Handling

Take care when handling heavy or awkward objects and lift by extending the legs whilst keeping the back straight. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance or try to lift more than you are capable of. It is advisable to wear steel toe-cap boots if possible

8 Leaving site safe and tidy:

Do a sweep of the site before leaving to ensure all the tools are collected and count them back in. Note any that are damaged or need maintenance before the next task and report them when returning the tools to your CMP.

If having a bonfire, ensure it is left in a safe condition or extinguished before leaving the site. Don't give the opportunity for the fire to spread whilst unattended.

Leave the site in safe condition by completing tasks e.g. don't leave holes dug for fencing but not filled in or trees half cut and not felled or hung up amongst others. Leave fences and gates in good condition and not having sharp edges from wire etc exposed.

Leave the site clean of litter and ensure any paths, rights of way, tracks and watercourses are not blocked.

Lastly, make sure you have accounted for everyone who has attended the site on the day.