



**INLAND  
WATERWAYS**  
ASSOCIATION

# GUIDANCE NOTE

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*Volunteer Health  
& Welfare*



# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>The Legal Bit</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Health Risk on a Restoration Site</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Stress &amp; Mental Health</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Welfare Facilities</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Drugs &amp; Alcohol</b> .....	<b>11</b>

First published as v.1 in 2022. This is a web-friendly document and will be reviewed and updated when the source legislation changes. Any printed version may not be the latest version and a check should be made on IWA website. IWA has interpreted the current legislation, as dated in the document, in good faith but the reader should check for themselves that it is the latest version and that they are acting within the legal framework.

## INTRODUCTION

The restoration sector attracts volunteers of all ages and from all walks of life. Everyone is different, with different motivations, and it is important to recognise this in how you manage your volunteers. There is strong evidence linking volunteering and improved mental health and wellbeing.

The Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA) acknowledges the problem of ill health arising from work and places a duty of care on the restoration group for your volunteers.

Occupational health should promote and maintain the highest degree of physical, mental and social wellbeing of volunteers. It means keeping volunteers as healthy as possible by removing or preventing the hazards and risks which may cause harm to people at work. A safe environment is one in which individuals feel protected from danger, risk or injury.

*Occupational ill health can be prevented by:*

- 1 Carrying out a suitable risk assessment and reviewing it as necessary.
- 2 Identifying, putting in place, monitoring, reviewing and adjusting measures to control risks.
- 3 Making sure anyone at risk uses the control measures provided.

It is essential that occupational health and its risks are considered at an early stage in the life of a project, ideally at the design or pre-construction planning stage.



**An injury caused by an accident is obvious, but the symptoms of occupational ill health and a person's awareness of it can take months or years to show.**





## THE LEGAL BIT

As a restoration group you must provide a safe place for your volunteers to work. Construction sites are dangerous places, with the operation of plant and equipment and the use of hazardous substances. HSWA places a duty of care which applies to your volunteers and others associated with your work, such as members of the public and visitors. Refer to the guidance note Introduction to Health and Safety Law.



**Regulations provide a legal framework to control hazards. Other guidance notes in this handbook cover specific hazards, such as hazardous substances, noise and vibration.**

The law under the HSWA requires good management and sensible measures to tackle risks. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (MHSWR) are more explicit with the main requirement being to carry out a risk assessment.

Volunteers might only work on a project once a week, or once a month, or only get involved as a one-off in the summer, but it is still important to assess the risk of occupational ill health. For example a volunteer could receive a personal injury from poor manual handling, inhale cement dust because of inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE) or contract Weil's Disease from contaminated water. All work on your restoration site should have a suitable risk assessment in place which addresses the possible short or long term health implications. Refer to the guidance note on Preparing a Risk Assessment.

Another area that you must make an assessment is for the provision of first aid. You must ensure you have adequate first aid equipment and trained volunteers to administer it. Accidents can still happen despite implementing the controls identified in your risk assessment. Certain injuries and diseases need to be reported to the enforcing authority (Health and Safety Executive) under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR). All accidents and near misses must be recorded and used to inform future risk controls. Refer to the guidance note on First Aid at Work and Reporting Accidents.





