



Preparing for activity

delivery in natural spaces

Whether you have transformed a space of your own or you have identified an outdoor location for the delivery of nature based activities, you will need to think about the risks of outdoor engagements. Going through the process of carrying out a risk assessment and then later developing a pre-delivery environment check will go a long way to helping you ensure activities are safe.

Carrying out an outdoor site and delivery risk assessment

Risk Assessments will need to be in place to ensure adequate consideration has been given to the safety of delivery staff and participants, for both the chosen location and the activities undertaken.



Here we will provide practical hints and tips to help you assess your location and wellbeing activities to minimise risks. However, as outdoor spaces can dramatically differ this is not meant as a definitive list of considerations and you should always carry out the relevant Risk Assessments in accordance with your organisation's own policies and procedures.

The following factors are specific to outdoor spaces and should be considered for inclusion in any risk assessments that you undertake, this is not an exhaustive list.

The location

The geographic location of a site will significantly impact on the risks you identify and the mitigation you'll want to consider putting in place. A remote site will have issues around isolation and infrastructure, whilst suburban or urban sites will have issues that come with busier locations like increased traffic and contact with the wider general public. Some general risk mitigations would include:



Ensure you carry a charged mobile phone at all times and pre-store important contacts.



Consider travel arrangements and assess the nearest safe parking.



Check for mobile phone signal and adapt your emergency procedures accordingly including carry maps and/or identify nearest access point for emergency services prior to delivery.



If part of the journey to site is on foot, account for this in a realistic plan for the day, i.e. leave enough energy and time to return at the end of day during daylight and organise sufficient food and drink.



Consider the potential for slow emergency response times.



Always ensure permission is sought for entry on to private land.



Follow your organisations remote / off site and lone working policies.

The landscape

It goes without saying that different outdoor landscapes will present different risks. Below is an overview of different landscape types and factors you should consider in your risk assessments.



Woods and forests – consider fallen or falling branches/trees, uneven ground, fading light etc.



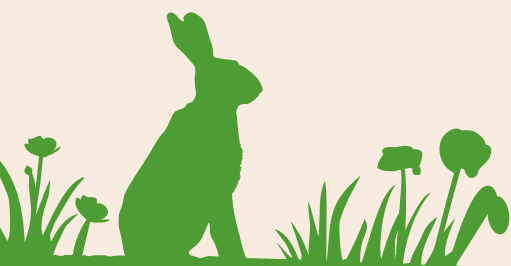
Lakes, beaches, canals, rivers and streams – consider mud, quicksand, slippery, soft or eroding banks, changing water levels or flash floods and strong currents and drowning etc.



Mountains and hillsides – consider fast changing weather patterns, steep pathways and embankments, unstable cliffs and rock falls etc.



Working farms or estates – consider contact with farm machinery and moving vehicles, contact with livestock and other animals, exposure to harsh chemicals etc.





Community spaces – consider interactions with nasty and silly people, litter - including sharp objects and illegal substances and criminal damage.

Other actions you could consider include:

- Checking ahead of any activity to prevent clashing with harvesting, contractor or event work.
- Clearly identify the dangers of a site to participants at the start of each event and putting up clear signage and warnings.
- Advising on appropriate footwear and any necessary safety clothing e.g.: high-vis vests.
- Leaving interpretation on site to inform others of the activities taking place.

The weather and seasons

As with any outdoor activity or event in the UK the weather will play a big part in the planning and risk assessments of your programme. Living in a changeable climate the weather cannot be relied upon so all possibilities should be considered. The key three considerations for delivery no matter what the time of year are:



Exposure to the elements



Changeability.



Seasonal considerations like hayfever or insect prevalence e.g.: nuisance wasps in late summer.



Mitigating actions you could consider include:

- Assess weather conditions prior to site visit.
- Carry extra clothing, including waterproofs and warm hat, in cold and wet weather.
- Stop work promptly if feeling ill or in discomfort.
- Remain vigilant for signs of hypothermia or heat exhaustion and ensure plenty of drinking water and hot drinks are available.
- Use a high factor sunblock and wear a sun hat in sun.
- Advise volunteers to wear long clothing and provide insect repellent.



Accidents and Emergencies

In addition to the site and its surroundings you will need to cover the traditional health and safety elements of a risk assessment but think about them in an outdoor setting:



Slips, trips and falls – hazards such as uneven and dirty ground.



Injuries from brambles or nettles.



Biting insects.



Diseases such as Tetanus, Lyme disease & other biohazards.

