Activities — Risk Assessment

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0845 300 1818

This factsheet provides guidance for Leaders on how to conduct a risk assessment both before and during an activity.

Introduction

In the many activities we can offer, we provide challenges that seek to encourage the development of young people. These are often ones they do not face every day and they can experience a great sense of achievement in completing them. Some degree of risk is unavoidable if the sense of adventure and excitement is to be achieved, but it is - and should be - much less than the participant perceives. We seek to provide: "**Excitement** but not **Danger** - **Adventure** but not **Hazard**."

Accordingly we need to assess and control the risks associated with activities in order to minimise the chance of injury.

Hazards and risks

Two terms, are frequently used during a risk assessment:

- A **hazard** is anything that could cause harm. In the context of activities, a hazard could be weather, equipment or many other elements.
- A **risk** is the chance - high or low - that someone will be harmed by the hazard.

What is a risk assessment?

Risk assessment can perhaps best be described as disciplined common sense applied to everyday life. Whether descending a staircase, crossing the road, or frying an egg, we all do risk assessments 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.....

1 ***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 surface, an arrow, or very high piece of equipment.

2 ***Decide who might be harmed, and how*:**
Think particularly about participants 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.

3 ***Evaluate the risks (what controls exist already?*):**
Consider the likelihood of the hazards causing harm to someone. If a surface 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.

The Scout Association Information Center
Gilwell Park Chingford London E4 7QW Tel + 44 (0)20 8433 7100 **Fax** + 44 (0)20 8433 7103 **email** info.center@scout.org.uk www.scoutbase.org.uk

4 ***Record your findings (what additional controls are needed?)*:**
You will always need to tell those involved in the activity what action they should take – and what actions they must not take!

Where the risk is one which regularly occurs (a particular activity / game), your record should be a permanent one, such as an instruction sheet (rules) or card for users, who should be required to read it before leading the activity. Regular users should be required to re-read it from time to time.

Date your risk assessment and put on it a date for reviewing it.

5 ***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, even if you do not think that a review is actually needed.

Changing conditions

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. For some activities natural changes in conditions such as weather will require on-going assessment or review of an activity (e.g. hiking).

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.

Where do I start?

The activity example in the table at the end of the factsheet is not exhaustive but suggests some possible hazards, some of their associated risks and suggestions for appropriate control measures.

Every activity will be different but the best way to discover your hazards is to go and have a look and to work out how the activity will take place. This way many of the hazards and their associated risks are identified and appropriate control measures adopted and put into place.

Who should do the risk assessment?

This could be almost anyone, but ideally someone who has a reasonable ability to recognise some of the risks that may prevail for the activity.

It may be a Leader or parent with relevant experience in the activity or just a friend of the Group with some time to give. More than one person can be a good idea. It spreads the workload and helps to spot things that one might miss.

In safety there is the recurring use of the phrase "*a competent person*". This is probably well summed up as being someone with a fair level of knowledge but, equally as importantly, who is able to recognise when someone with more expertise is needed for a particular task.

What do I do with the risk assessment?

There are many ways in which risks can be minimised. This might be a change in venue, additional training, an increased leader/participant ratio and properly equipped participants.

The recording of the assessment should be in a format which is easily read - don't write a book! Risk assessments are not operating procedures - they inform and determine key aspects of the operating procedures.

Risk assessment - in practice

There has sometimes been a tendency to use ‘standard’ risk assessments for activities. We must remember, however, that as the environments, people and circumstances involved are constantly changing, such assessments cannot be set in stone.

One example of a hazard sometimes forgotten: after a weekend of activities is it appropriate for the leader (who has been fully participant in the activities) to be the one who drives the minibus many hours to take the party home? Asking another appropriate adult to support the activity by driving the minibus can significantly reduce the risk.

A simple example of constantly assessing the risks might be a party of Scouts on Dartmoor with the weather conditions deteriorating. The Leader assessed the situation and decided that it was best not to continue with the expedition. Everyone was disappointed. It was a hard decision to stop and turn around but safety had to be of prime importance. It is better to explain to the young people why the party turned back than have to explain to parents why you did not.

Other methods

The approaches described above for conducting risk assessments are not the only ones that exist. Use whichever one you are comfortable with. Remember, it is important that you conduct the assessment and modify your plans accordingly, to minimise the risks to an acceptable level.

Conclusion

There is a clear distinction between perceived risk (in the eyes of young people) and actual danger. We have to minimise the latter.

Publications Cross Reference

Policy, Organisation and Rules - current edition.

Adventure Activities Industry Advisory Committee - *Adventure Activities Centres: Five Steps to Risk Assessment*, HSE Books ISBN 0-7176-2463-3

Example Of A Simple Risk Assessment – Taking A Group Cycling

Hazard Identified & Risks Arising	Persons at Risk	How Is The Risk Controlled? What Further Controls Are Needed?	Person Responsible for controls	Review Date & Revisions Made?
Equipment Bike may have faults resulting in mechanical failure at a dangerous moment.	All cyclists and others nearby	Bike maintenance evening for the Scouts, run by a competent person (maybe an experienced parent or friend). Bike checks before setting off on the trip. Daily checks if trip is more than one day.	Leader with competent person. Leaders	
Roads and Traffic Collision with other traffic, due to inexperience of road use and equipment.	Inexperienced riders, particularly the young	Instruction and training of riders **plus** careful supervision on the trip itself. Use of High Visibility jackets/vests. Avoid cycling at night or dusk. Compulsory and proper use of cycle helmets . Use dedicated cycle paths away from other traffic.	Leader with a competent person (police officer?)	
Group Risks Riding as a group and potential for losing members.	All cyclists	Ride in single file or pairs (according to the road) using Leaders at the front and back of the Group. A sensible group size cycling together Occasionally stop and have a head count – use a list or register if necessary.	Leaders Event Leader	
Weather Conditions Too hot / cold / wet Dangerous / slippery road conditions due to rain or ice	All cyclists All cyclists	Ensure the correct clothing, including waterproofs are advised and carried on the day. Check before setting off. Check condition of tyres and brakes. Consider & control the speed of the group. Postpone the event if necessary.	Leaders Event Leader	

The items above are just an example of some things to consider.
Your risk assessment should reflect any localised conditions or timings that apply