
Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service Comité de Coordination du Service Volontaire International

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Health and Safety – A Guide

Introduction

For many years organisations belonging to The Alliance of European Voluntary Organisations and CCIVS have exchanged volunteers and completed thousands of hours of voluntary work within each of their communities. During that time there has been a great deal of care, organisation and learning derived from each voluntary project. The standards have been good and the safety of the volunteers has been paramount. But there is always room for improvement. As both networks continue to grow in numbers and experience they have reached a stage where a more formal approach to Health and Safety is necessary.

With increasingly litigious public voluntary organisations run the risk of expensive law suits if we ignore current issues and do not put good standards of health and safety in place. Not only do we let our own organisations down but the volunteers that are the life blood of our networks.

Most organisations are aware of the hazards that can occur when working with volunteers but as a network we should have guidelines on what minimal standards are acceptable for membership and a Best Practice Guide we can all work towards and share with our partners. (This would give us greater confidence in placing volunteers)

1. Emergency Procedure

An emergency is anything that seriously affects the health, safety and wellbeing of a person who is involved in a project. Set out below is a set of standards that we recommend each organisation should follow should there be an emergency on a project:

Examples of what is considered to be an emergency are:

- If a volunteer has to be hospitalized
- If there is a serious accident
- If a volunteer has to be removed from the project for inappropriate behaviour including violence or abuse
- A major event which puts volunteers at significant risk such as war, natural disaster etc.

It is the **host organisation's** responsibility to make sure at the start of each project that they have the following information:

- Emergency contact details for each volunteer including a name, address and contact telephone number
- A contact name and phone number for the sending organisation. It is recommended that a mobile number is given
- Any medical details from the volunteer
- Insurance cover during the project. If that is not possible or if cover is limited all the volunteers who are on your project must be been informed before the project starts that they are responsible for getting their own insurance cover

In an emergency situation:

- It is the **host's** responsibility to get help for the volunteer.
- It is the **host's** responsibility to inform the volunteer's emergency contact
- It is the **host's** responsibility to contact the sending organisation as soon as possible. All this will need to be documented and a copy sent to the sending organisation so that they can keep a record of the event. If necessary the host organisation may have to contact the embassy of the volunteer's country.

Please also be aware that if the accident is very serious that the national press from the volunteer's country of origin might also want to get in contact. Do not give out any information and pass the details on to the sending organisation.

2. Hosting a project/workcamp

The work:

The host must ensure the following:

- That the worksite is safe for volunteers
- That adequate training is given to the volunteers on any equipment used and how to carry out the work
- That appropriate protective clothing is available if necessary for the work
- There must be a suitably qualified supervisor appointed for the work site and they must be available at all times during the work
- That a first aid kit is provided

The volunteer is responsible for the following:

- To follow all safety instructions and procedures given by the host and appointed supervisor
- To take adequate care of their own safety and that of others
- If the volunteer believes that the work is unsafe they must inform the supervisor and host organisation

Accommodation:

All accommodation provided for volunteers must be checked for health and safety. The accommodation must be up to the standards set out in that particular country which the project will be held in. Below are some recommendations that we should expect as a minimum:

- Information on how to deal/prevent a fire
- Safe gas/electricity provision
- Adequate washing facilities
- Hygienic toilets and cooking facilities
- Adequate lighting
- Adequate security
- Access to an emergency phone
- If the volunteers are camping and the hosting organisation are providing the tents, the volunteers must be shown how to erect the tents and have access to the above points. They must not have any naked flames near to the tent (i.e. a separate area needs to be designated for smoking and cooking)

Risk Assessment:

Risk Assessment is a tool that can be used to assess how safe or hazardous an area is. It doesn't have to be difficult and if used correctly it can be a valuable aid to checking how safe your projects are.

There are 5 steps to risk assessment

1. Step 1 – Identify the hazard
2. Step 2 – Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Step 3 – Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions
4. Step 4 – Record your findings and implement them
5. Step 5 – Review your assessment and update if necessary

What is a HAZARD – anything that may cause harm such as chemicals, electricity, working on a ladder, crossing a road.

What is the RISK – the chance, high or low, that somebody could be harmed by these hazards.

For example: Working at heights is a hazard, the risk of injury is very high if someone falls from a height. So what precautions can you put in place?