Mitigating actions you could consider include:

- Make sure all cuts are covered with waterproof plasters.
- Avoid contact with any fly tipped waste or hazardous rubbish and report to appropriate agencies.
- Ensure legs and arms are fully covered by clothing to reduce contact with potentially poisonous plants and likelihood of tick bites. Tuck trouser legs into socks in long grass.
- Check for sharps and faeces before kneeling, sitting or lying down on the ground.
- Carry an appropriately stocked or specialist first aid kit.

Activities

Having assessed your environment you can now assess your chosen activities. This can be done by assessing each activity individually or by grouping types of activities together and assessing the skills and equipment instead. Follow your organisation's existing risk assessment format or your health and safety lead's guidance.

Depending on your activity key areas for risk assessment are likely but not exclusively going to include:







Manual handling e.g.: carrying equipment or incidents around building a den or whilst out exploring.



Safe usage of manual tools or equipment e.g.: bow saws, hand drill, secateurs, hammers, spades, and kitchen knives.



-  Safe working practices around water e.g.: safe handling of pond nets, paddling and wading.
-  Building fires and fire management e.g.: risks around lighting a fire, working near fire, cooking over an open fire.
-  Food and hygiene practices e.g.: poisoning from unclean practices, knife skills.
-  Human contact e.g.: personal attack, conflict with other site users or incidents occurring through threatening behaviour from a member of the public.

Mitigating actions for some of these activities could include:

- Ensure good working practice especially regarding safe working distances.
- All volunteers / staff trained in how to use hand tools.
- Gloves worn when working with hand tools, and handling scrub with thorns, unless using swinging hand tools such as billhooks.
- Aware of uneven ground when walking, working with hand tools.
- Observe safe working distances.
- Be aware of sparks.
- Only burn approved materials.
- Wash hands thoroughly before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Deal with conflict calmly. If threatened or intimidated leave the area. Do not deal with difficult situations alone, follow lone working procedure.
- Report incidents of violence to non-emergency number 101.



Getting your site ready before your activity

Having completed your development phase the time will come when you are on site for the first time with participants. Assuming you have all the equipment or provisions ready to go preparing the site for an activity should at this stage be relatively simple.

Use the checklist on the following pages to help you prepare:



✓ Organise a site check:

You may be delivering your activity within the grounds of your workplace; in which case you will probably be aware of its current condition. You may be delivering off site in a remote location or community space, which you may not have visited for a while. The weather, public footfall or even landowner developments can change a site, so a quick visit to assess its condition could prove extremely useful in the days running up to your delivery.



Revisit your site plans, i.e.: access, the seating area, the activity zone, the food preparation space, do they still work?



Are toilet facilities needed, are they still available or in place if you are hiring them in?



If you are using the site surroundings as part of planned activities, e.g.: mindfulness walks or sit spots, are these spaces still safe and accessible? Do you need to think about signposting or cordoning off any areas that you no longer consider safe or appropriate, or maybe re-thinking a route to include or exclude a new development?



Is there any general clearance work required to make the space safe or more comfortable?



Are your parking arrangements still feasible?



Consider whether you will leave materials or artistic creations on site or remove them at the end of sessions?



Does the site offer the infrastructure you need to deliver the programme and/or Interventions? If so, is this of suitable condition or does it need repairing? If not, what will you need to bring on site? Infrastructure to consider could be shelter, vegetable patches, seating, weaving looms.

✓ Check the weather

Depending on the season, you will find that your outdoor space can change significantly and sometimes very quickly. Keeping an eye on the weather for the days leading up to your activity will help to establish any last minute equipment changes e.g.: pop up camping chairs rather than sit mats if the ground is saturated and unlikely to dry or the need to take a shelter of some kind.

You should have previously requested that your participants wear or take appropriate clothing but if the weather looks changeable a last minute reminder might be useful.

Useful free weather apps, particularly to live track rain clouds include:



[Weather & Radar](#)
[Met Office Weather Forecast](#)



✓ Arrival and set up:

On your first day of on-site delivery, you may want to consider having the site ready to go before the participants arrive. This will hopefully be a less intimidating space for arrivals but more importantly, it allows you to focus on meeting and greeting the participants.

For additional delivery days, it can help participants feel a sense of inclusion and space ownership if they set the site up with you. It also provides a great chance for informal hellos and catch-ups whilst everyone is busy helping to prepare the space.

Participants can help to pack up at the end of each day, leaving the space as found, to reduce workload for facilitators.



✓ Equipment list:

Don't forget to check your final equipment list and purchase any last minute perishables.

✓ Other:

Do not forget to consider the wishes of the land or property owners that you've been working with or, if accessing public spaces, the Countryside Code is also available to help you and your participants keep our valuable outdoor spaces respected and protected.

Further information and the following useful Countryside Code summary sheet are available for download at: www.gov.uk/countryside-code.



Download more activity ideas at:
cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-connection-toolkits

