

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) 1.3.1.1

Assuring Health, Safety and Access

Organizations have obligations towards their volunteers, and it is clearly good practice to treat volunteers with full consideration when it comes to health and safety.

The duty of care is a general and legal duty on all individuals and organizations to avoid carelessly causing injury to persons. This obligation exists regardless of the organizations size, its income or whether the organization has paid staff.

If your organization asks a volunteer to do a task, which results in them injuring themselves or anyone else the organization, at a minimum, may be liable. No matter what activities your organization is involved in, from entering data, running a small laboratory, to organizing field collection trips on the seaside, you will have to consider the duty of care owed to your volunteers. Liability depends on establishing that the organization failed to take reasonable care.

Health and safety law lays down your duties to your employees. The law also imposes further responsibilities on you as an employer with regard to people not in your employment, such as volunteers and other members of the public, who may be affected by your work activities. Please refer to the California and Federal offices of Occupational Health and Safety Administration for guidance.

Employers have certain responsibilities under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970. The following list is a summary of the most important ones

- Provide a workplace free from serious recognized hazards and comply with standards, rules and regulations issued under the OSHA Act.
- Examine workplace conditions to make sure they conform to applicable OSHA standards.
- Make sure employees have and use safe tools and equipment and properly maintain this equipment.
- Use color codes, posters, labels or signs to warn employees of potential hazards.
- Establish or update operating procedures and communicate them so that employees follow safety and health requirements.
- Provide medical examinations and training when required by OSHA standards.
- Post, at a prominent location within the workplace, the [OSHA poster](#) (or the state-plan equivalent) informing employees of their rights and responsibilities.
- Report to the nearest OSHA office within 8 hours any fatal accident or one that results in the hospitalization of three or more employees.

- Keep records of work-related injuries and illnesses. (Note: Employers with 10 or fewer employees and employers in certain low-hazard industries are exempt from this requirement.)
- Provide employees, former employees and their representatives access to the Log of Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses ([OSHA Form 300](#)).
- For 2002 only, post a copy of the totals from the last page of the OSHA 200 Log during the entire month of February 2002.
- Provide access to employee medical records and exposure records to employees or their authorized representatives.
- Provide to the OSHA compliance officer the names of authorized employee representatives who may be asked to accompany the compliance officer during an inspection.
- Not discriminate against employees who exercise their rights under the Act.
- Post OSHA citations at or near the work area involved. Each citation must remain posted until the violation has been corrected, or for three working days, whichever is longer. Post abatement verification documents or tags.
- Correct cited violations by the deadline set in the OSHA citation and submit required abatement verification documentation.

Organizations should carry out a risk assessment and require volunteers to be given health and safety information and training. Risk assessment is a technique for identifying and controlling hazards of an organization's activities. It is not just about chemicals and dangerous factories and is as relevant to the voluntary sector as it is to the private sector.

- A hazard is anything that has the potential to cause harms, e.g. a faulty electrical socket.
- Risk is the likelihood of it causing harm and the degree of harm it could cause (e.g. an electrical shock, which could lead to a fatality).

Risk assessment involves identifying all hazards, assessing the risk and putting in places measures to control unacceptable risks. Assessing risk requires detailed knowledge of the activities and working practices normally only found in the people who actually do the work. Risk assessment should always involve employees and volunteers and should never just be left to the experts.

To begin a risk assessment identify the organization's personnel (by name not just position), their responsibilities and contact information. Next make a list of the tasks and duties to be performed and identify potential hazards and how to avoid/minimize the potential for those hazards. Provide a list of personal protection equipment that will be used and provide. List the work location(s) and the potential hazards associated with those locations (e.g. the desert has as potential hazards heat, sun exposure, scorpions...). Do the same for all of the equipment and include Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for chemicals that may be used. Include your emergency procedures plan on who (person and place) and how (radio, phone...) to communicate health and safety issues. Lastly, the risk assessment addresses standard health and safety issues

(e.g. no horse play, work in teams of at least two...). Your organization may also need to address their responsibility for buildings and premises.

Every organization should also have insurance coverage(s). There are several insurance options and policies to consider. Review this insurance coverage at least once a year. Law requires some while others are optional. This is also a good time to review your volunteer liability waivers.

The following are examples of health and safety issues that might need to be addressed for your organizations; other examples are contained in the Clean Water Teams' Informational Paper on Field Manuals.

General

1. Always monitor with at least one partner. Always let someone else know where you are, when you intend to return, and what to do if you don't come back at the appointed time.
2. Always obtain permission from the landowner before crossing private property.
3. Watch for hostile dogs, wildlife (snakes), and insects such as ticks, hornets, and wasps.
4. Carry a first aid kit and make sure someone knows how to use it.
5. Watch for poison oak, stinging nettle, and other types of vegetation that may cause rashes, irritation or scratches.
6. Never drink the water in the stream. Bring your own water from home.
7. Please don't walk on unstable streambanks. Disturbing these banks can accelerate erosion and may prove dangerous if a bank collapses.
8. Be very careful not to disturb streamside vegetation.
9. Be very careful when monitoring swiftly flowing streams, do NOT attempt to wade into or across them when the water is swift or above knee height.
10. **If at any time you feel uncomfortable about the condition of the stream or your surroundings, stop monitoring and leave the site. YOUR SAFETY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING.**

When Using Chemicals

1. Wear safety glasses and gloves when handling chemicals.
2. Know your equipment, sampling instructions, and procedures before beginning.
3. Know the chemicals you are using and their hazards (see Material Safety Data Sheets for each chemical in you will use).
4. Avoid contact between chemical reagents and skin, eye, nose, and mouth. Never use your fingers to stopper a sample bottle when shaking a solution.
5. Do not eat or drink while monitoring. Wash hands thoroughly before contact with eyes, food, or mouth.
6. Rinse test vials with deionized or distilled water after each test; dry hands and outside of vial.
7. Tightly close all reagent containers after use; check for correct cap.
8. Wipe up spills when they occur.

Do not pour used chemicals or samples onto the ground or into the creek! Place all solutions and used chemicals in a container and dispose of them down a sink connected to a sewer system (not a septic tank).

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