## HEALTH RISKS ON A RESTORATION SITE

*Health risks that may be encountered on a restoration site are:*

- 1 **Musculoskeletal injuries** as a result of poor manual handling, such as moving a load that is too heavy.
- 2 **Respiratory problems** from inhaling hazardous substances, such as cement dust.
- 3 **Hearing loss** from being exposed to high noise levels from tools and equipment, such as power hammers.
- 4 **Nerve damage** which can result from the use of hand-held vibrating equipment, such as brush cutters.
- 5 **Dermatitis** from contact with hazardous substances, such as wet cement.
- 6 **Asbestos and lead related diseases** from exposure to asbestos and lead containing materials, such as asbestos roofing and lead based paints.
- 7 **Tiredness** increases the risk of human error, mistakes and accidents.
- 8 **Bird and bat droppings**, the main hazard is the inhalation of dust or water droplets that become airborne as a result of disturbing dust. Diseases include Psittacosis, Salmonella and an acne-like skin condition from skin contact.
- 9 **Leptospirosis (Weil's Disease)** carried in the urine of infected rats and present in the water where they may live, such as canals and ponds. Another form is present in the urine of infected cattle. The bacteria can enter the body through unprotected cuts and scratches, by swallowing infected water and through the lining of the nose.
- 10 **Needlestick injuries** from accidental puncture wounds from discarded hypodermic syringes or discarded needles.
- 11 **Contaminated ground** disturbance can release hazardous fibres (asbestos), hazardous gases or fumes and micro-organisms (anthrax spores).



## STRESS & MENTAL HEALTH

Generally, volunteering is beneficial to physical and mental health, and can help to counteract the effects of stress, anger or anxiety. However, you still need to take steps to make sure that volunteers have a positive experience and that volunteering does not create or worsen mental health issues.

*A positive, supportive volunteering experience can be created by:*

- 1 **Sharing ideas:** Encourage a culture that welcomes new ideas and encourages input from all volunteers.
- 2 **Good communication:** Daily briefing to make sure everyone understands the tasks for the day. New or inexperienced volunteers might appreciate a buddy system to explain unfamiliar routines or processes.
- 3 **Sensible timelines:** The work should be well planned with achievable deadlines so volunteers do not feel under pressure to rush the job.
- 4 **Defined roles and expectations:** All volunteers should have a clear explanation of their roles and responsibilities, as well as what they are allowed to do.
- 5 **Match roles to volunteers:** Every volunteer will have different strengths and weaknesses and will find different situations rewarding or stressful so match roles to their preferences and skill set.
- 6 **Provide a safe/quiet space:** For volunteers who need a bit of time out. It could be the back of the van or a private vehicle

Stress is not an illness, but can lead to a reduced ability to perform at work. It can have an impact on a person's health and wellbeing. Positive stress management can increase productivity, efficiency and reduce the likelihood of mental health issues.

*Possible causes of work-related stress encountered on a restoration site include:*

- 1 Insufficient workloads so people feel their skills are underutilized.
- 2 Lack of control over how people do their work.
- 3 Lack of support for the task, poor supervision and incorrect plant, tools, equipment or materials.
- 4 People being asked to do a job for which they have insufficient training or experience.
- 5 Bullying, violence or harassment.
- 6 Blame culture with people afraid to get things wrong or report mistakes.
- 7 Poor physical working conditions.
- 8 Lack of clarity over roles of multiple task leaders.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has produced a workbook, *Tackling Work-related Stress Using the Management Standards Approach* to help organisations meet their legal duty to assess the risks associated with work-related stress and gives guidance on how to manage work-related stress. A link is provided in Useful Resources on p.12.





**If stress is not addressed it can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.**

Your first aid assessment might indicate that it would be beneficial to have a volunteer trained to identify and understand mental health symptoms and be able to support someone experiencing them. Mental health trained first aiders are taught how to recognize warning signs of mental ill health and have the skills and confidence to approach and support someone, while keeping themselves safe.





## WELFARE FACILITIES

Restoration volunteers need adequate welfare facilities and good facilities can have a positive effect on health and welfare. They also help prevent a number of occupational diseases and illnesses. The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (CDM), Schedule 2, sets out the minimum requirements for welfare facilities:

### SANITARY CONVENIENCES

- ① Suitable and sufficient sanitary conveniences must be provided or made available at readily accessible places.
- ② So far as is reasonably practicable, rooms containing sanitary conveniences must be adequately ventilated and lit.
- ③ So far as is reasonably practicable, sanitary conveniences and the rooms containing them must be kept in a clean and orderly condition.
- ④ Separate rooms containing sanitary conveniences must be provided for men and women, except where each convenience is in a separate room, the door of which is capable of being secured from the inside.