- Wearing the appropriate safety equipment such as a harness and having the correct safety equipment needed for the work, for example scaffolding

Transport:

If transport is needed during the project for the volunteers it is the hosts responsibility to ensure that the vehicles being used are road worthy. If long distances need to be driven then

it is the host's responsibility to ensure that the drivers get enough rest and are not put under pressure to drive many miles in a short time period.

If volunteers are asked to do any driving then it is the host responsibly to ensure that they have the correct category of driving license, are insured and are adequately trained for the task. The driver must also obey the laws of the country that they are driving in and if they are responsible for driving volunteers then they should not consume alcohol before driving.

3. What the volunteers need to know

Info sheets:

The info sheets are probably the most important piece of information that hosting organisations can produce and that a sending organisation can pass on to a volunteer.

The information needs to be clear and concise (please refer to the Alliance booklet for more information). Health and Safety issues relating to the info sheets should be:

- The name and address of the accommodation and a contact phone number
- Clear instructions of where the meeting point is with dates, times and location
- The type of work that the volunteers will be doing; if this changes you **MUST** inform both the volunteers and their sending organisations as soon as possible.
- Clear information on when the project starts and finishes - dates and times
- Any specific clothing or equipment that the volunteers need to bring (e.g sleeping bags, warm clothes, hats etc.)
- Who the leader is and their contact details – if you don't have a specific leader at this point make sure that once a leader is appointed that they then contact the volunteers to introduce themselves.
- Any local hazards (e.g – you cannot swim in the sea due to strong currents)

4. Leaders

Each project must have a designated leader or host. The leaders must have been prepared and given adequate training before the project. (please see 3.9 of Alliance handbook for more details).

It is very important that the leader is clear about their role and liaises between the host and the volunteers. It is also important that the volunteers know who the leader is before the start of the project and have a contact number for him/her. The leader needs to make sure that the volunteers are informed about the following:

- Ensure that clear instructions are given on what the work is and how to achieve it. That these instructions are given in the common language of the workcamp.
- Training on how to use tools

- If appropriate what protective tools/clothing are needed
- Cooking and hygiene
- Fire evacuations plan
- Local hazards – and what they are
- Security – where the volunteers can leave valuables safely
- Where the first aid kit is
- The person to contact if there is an issue

Free time:

Unfortunately the most likely time for an accident is during the free time. It is important to let volunteers know that they are responsible for their own actions during this time. When choosing a free time activity it is important that the host informs both the leader and the volunteers of any activities that might have high risks (e.g swimming in the sea). Volunteers should also be encouraged to drink alcohol sensibly and to follow local laws regarding alcohol and smoking.

Drugs: It is very important that host organisations inform (through info sheets and leaders) what their own countries laws are on drug abuse. Most countries have very strict laws.

5. Near misses

It is a good idea to record near miss incidents as you can often avoid a big accident by learning from a near miss incident. For example: One of the tools being used to plant a tree broke whilst the volunteer was using it. She narrowly missed injuring her foot. This tool can then be removed and repaired so the accident is avoided again.

6. Working with young people under 18

Many European countries have strict laws when working with young people under the age of 18. Please check with your local laws and if planning to send a person overseas under the age of 18 making sure that you get parental consent. Most of the Teenage Projects are run by organisations that have many years experience of working with this age group.

7. Child Protection and police checks

The host organisation must work within the laws of their own country regarding child protection. Please note that in some countries a police check is compulsory for working with children and vulnerable adults, such as in the UK.

8. Data protection

Between all our organisations we swap personal data of the volunteers. It is our own responsibility to ensure that we don't pass that data on to a 3rd party without the consent of the volunteers.

Summary:

To conclude, accidents will happen on projects but if we have systems in place which can deal with these unlikely events in a mature, clear and safe way then we can only move forward in our work.

Just to be clear that it is the host's responsibility to ensure that volunteers have adequate Health and Safety whilst on project, but it is also everyone's responsibility to have a clear dialogue with each other to make sure that we can respond in the correct way. It is also very important to make it clear to volunteers that they have their own 'duty of care' not only to look after their own well being but of those around them.

Both CCIVS and The Alliance of European Voluntary Organisations have a great reputation for evaluating their methods and their programmes. This is crucial to the smooth running and ever evolving life of the networks and one essential for the good practice of Health and Safety.

Further information:

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf