

Safety in Scouting: Safety Checks

(Risk Assessment – General)



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0845 300 1818

This is a new factsheet introduced in March 2002. It provides guidance for leaders on the nature of, and the necessity for, routine risk assessment and safety checks. The publication of future editions will be notified in Scouting magazine, Talking Points and on ScoutBase.

Introduction

Young people need challenge and adventure in their lives if they are to grow and develop fully as adults. This means that they – and those who lead them – must face the reality of risk. At the same time, adults have a responsibility to minimise the chance of accidents, especially where there is a possibility of young people being badly hurt. Everything we do in our everyday lives involves some element of risk. The challenge is to manage those risks in a way which gives us the protection we need without constraining what we do beyond a justified level. It is rarely possible to eliminate all the risks. We have to get the balance right and be sure that every effort has been made to eliminate or reduce the risk of causing harm to individuals or damage to property: that is the purpose and value of risk assessment.

The Association routinely monitors accident reports involving members of the movement during Scouting activities. The Insurance Department receives over 4,000 accident reports a year. In percentage terms . . .

...about 30% of the accidents occur in, or near, Group headquarters; and well over 30% occur at (green fields) camps.

Most of the accidents involve collisions (during games etc), falls, burns and scalds. There are roughly twice as many accidents in ordinary surroundings ('the Scout hut', camp) than in all other situations put together. It might be expected that supervision would be easy and straightforward in these situations, but it seems that complacency sets in as a result of familiarity with the surroundings. There is no place in Scouting for such a complacent – or even careless – approach. While very few accidents are life threatening, every accident involves some degree of incapacity, even if only temporary, and the possibility of permanent scarring or injury. So regular and routine risk assessment safety checks are a must.

What is Risk Assessment?

Risk assessment can perhaps best be described as disciplined common sense applied to every day life. Whether descending a twisting staircase, crossing the road, or frying an egg, we all "do" risk assessment or, safety checks in one way or another every day. However, a structured approach makes the task easier and helps us to spot all the potential risks. There are just five steps to a proper risk assessment . . .

One - Look for the hazards (how can people be hurt or damage caused): stand back from the situation, and assess it. Identify all the hazards, and list them, concentrating on the significant ones e.g. a slippery floor, a heater, or very hot water.

Two – Decide who might be harmed, and how:

think particularly about regular users who might have become accustomed to the presence of the hazard; about visitors who might not know that the hazard is present; and about young people, especially those with special needs, who simply might not appreciate the hazard.

Three – Evaluate the risks: that is, consider the likelihood of the hazards causing harm to someone. If the heater is already guarded by a securely fixed grill, the risk is clearly low, and no additional precautions may be necessary. If the floor is always slippery, perhaps it needs 'roughing up' as a precaution – and certainly it is no place for physically active games! Your responsibility is to do whatever is reasonably practicable to make the situation safe and your aim is to minimise all the risks by maintaining or adding to the precautions as necessary.

Four – Record your findings: you will always need to tell those involved in the situation what action they should take – and what actions they must not take! Where the situation is one in which Scouting regularly takes place ('the Scout hut', a District camp-site), your record should be a permanent one, such as an instruction sheet or card for users, who should be required to read it before leading a Scouting activity in the particular situation. Regular users should be required to re-read it from time to time.

Five – Review and revise: you cannot assume that the hazards, and the risks, will stay the same for all time. So you must review your risk assessment from time to time, and revise it where necessary. This will almost certainly mean a revised record e.g. a new instruction sheet. It is good practice to fix a maximum time between reviews (e.g. not less than once every year for a Scout meeting place), even if you do not think that a review is actually needed. Of course, it may be necessary to review your assessment in the light of changes to the situation much more frequently than you had originally thought. An out-of-date assessment is a hazard in its own right, because it

may misleadingly encourage people to think that all the necessary precautions are in place.

Risk Assessment in Practice

In certain situations, some more or less standard approaches to the details of a risk assessment are available. For example, there are other factsheets available dealing in some detail with risk assessments for Scout premises, and for Activities. But you can never avoid your responsibility for carrying out your own assessment of the risks involved in any Scout programme or situation. The general approach summarised above will always work, but there are one or two practical tips that will usually help . . .

1: Involve other people. Ask them to help you to spot the hazards, to evaluate the risks, and to judge the suitability of the precautions. Two (or three) heads are almost always better than one!

2: Check what others have already done in similar situations. There is no need to re-invent the wheel!

3: Keep it simple! There is no need to let it get complicated. Most hazards are quite clear; the risks are obvious; and the precautions required straightforward.

