

Ready Scotland

Preparing for and dealing with emergencies

Health and Safety for Community Resilience Groups

Community Resilience Topic Sheet 3 Keeping volunteers and the public safe.

Introduction

Health and safety doesn't have to be complicated. It is aimed at protecting employees and other people who may be affected by work activities. It should not be seen as a barrier to anyone getting involved in helping their community cope better in an emergency. In fact, being aware of it can give you confidence that you are taking action in the best and safest way for yourself, volunteers and the people you are helping.

Health and safety law is sometimes wrongly blamed for preventing organisations from taking action, but by taking a sensible, proportionate approach, community resilience groups can make sure things go smoothly and safely, avoid unnecessary paperwork, and go about their business without putting themselves or others in danger.

Who does health and safety law apply to?

Health and safety law applies to employers. Most community resilience groups will therefore **not** have responsibilities under health and safety law¹ (unless they have at least one employee), but they do have a legal responsibility to take **reasonable care** towards volunteers and the wider public. Employers and self-employed people are responsible for managing health and safety in their business and for taking the right precautions to reduce the risks of workplace dangers and to provide a safe working environment.

If yours is the kind of group that is motivated to do something to help your community in an emergency, **you will want to make sure that the volunteers who are working with you do so safely**. Taking account of the following advice will help you do so.

Understanding risks and taking sensible actions to keep safe

Community Resilience groups should never do anything that would put themselves or anyone else in any danger. They help their communities by carrying out every-day activities like fetching shopping, checking on neighbours and clearing ice and snow from paths. However, in an emergency, conditions can be challenging, so it is worth thinking about the health and safety of everyone involved.

¹ If your group does employ staff, advice is available on the Health and Safety Executive's [Health and Safety Made Simple](#) website.

You should think about health and safety at 4 key points:

- 1) At the planning stage
- 2) When you activate your plans
- 3) At all times during the emergency
- 4) After the emergency.

At the planning stage

When making your community emergency plan, or planning other activities you should consider:

- 1) Who might be harmed and how; and
- 2) What measures you should take to reduce risk

For example, if your group plans to clear ice and snow, you should make sure all volunteers have appropriate footwear and clothing, and are aware of Scottish Government guidance on this subject available at Readyscotland.org

When you activate your plans

When deciding how to respond to a specific emergency, you should think about the specific risks that volunteers will need to be aware of. For example, if you receive a flood warning, what areas should volunteers avoid.

During an emergency

Volunteers should be alert at all times during an emergency to risks that face them as they happen, and ensure that they do nothing that would put themselves or anyone else in any danger. For example, if volunteers are clearing snow, they should avoid areas under hanging icicles, or roofs with a heavy load of snow which might slide.

After an emergency

You should get together and discuss what was successful about your group's work during the emergency, and what lessons you can learn to help plan for future work for your group. For example a group member may have highlighted how future work could be undertaken more safely.

More information on Health and Safety can be found at:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/index.htm>

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/voluntary/manage-low-risk.htm>

<http://www.communitytoolkit.co.uk/>

<http://www.rospa.com/>

<http://www.scvo.org.uk/information/running-a-voluntaryorganisation/>

[people/volunteers/](http://www.scvo.org.uk/information/running-a-voluntaryorganisation/people/volunteers/)