

This Good Practice Guide is offered as informal material. It comprises well-intentioned advice but does not obviate the need to pay particular attention to your safety procedures or advanced planning.

Whilst Heads and Excursion Leaders are encouraged to take risk assessing very seriously, it can be made into a very complex and time-consuming process. A quick Internet search for the subject will reveal how out-of-proportion it may have become.

Whenever possible, risk assessments should show attention to detail but need only address **significant** risks and hazards. For example, it is imperative that assessment writers pay attention to the hazards and risk of injury during in cross-country running, but unnecessary for them to lay down complex and forbidding procedures which might prevent either enjoyment or fulfilment. A word of caution though – it is potentially dangerous to allow an activity to go ahead **DESPITE** the risks.

The **measurement of risk** is a notoriously difficult subject. It is imperative that you measure **LIKELIHOOD** of the particular risk occurring, rather than the seriousness of outcome.

Using the Risk Assessment Form EX D7 in Part Two Section 4, makes risk assessing seem a simple procedure but, like all pro-formas, may leave the assessment writer anxious about what, and how much, detail is required. The answer is as much detail as is necessary to identify hazards and risks and to put in place procedures to prevent injury to anyone affected by them.

**Following the section headings in Section 3.2 Part One of the Policy, here are a few useful points –**

#### **Ensuring assessments are in place**

It is not acceptable to undertake an excursion, even a trip to a puppet show in the park, without considering risks and hazards to the party nor, if you are the puppeteer, the audience. In short, risk assessing must be done and must be 'in place'. For safety, peace of mind and possible avoidance of litigation, such assessments should be recorded in writing. The correct and recommended form for this is EX D7 in Section 4 - bear in mind the need for Heads to understand them and for the relevant Service Excursion Adviser to pass them as suitable.

#### **Scrutiny of assessments**

The idea here is to ascertain whether all known hazards are addressed and in sufficient detail. Ideally, the climate should be one of open inquisitiveness – meaning that we should like to know more and learn each time we assess. It follows that anyone designated to check over a risk assessment ought to be capable of offering wisdom and constructive advice. It is perfectly satisfactory for a work colleague to check over your assessment but it is probably safer for an expert in the subject, or activity, to do this.

#### **Ability and behavioural assessments**

This is an area fraught with political correctness. The intention is to make certain that any risks, hazards or even dangers, related to ability or behaviour, do not affect the free running of the excursion. An ability assessment may include suggestions that a specific wheelchair user is more than capable of looking after herself during the excursion; or a note about the challenging-behaviour of an individual being made even more challenging by boredom and inactivity.

#### **Generic risk assessments**

These are the most useful and are dealt with in Good Practice Guide 7. Heads should begin the process of formalising the work done previously – that is to say where good practice already exists, then it should be written and filed under a generic name (cross-country running for instance). Heads are encouraged to make time available for someone (themselves even!) to check over all the off-site venues or activity and write simple guidelines.

### **Activity risk assessments**

These are the most difficult and it is almost impossible not to indulge in detail. However, investigating rock pools on a windy day has more than enough obvious dangers to occupy us, so it may not be necessary to suppose there might be monsters lurking or that children might be frightened by their own reflections. In short, stick to obvious and definable hazards and risks.

### **Location risk assessments**

These are a delight to write as it means site visits. However, a quiet time searching for hazards in Kirkwall Cathedral will be very different from leaning on the wind on the causeway crossing to the Brough of Birsay. But it adds up to the same things – going there and looking.

### **Travel risk assessments**

This is an area that needs the utmost attention and often far more detailed analysis. Anyone who has accompanied youngsters on a vehicular journey will know what will happen if risks are not assessed. Those who haven't savoured this, need to accept the wisdom of someone who has and this emphasises the need for Scrutiny of Assessments (see above).

### **Security and protection assessments**

This is an important area and why Orkney Islands Council require nothing less than Full Disclosure. However, not every security and protection issue is revealed in disclosure. It is more likely that you will need to assess locations far more often than people, as it is in dangerous locations that security and protection issues lurk. You do not have to write separate assessments, as it is sufficient to include security and protection issues within location, activity, travel, even generic, ones. One word of specific caution (knowing what we know now) - thoroughly check the Accommodation and Activity Provider's Forms for omissions and always check for yourself on arrival.

### **On-going risk assessments**

Every supervisor must be able to detect unexpected hazards and risks as, even before, they occur – it is a facet of applied duty of care. Risk assessing of unexpected dangers, hazards and risks usually requires quick thinking and good judgement and will certainly not require a prolonged writing session. Assessing risk of this type requires a safety measure to be applied and a retrospective entry in the current risk assessment.

### **Risk assessments by outside agencies**

There is much to be gained by asking to see others' risk assessments. If they are put on edge or become defensive, it is likely that they have not done what is required by legislation and this implies that it may be necessary for you to apply your own safe procedures. However, looking on the bright side, it is quite likely that you will be inspired and learn about different styles and approaches to the subject.

### **Involving all leaders and group members in risk management**

Risk management is not risk assessing but the need for group co-operation when applying safety procedures is paramount. This is far more likely to occur if everyone contributes to safety management. It is a good leader who allows his group members to participate in the formulation of quality safety measures.

### **Carrying Risk Assessments**

The main purpose here is to have them with you. Who's to know, for instance, that you might become incapable of leading on a given day and that a deputy with the relevant assessment, might just save calling it all off. It is also important to be able to modify an assessment according to changing circumstances.

### **Retrospective Risk Assessments**

These might be written immediately after the excursion and should be seen as a hazard- and risk-list or suggested procedures needing to be used when next conducting the activity. They must not be written to suggest they were in place before the excursion and therefore should be dated accordingly.