4: Work systematically. It may be helpful to break down an activity into parts such as – transport, setting up, activity, taking down, returning and re-storing. If there is a hazard, can it be eliminated? If not, how are the risks best minimised? (These are sometimes referred to as 'the control measures For example: -

- Can you use a less risky approach to the whole situation?
- Can you re-organise the Scouting activity/activities to minimise the risks to participants?
- Can you use a physical guard of some sort?
- Should you use more, or different, leaders?

- Should you provide extra training, or supervised practice?
- Should you insist on particular equipment, or safety gear, being used?
- Is the overall supervision of the situation adequate?
- Are appropriate 'welfare' provisions (washing & drying facilities, first aid kit) available?

Standard Scout Association precautions

Some standard precautions that apply to various Scouting situations are specified by the Association in *Policy, Organisation and Rules*. For example, the minimum ratio of leaders to young people for all Beaver Scout activities is laid down in *POR*. Similarly, the requirement to appoint a Home Contact on certain occasions is set out very clearly, and is dealt with in another factsheet. These are just examples. You should be familiar with all these requirements, and know where to check on the details of them.

It may be worth noting that a good Risk Assessment may show that further precautions are necessary. For instance crossing a very busy road with Beaver Scouts may need a 1:2 ratio (a Beaver Scout on each adult hand).

POR also specifies [see Rule 7.4a] when the Headquarters of the Association must be notified of accidents -

Rule 7.4 Accident reporting

- a. Headquarters must be informed immediately. If any person, whether a Member of the Movement or not:
 - suffers personal injury (where injury necessitates treatment by a doctor, dentist or at a hospital);
 - requires rescuing (where rescue involves any Emergency Service, i.e. Police, Fire, Ambulance, Mountain Rescue or Coastguard);

- Dies in the course of, or arising out of, a Scout activity or while on, or in conjunction with, any Scout property.

Conclusion

Leaders cannot be everywhere and are prone to the failings and frailties of every human being. Attention can lapse or a special situation may arise that has to be dealt with there and then. We don't need to become paranoid about accidents in Scouting and no one is aiming to put a dampener on everything that involves excitement with an element of risk, but the fact that we do have accidents in Scouting is why we have to put a large slice of the membership subscription into insurance premiums.

Moreover, the publicity attracted by such accidents does little to enhance the image of the leaders in the movement or, indeed, the movement itself. Safety in Scouting is of paramount concern to all in the movement. We are entrusted with one of the most precious commodities possible - someone else's child. Accident prevention is in everyone's interest and must be everyone's business.

Further advice and support is available from your County Safety Co-ordinator or Headquarters.

Publications Cross Reference

POR February 2002

Five steps to risk assessment – by HSE, series No. INDG163, available free – Tel: 01787 881165.

Fact Sheet: Scout Premises–Risk Assessment FS285001.

Fact Sheet: Activities – Risk Assessment FS120000.

Example of a simple Risk Assessment – CUB SCOUT EURO DISNEY TRIP

Adapted from: *Five Steps to Risk Assessment*

STEP 1

STEP 2

STEP 3 (AND 4)

STEP 5

HAZARD	WHO MIGHT BE HARMED?	IS THE RISK ADEQUATELY CONTROLLED, OR IS MORE NEEDED?	REVIEW AND REVISION
Accident at boarding point	Cubs	Coaches to be parked off roads in well lit areas Two safety marshals appointed per coach to oversee safe boarding. Marshals to wear reflective tabards.	
Coaches involved in accident en-route	Cubs, Leaders	Coaches hired from reputable company with seat belts fitted and to be worn First Aider and first aid kit on each coach Coaches to travel in 2's or 3's rather than large convoy	
Accident on coach	Cubs, Leaders	No glass bottles or fizzy drinks to be taken on board No heavy objects in overhead racks Rubbish bags provided to dispose of waste	
Travel sickness etc.	Cubs, Leaders	Identify potential from health forms Provide buckets / bags and bottles of water for journey Provide reassurance / occupation (games, quiz etc)	
Loosing Cubs and leaders at service station and Euro Disney	Cubs, Leaders	Operate 'buddy' system and maintain supervision – 1adult to 4 Cub Scouts Cubs to wear identifying neckerchiefs Coaches named after Disney characters to assist Cubs in finding their coach Roll call before recommencing journey	Review once on site
Accidents at Euro Disney	Cubs, Leaders	Euro Disney operating their own safety procedures and first aid facilities E111's to be handed to Leaders prior to leaving	