

## Appendix 4

### Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group Guiding Principles ([www.vscg.co.uk](http://www.vscg.co.uk))

The principles apply to individuals and groups visiting land, water, buildings and other structures. They are relevant to country parks, canals and rivers in urban areas as well as more open countryside. Visitors include people engaged in informal recreation as well as participants in various sports and activities. The principles are not intended to cover employee safety, or the work of contractors.

They are grouped under five main headings.

#### 1. Fundamentals

- Take account of conservation, heritage, recreation, cultural and landscape objectives.
- Do not take away people's sense of freedom and adventure.
- Avoid restrictions on access.

#### 2. Awareness

- Ensure that your visitors know the risks they face.
- Inform and educate your visitors about the nature and extent of hazards, the risk control measures in place, and the precautions that they themselves should take.

#### 3. Partnership

- Recognise that people taking part in similar activities accept different levels of risk.
- Recognise that risk control measures for one visitor group may create risks to others.
- Work with visitor groups to promote understanding and resolve conflict.

#### 4. Responsibility

- It is important to strike a balance between user self-reliance and management intervention.
- It is reasonable to expect visitors to exercise responsibility for themselves.
- It is reasonable to expect visitors not to put others at risk.
- It is reasonable to expect parents, guardians and leaders to supervise people in their care.

#### 5. Risk control

- Assess risks and develop safety plans for individual sites.
- Risk control measures should be consistent.
- Monitor the behaviour and experiences of visitors to review visitor safety plans.
- Make sure that your work activities do not expose visitors to risk.

## Fundamentals

*Take account of conservation, heritage, recreation, cultural and landscape objectives*

The use of modern safety precautions may conflict with conservation, recreation or landscape objectives. For example, it would be possible to reduce risk when crossing historical aqueducts by erecting railings. Handrails and steps could reduce risk on steep mountain descents. Fencing might lessen risk if erected at the edge of cliffs or water. However, the application of such control measures could fundamentally detract from the historical integrity of the structure and inherent attraction of the landscape. A balance must be achieved between risk and the impact of safety measures.

*Do not take away people's sense of freedom and adventure*

*Do not destroy the appeal of wild and remote places by putting up signs and fences.*

People should be free to participate in high risk or adventurous activities as long as they are aware of the risks. Riders of mountain bikes should not be prevented from experiencing the exhilaration of steep descents and challenging drops, if that is their informed choice.

Where activities conflict, you might have to restrict one person's freedom for the benefit of others. However, first look for solutions that could still allow conflicting activities to take place, for example by zoning, or by scheduling them to take place at separate times.

*Avoid restrictions on access*

Try to find safety solutions that both allow access and protect the buildings or landscape. Only restrict access in the interest of conservation as a last resort.

You may need to exclude the public to carry out repairs or commercial operations (like timber harvesting). If so, keep restrictions as short as possible, and time them to cause least interference to visitors.

*Avoid giving visitors a long list of dos and don'ts. Disclaimers rarely offer legal protection.*

## **Awareness**

*Ensure that your visitors know the risks they face*

Our aim is for visitors to be aware of all the risks they face and to have the chance to decide whether or not to accept them. There should be no nasty surprises.

Visitors may arrive with full knowledge of all the risks. Sometimes the risks are clearly visible on arrival at a site. In other cases, information about risk might be provided on signs at car parks, or access points.

Once the visitor is aware of the nature of the risk, say for example an unfenced drop, he or she can then decide whether to accept it and go near the edge.

Usually it is reasonable for you to expect people to be aware of the normal risks associated with the sports and activities they are carrying out. You may, however, need to inform users of additional hazards specific to the site. For example, a sub aqua diver should have knowledge of the normal risks of the sport, but should be made aware of additional hazards, say from sluices, if diving in a reservoir.

Inform and educate your visitors about the nature and extent of hazards, the risk control measures in place, and the precautions that they themselves should take.

You can often control risk through information and education rather than by physical intervention on site. High-risk groups can be targeted. Children might be informed through schools. Participants in sport and recreation may be contacted through event organisers, governing bodies and local user groups, and by information issued with licences, tickets or permits. Stickers or leaflets can be applied to bikes, canoes, boats, fishing tackle, outdoor equipment and the like prior to hire or sale. Advice can be provided in tourist information centres, climbing shops, holiday accommodation, etc. The Internet, local radio and telephone message lines can be used to give up to date information; for example on weather conditions in mountain and coastal areas. Signs can be erected in car parks, stations and at other access points.