### WASHING FACILITIES

- ① Suitable and sufficient washing facilities, including showers if required by the nature of the work or for health reasons, must, so far as is reasonably practicable, be provided or made available at readily accessible places.
- ② Washing facilities must be provided;
  - ▶ In the immediate vicinity of every sanitary convenience, whether or not also provided elsewhere.
  - ▶ In the vicinity of any changing rooms whether or not provided elsewhere.

- ③ Washing facilities must include;
  - ▶ A supply of clean hot and cold, or warm, water (which must be running water so far as is reasonably practicable).
  - ▶ Soap or other suitable means of cleaning.
  - ▶ Towels or other suitable means of drying.
- ④ Rooms containing washing facilities must be sufficiently ventilated and lit.
- ⑤ Washing facilities and the rooms containing them must be kept in a clean and orderly condition.
- ⑥ Subject to sub-paragraph (7), separate washing facilities must be provided for men and women, except where they are provided in a room the door of which is capable of being secured from inside and the facilities in each room are intended to be used by only one person at a time.
- ⑦ Sub-paragraph (6) does not apply to facilities which are provided for washing hands, forearms and the face only.

### DRINKING WATER

- ① An adequate supply of wholesome drinking water must be provided or made available at readily accessible and suitable places.
- ② Where necessary for reasons of health or safety, every supply of drinking water must be conspicuously marked by an appropriate sign.
- ③ Where a supply of drinking water is provided, a sufficient number of suitable cups or other drinking vessels must also be provided, unless the supply of drinking water is in a jet from which persons can drink easily.



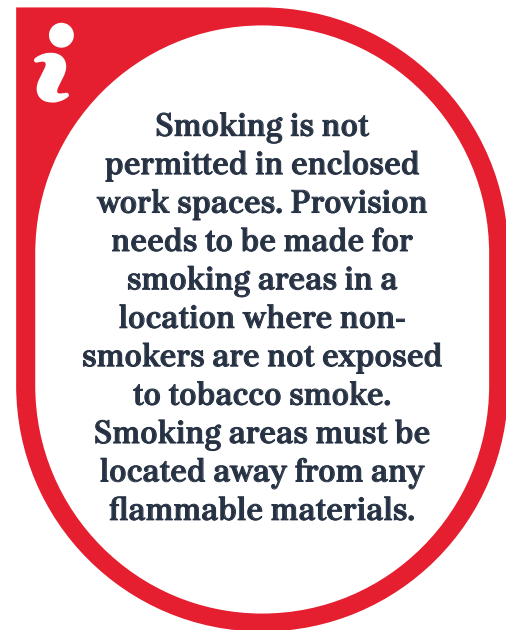
## CHANGING ROOMS AND LOCKERS

- ① Suitable and sufficient changing rooms must be provided or made available at readily accessible places if a worker;
  - ▶ Has to wear special clothing for the purposes of construction work.
  - ▶ Cannot, for reasons of health or propriety, be expected to change elsewhere.
- ② Where necessary for reasons of propriety, there must be separate changing rooms for, or separate use of rooms by, men and women.
- ③ Changing rooms must;
  - ▶ Be provided with seating.
  - ▶ Include, where necessary, facilities to enable a person to dry any special clothing and any personal clothing or effects.
- ④ Suitable and sufficient facilities must, where necessary, be provided or made available at readily accessible places to enable persons to lock away;
  - ▶ Any special clothing which is not taken home.
  - ▶ Their own clothing which is not worn during working hours.
  - ▶ Their personal effects.

