

MCofS Mountaineering Activities: EVENTS PROTOCOL

APPENDIX 3 Risk Assessment



**The Mountaineering Council
of Scotland**

**Advice on
RISK
ASSESSMENT**

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Risk Assessment

The Health and Safety Commission recognises that adventure and outdoor activities offer educational and recreational opportunities as well as personal and social development to participants, regardless of their background. These activities can help foster a spirit of adventure in which the participants can learn to work with others and cope with an element of the unknown and so develop the ability to deal with changing circumstances and the management of risk. The commission's Advisory Committee adds that the public are willing to accept a certain level of risk in order to secure these benefits, so long as they can be confident that the risk is worth taking and that it is being properly controlled. This does not extend to the elimination of all risk or the establishment of standards that are so high as to reduce the potential benefits. The balance between challenge and safety is therefore an important consideration. Steps should be taken to ensure risks are managed and controlled so far as is reasonably practicable while also allowing the potential benefits to be achieved¹.

The Advisory Committee adds, the process needs to include:

- Ensuring that the activity is managed by people whose competence and experience are appropriate to the task and the hazards it presents and whose judgment can be relied upon;
- Ensuring that participants, especially young people, are properly prepared to undertake the activity and that the activity is appropriate to their levels of physical and mental maturity;
- Ensuring that management systems are in place to set the boundaries of acceptability of the risk and control mechanisms through **risk assessments**;
- Ensuring that the equipment to be used is fit for purpose in terms of its initial specification and subsequent maintenance;
- Ensuring that authoritative, relevant good practice is followed;
- Ensuring that statutory obligations are met.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment is looking at what could go wrong – both before and during an activity – and then deciding on ways to prevent or minimise these potential problems. Two important terms that are frequently used during risk assessments are “hazard” and “risk”. These are defined below.

Hazard: anything with a potential to cause harm

Risk: the possibility that someone will be harmed by a particular hazard

The most important part of a risk assessment is to decide whether a hazard is significant. This determines what measures need to be taken to minimise the risk to an acceptable level.

Without realising it, we all carry out informal, dynamic and ongoing risk assessments everyday from the time we get up until we go to bed.

For example, when we cross the road one hazard is obviously being hit by a car. We first stop, look, consider the speed and volume of the traffic and also bear in mind other factors such as the weather conditions, visibility, and so on. Based on our early training and experience we either decide to cross the road on this particular occasion or decide the risks are too great and move to another location. So risk assessment is something we all do everyday even though in daily life we don't call it that. Moreover, if we didn't do it, or were very poor at doing it, we would be continually having accidents and probably wouldn't live very long.

Types of Risk Assessment

The risk assessments we all continually do everyday are informal, ongoing and of necessity left unrecorded. A good mountaineer will probably make thousands of such assessments during a day in the hills as conditions and situations change, feed them into the decision making process, and, if necessary, adjust plans accordingly. This is part of having good judgement. These sorts of risks assessments are sometimes referred to as **dynamic risk assessments**.

Dynamic risk assessments are made on the hoof and sometimes under great pressure. Pressure on the decision making process can be reduced by making risk assessments before getting into potentially difficult situations. This gives us the advantage of being able to take time and think clearly about foreseeable hazards and risks, consult others, ask for expert advice, etc, and then take steps to reduce risks to reasonable levels. This sort of formal risk assessment is an important part of forward planning and the results are usually recorded in some way so that (1) they can be shared with participants and others involved; and (2) serve as evidence that organisers have exercised care and given these important matters due weight and consideration.

Two sorts of formal risk assessments are often identified. These are **generic risk assessments** and **specific risk assessments**

A generic risk assessment is one in which hazards identified are likely to be common to that activity wherever and whenever it takes place. Consequently, a generic risk assessment can be used on a number of occasions. This obviously simplifies planning when organising an event. A specific risk assessment, on the other hand, is carried out for hazards that are specific, or unusual, to a particular place, time, or event and so not covered on any generic risk assessments being used. Therefore, when undertaking risk assessments for an event, organisers might use generic risk assessments when considering the risks associated with large parts of the event but may need to undertake a specific risk assessment for a hazard that is unique. One such hazard that would require a specific risk assessment to be carried out, for instance, is a mineshaft that is known to be at a particular crag a group is considering visiting.

Five Steps To Risk Assessment

Risk assessment should cover those risks that are reasonably foreseeable. This includes assessing and planning for contingencies arising from foreseeable changes such as weather conditions.