## Partnership

*Recognise that people taking part in similar activities accept different levels of risk*

You need to understand differences in how people view and accept risk. Contrast the expectations of a family out for a gentle cycle ride with those of competitive mountain bikers. Many activities share this contrast between 'extreme' adherents and more gentle recreation participants. Codes of practice issued by governing bodies of sport can help your understanding.

*Recognise that risk control measures for one visitor group may create risks to others*

For example, a fence erected at a lock side to prevent a walker drowning, might create a crush hazard to a boater, whilst the raised stone grips that help prevent a boater slipping when pushing lock gates could create a trip hazard to passers by. Speed humps designed to slow cars can be a hazard to cyclists.

*Work with visitor groups to promote understanding and resolve conflict*

For example, encourage cyclists to slow down or dismount on narrow paths used by walkers. Consider promoting physical segregation of different uses. Promote awareness of the needs of other users.

## Responsibility

*It is important to strike a balance between user self-reliance and management intervention*

The risk control matrix illustrates this principle in greater detail. Note that the matrix is only a framework to guide analysis. Adverse weather conditions can make activities in easy terrain more hazardous. It is also reasonable to expect higher levels of user self-reliance on land where no recreational facilities have been specifically provided but public access is a fact. For example paths in such areas that have been created by informal use will not be to the standard that visitors might reasonably expect of paths built and managed on a formal recreation site.

*It is reasonable to expect visitors to exercise responsibility for themselves*

For example, it is reasonable to expect walkers in mountains to be equipped with waterproofs and suitable footwear. It is reasonable to expect horse riders to wear proper safety helmets.

*It is reasonable to expect visitors not to put others at risk*

For example, people hang gliding should not alarm horses. Horse riders should not gallop past people with toddlers and pushchairs.

*It is reasonable to expect parents, guardians and leaders to supervise people in their care*

For example, in stopping children rolling stones over cliff drops, in watching children near water. The result is that there may not be a need to erect signs forbidding rolling stones, or fences to prevent access to water. (Note that the parent, guardian or leader may need to be informed of risks that lie out of sight.)

## Risk control

*Assess risks and develop safety plans for individual sites*

Every organisation or individual property owner should have a visitor safety plan. This should set out the overall management framework and procedures for carrying out individual site assessments. It

should contain an overview of accident data and consider what levels of risk are acceptable. What constitutes a 'site' will vary between organisations, and there will usually be a hierarchy of safety plans. A canal, a country park, or a forest could each have its own safety plan. Within them, a lock, a car park, or a picnic area could need an individual risk assessment and a safety plan.

The risk assessment would typically involve identifying activities on the site, the potential accidents, their causes, the likelihood of them happening and the possible consequences. If the risks are judged acceptable, then no action is necessary. The safety plan, however, would indicate the need to carry out a further assessment after a specified interval, or when use of the site changed. If the risks were unacceptable, further investigation might be required, or risk control measures might be planned. These measures should take into account available guidance from the Health and Safety Executive and other relevant bodies. The concept of doing what is 'reasonably practicable' should be considered in terms of meeting conservation, recreation and landscape objectives as well as considering the time, trouble, cost and effort of reducing risk.

It is valuable to carry out the site assessment through the minds of the visitors and by considering the activities they are engaged in. Look out for risks that some activities may pose to other users. Consider new activities that bring new risks.

*Risk control measures should be consistent*

Consistency is important within a particular location; from site to site within a regional or national organisation; and between different organisations. Ideally, the visitor should know what to expect at any location. Inconsistencies in the application of risk controls (for example the absence or presence of fencing at similar cliff edges and watersides) make it very difficult for visitors to make informed judgements about accepting risk. Note that consistency is not the same as uniformity. Design solutions should be allowed to reflect the individual character of each site.

*Monitor the behaviour and experiences of visitors to review visitor safety plans*

Learn from experience of incidents and near misses. Add questions about accidents to visitor surveys. Have systems in place for accident reporting and investigation, and for letting others know what lessons you have learned.

*Make sure that your work activities do not expose visitors to risk*

On occasion, this may require access to be diverted or denied, for example, when spraying bracken by helicopter, or during commercial harvesting of timber.