

Health and Safety

Most health and safety legislation refers to paid employees. However the law also imposes further responsibilities on organisations with regard to people not in their employment, such as volunteers, who may be affected by their activities. It states that all organisations have a duty of care to ensure that no one is exposed to risks to their health and safety as far as is reasonably practicable.

Duty of care

The duty of care is a general legal duty which applies to all organisations, regardless of their size, or whether or not they employ paid staff, to avoid harming or damaging the health of people through their involvement in the activities of that organisation.

Essentially, if a volunteer is asked to carry out a task which results in them injuring themselves or anybody else, your organisation may be liable if it is deemed that it failed to take reasonable care.

No matter what activities your organisation is involved in, be it running a major hospital trust or a lunch club, you will have to consider the duty of care owed to your volunteers. Risk assessments (see below) can help you to identify what level of supervision or training is required for volunteers and should be used in conjunction with your Health and Safety Policy.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment is a way of identifying all hazards of an organisation's activities, assessing the risk and putting in place measures to control any risks which are unacceptable.

The employees and volunteers who are actually carrying out these activities on a day to day basis should be involved in any risk assessment exercise as they will generally have the detailed knowledge required. The Health and Safety Executive recommends a 5 step approach to risk assessment

- Look for the hazards
- Decide who might be harmed
- For each hazard, evaluate the chance, big or

small, of harm actually being done and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done

- Record the significant findings of the risk assessment e.g the main risks and the measures taken to deal with them.
- Review your assessment from time to time and revise if necessary.

Once complete, a risk assessment helps organisations to decide whether they have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm.

Health and safety policy

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 an employer has a duty to produce a written health and safety policy. Organisations with fewer than 5 employees are exempt but are strongly advised to do so. If your organisation involves volunteers, they should always be included in the health and safety policy as a matter of good practice.

A template policy is available from the Health and Safety Executive but individual organisations should use this as a basis for drawing up a policy that is specific to their own circumstances. There are no specific legal requirements as to the contents of a Health and Safety Policy, but in principle it should include the following:

- The responsibilities of management and supervisors
- The duties of employees and volunteers
- Roles and responsibilities of staff with delegated safety duties (e.g. first aid)
- The identification of the main hazards likely to be encountered by employees or volunteers (this can be done via a risk assessment)
- Fire arrangements

Volunteers should be made aware of your organisation's health and safety policy, practices and procedures as part of their induction. It is equally important to make the roles and responsibilities of volunteers clear from the start. Where volunteers undertake tasks covered by health and safety legislation (e.g. food hygiene, manual handling of clients, first aid, use of

practical tools, etc), the potential hazards and safety implications must be identified and the appropriate training provided.

Home visiting

If any of your volunteers are involved in carrying out home visits to clients, you have a duty of care to ensure that both volunteers and clients are adequately protected. You should have clear procedures for volunteers involved in this type of work and it is a good idea to have a separate policy on home visiting and outreach work. The type of safeguards you should consider to protect volunteers and clients may include the following:

- Volunteers involved in visiting clients in their own homes should be subject to a police check.
- Volunteers should carry some form of I.D issued by your organisation
- Volunteers should have use of a mobile phone.
- A system of recording dates/times of home visits should be put into place, in addition to normal case-records.
- A staff member should always be advised when a home visit is taking place and the time the volunteer is expected to return.

Child protection

If your organisation works with children, you should make sure that you carry out regular risk assessments and take steps to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place to prevent things going wrong. Ideally you should have a child protection policy and a procedure for what to do if there are concerns about a child's welfare. You should also have appropriate recruitment and selection procedures for volunteers who will be working with children and ideally you should offer training and regular opportunities for all those in contact with children to learn about child protection. The NSPCC has produced a free step-by-step guide, Stopcheck, to help organisations safeguard children. Call their helpline on 0808 800 5000 to order a copy.

Further information

For further information about all aspects of health and safety you can call the Health and Safety Executive Information Line on 08701 545 500 or visit the website at www.hse.gov.uk. It also produces lots of useful publications, many of which are free of charge