It is usual to follow the *Five Steps to Risk Assessment* as recommended by the Health and Safety Executive. The five steps are:

1. Look for the hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions or procedures are adequate or whether more should be done
4. Record your findings
5. Review your assessments and revise if necessary

Checking hazards is common sense, but necessary. Once hazards have been identified check that reasonable precautions have been taken to avoid people being injured. If you do not feel confident to do the assessments yourself you could ask someone more experienced to help. For more detailed guidance you might like to check out [Adventure Activities Centres: Five steps to Risk Assessment](#)². Irrespective of who carries out the risk assessments the Event Co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring they are adequately done.

Step 1: Look for the hazards

Look afresh at any activities and consider what could reasonably be expected to cause harm. Concentrate on significant hazards (those which could result in serious harm or affect several people). Ask others to help. What do they think are significant hazards? Incident and accident records can also help.

It may be easier to tackle each activity separately and look at each hazard that may be encountered. To help identify hazards it can also help to think about what might happen if someone slips, falls, becomes ill, follows the wrong route, goes missing, makes a mistake, something goes wrong, there is poor or miscommunication, there is equipment failure, or something falls from above. Try to identify where, when and how these could happen. Consider:

- Hand over periods
- Transport
- Walking and scrambling
- Climbing
- Getting off routes, crags, hills and mountains
- Down time or periods of waiting
- Residential stays

Step 2: Decide who might be harmed, and how

These include young people, volunteers, staff, instructors, and any other people who will be in the vicinity and may be affected by the activities.

Step 3: Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done

Consider the likelihood of each hazard causing harm. This will determine whether or not more needs to be done to reduce the risk. Even after precautions have been taken risks usually remains. What you have to decide for each significant hazard is whether the remaining risk is high, medium or low.

There is no adventure without risk. However, everything reasonably practicable must be done to keep the activities or venue safe. Consider whether this has been done or not. The aim is to minimise risks by adding precautions as necessary.

If something needs to be done draw up an “action list” and prioritise any remaining risks that are high and/or those that could affect most people. In taking action ask:

- Can the hazard be eliminated completely?
- If not, can the risks be controlled so that harm is unlikely?

Competent personnel and adherence to best practice play a vital part in ensuring safety. Nevertheless, however competent volunteers and personnel are they will need guidance on the limits within which they can exercise discretion. They will also need guidance on site/venue specific risks. Part of the risk assessment should also give consideration to young person/adult ratios and set out how these might be varied according to circumstances. As part of the precautions it needs to be clear how volunteers can obtain guidance on such issues if the need arises.

When seeking to minimise risks apply the following principles in the order listed below:

- Try a less risky option (i.e. change the site/venue, the task, or level of challenge)
- Use competent and experienced personnel with a proven track record and adherence to good practice
- Increase the level of training and instruction for participants to counter the levels of risks likely to be encountered
- Prevent access to the hazard (e.g. by fencing it off, placing it “out of bounds” etc.)
- Organise the activities or session to reduce exposure to the hazard
- Provide facilities and/equipment (e.g. washing and drying facilities, first aid, warm and dry clothing); and
- Ensure there are appropriate first aid provisions and if possible competent first aiders

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Step 4: Recording your findings

For small events and meets it is not always necessary to write everything down. However it is advisable to keep a written record of what you have done in terms of risk assessments. You must, however, tell those working on the activity/meet/venue what the findings of the risk assessment are. You need to be able to show that

- A proper check was made
- People who might be affected were asked
- Precautions are reasonable, and the remaining risks are low

The risk assessment should also record and reflect the need to consider the level of competence of those with specific responsibilities.

Keep the written record for future reference or if there is a need in a legal case and ensure it is available to all volunteers and staff.

Step 5: Review assessments and revise if necessary

Sooner or later you will use new venues, engage in new activities, or bring in new equipment. If there is any significant change, review and revise the assessment to take account of the new hazard.

It is also good practice to review assessments from time to time to make sure that precautions are still working effectively. If the change is significant then all relevant people must be informed. Any reviews and changes should be dated. Amendments can also be recorded chronologically on a front page for quick reference.

Quantifying Risks

When working out whether a risk needs addressing it is useful to use a fairly simple numerical system like the one detailed below. This involves multiplying the severity of an outcome by the likelihood of an incident happening to arrive at a risk factor (severity x likelihood = risk factor). The resulting risk factor can then be used to arrive at a risk assessment.

Severity of Outcome		Likelihood	
Rating		Rating	
5	Death/Permanent disability	5	Will almost certainly happen
4	Serious injury/long term sickness/Hospitalisation	4	Likely to happen
3	Temporary disability/Medical attention required	3	Could happen from time to time
2	Minor injury requiring first aid	2	Unlikely to happen
1	Slight inconvenience/Bruise	1	Highly unlikely to ever happen

Severity x Likelihood = Risk Factor

Using this chart a risk factor for any activity can be arrived at. For instance, when considering the risks involved in a child walking to a crag with a good path you might decide that the severity of a slip would probably result in a bruise causing slight inconvenience (that gives a numerical severity of 1). You might decide, moreover, that such a slip is unlikely to happen given that the path is a good one (that gives a numerical likelihood of 2). If these two figures are now multiplied together a risk factor for the activity is arrived at. So, $1 \times 2 = 2$. Therefore the risk factor of walking to this crag along a good path is 2. Obviously the initial decisions involved here are dependant on one's knowledge of the path and crag but, additionally, in one's judgement.

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Having arrived at a numerical risk factor that now needs translating into a risk assessment that can be used in planning. The following chart does this.

Risk Factor	Risk Assessment
16-25	Unacceptable. Requires definite action to control and reduce risk
10-15	High risk. Requires action to control and reduce risk
6-9	Medium risk. Consider practical ways to reasonably control or manage risk
3-5	Low risk. Consider whether action is required
1-2	Low risk. No action required

There follows some sample risk assessments and a blank risk assessment form that can be photocopied and used to undertake your own risk assessments.

Notes

1. Adventure Activities Industry Advisory Committee (AAIAC) Statement on Risk Perception in Adventure and Outdoor Activities (Health and Safety Commission available to download at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/spd/pdf/riskperc.pdf>)
2. Copies can be purchased from: HSE books, PO box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 2WA. Telephone 01787 881165, Fax 01787 313995. Further guidance is available from this free HSE download <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf>



EXAMPLE

Assessment Review Due
 Review assessments on or
 before the following date:
Date 00.00.0000

MCofS Risk Assessment Form

Risk Assessment For (Meet/Event/Venue/Activity) **Drop-off and collection of young people by parents (Hand over Periods)**

Name of Assessor Kevin Howett Assessor's Signature _____ Date _____

Activity	Hazard(s)	Who	Risk Factor	Existing Precautions	Additional Precautions
Drop-off and collection	Being involved in a road traffic accident	Young people	12	Arrange for drop-off and collection points to be away from busy traffic	Warn young people of dangers and advise them to be sensible. Responsible adults to supervise.
	Attack or molestation	Young people	8	MCofS Child Protection Policy and Guidelines	Ensure at least 2 responsible adults with young people after they've been dropped or awaiting collection
	Weather: rain, cold, sun, wind, fog	Young people and adults	6	Participants advised to bring appropriate clothing for weather conditions.	If raining/windy arrange to meet where there is adequate shelter
	Young people wandering off and going missing	Young people	8	Code of Conduct, MCofS Emergency Procedures, responsible adults	Advise adults to inform young people not to wander off
	Parents not turning up on time or at correct place	Adult supervisors	3	Local briefings and event literature giving clear details	Provide parents with mobile phone number of adult supervisors to ring in event of lateness etc

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EXAMPLE

Assessment Review Due
 Review assessments on or
 before the following date:
Date 00.00.0000

MCoS Risk Assessment Form

Risk Assessment For (Meet/Event/Venue/Activity): **Transport arrangements**

Name of Assessor **Kevin Howett** Assessor's Signature _____ Date: _____

Activity	Hazard	Who	Risk Factor	Existing Precautions	Additional Precautions
Using Club members' private cars to transport young people	Road traffic accident	All occupants	15	Driver has full, current driving license, vehicle is properly insured and vehicle is roadworthy (has MOT certificate if applicable). Follow Highway Code.	All occupants must wear seat belts. Drivers to check insurance. Does it cover them to carry young people/club members? Accident procedure in place. Means of communication, e.g. mobile phone.
	Driver falling asleep on long journeys	All occupants	10	Additional drivers to ensure change-overs.	Plan adequate rest stops in long journeys
	Child Protection issues	All occupants	8	Follow MCoS Child Protection Policy and Guidelines	Young people not to travel alone in car with adult who is not their parent. Arrange for central drop-off and collection points rather than individual home drop-offs.
	Silly behaviour in vehicle	All occupants	4	Codes of Conduct	Remind young people of Code of Conduct responsibilities.

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Date 00.00.0000

Risk Assessment For (Meet/Event/Venue/Activity) _____

Name of Assessor _____ Assessor's Signature _____ Date _____

Activity	Hazard	Who	Risk Factor	Existing Precautions	Additional Precautions

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Risk Assessment For (Meet/Event/Venue/Activity) _____

Name of Assessor _____ Assessor's Signature _____ Date _____

Activity	Hazard	Who	Risk Factor	Existing Precautions	Additional Precautions

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