## FACILITIES FOR REST

- ① Suitable and sufficient rest rooms or rest areas must be provided or made available at readily accessible places.
- ② Rest rooms and rest areas must;
  - ▶ Be equipped with an adequate number of tables and adequate seating with backs for the number of persons at work likely to use them at any one time.
  - ▶ Where necessary, include suitable facilities for any woman at work who is pregnant or who is a nursing mother to rest lying down.
  - ▶ Include suitable arrangements to ensure that meals can be prepared and eaten.
  - ▶ Include the means for boiling water.
  - ▶ Be maintained at an appropriate temperature.

The facilities provided must be available before any construction starts and remain in place until the end of the project. The siting of facilities must take account the activities being carried out on the project and the location of the workplace(s). The size and suitability of the facilities will depend on the size and nature of the workforce, the nature of the work being undertaken and the duration of the work.



Health and safety law uses the phrase 'so far as is reasonably practicable' which allows restoration groups to consider the risks and associated costs. Restoration work carried out by volunteers is not always a continuous daily process and account must be taken of the way restoration groups arrange work parties. For instance a work party that meets once a month for a day could consider less extensive welfare facilities than a project with daily work parties over 6 months. However restoration groups must provide welfare facilities for their volunteers.

*Some examples to consider:*

- 1 If your work party operates on an occasional basis, such as one day per week you could make use of nearby public conveniences if suitable. In your site induction you would advise your volunteers where the facilities can be found.
- 2 Portaloos offer sanitary conveniences. You may need to provide a means of heating water or an alternative means of washing facilities, such as a supply of wet wipes and a means of disposing of these.
- 3 Where regular work parties are carried out daily, one week at a time. You could set up a temporary shelter using a gazebo with picnic chairs for a rest area.
- 4 Drinking water could be brought to your site in plastic containers.
- 5 A gas fired Burco can be used to heat water. It must be sited so that it doesn't create a hazard.
- 6 For a site that is being used regularly, but not daily, for a long duration you could consider setting up a composting toilet unit.
- 7 A temporary rest area could be built as a lean-to to a store cabin.





## DRUGS & ALCOHOL

Drug and alcohol misuse is a threat to the health, safety and welfare of individuals and others who they work with. People who misuse drugs and alcohol may be under the influence when they report for work and endanger themselves and other volunteers. Alcohol and drugs affect coordination, perception and reaction times so driving, using tools or machinery or working in a hazardous environment must be avoided. Site leaders should be aware of the signs of drug and alcohol misuse and prohibit volunteers under the influence from being present on the restoration site.

The restoration group should develop a policy to address misuse of alcohol and drugs. A disciplinary policy will need to be in place and should form part of any misuse policy and must be communicated to the volunteers.



### *Some definitions:*

- ① **Alcohol:** a colourless, volatile, flammable liquid that forms an intoxicating element in beer, wine and spirits.
- ② **Alcoholic:** a person suffering from alcoholism.
- ③ **Drug:** a medicine or other substance that has a physiological effect when ingested or otherwise introduced into the body.

- ④ **Drug misuse:** the intermittent or continual use of drugs, which causes harm to the individual, their significant others or the wider community.
- ⑤ **Substance abuse or misuse:** the continued use of any mind-altering substance that severely affects a person's physical and mental health, social situation and responsibilities.
- ⑥ **Company premises:** all property owned, operated, leased by or otherwise under the control of an organisation and includes restoration sites.
- ⑦ **Under the influence:** when there is a sufficient amount of the substance in a person's system to produce a positive result from a medical test or breathalizer and/or when the volunteer shows behaviour likely to pose a risk to themselves or others or to interfere with their job performance.

*Alcohol, drug or solvent misuse can be indicated by the following actions:*

- ① Poor timekeeping.
- ② High accident level.
- ③ Confusion and disorientation.
- ④ Poor performance and workmanship,
- ⑤ Irritability, aggression and argumentativeness.
- ⑥ Misconduct.
- ⑦ Failure to remember, or failure to comply with, common instructions.
- ⑧ A sudden need for increased supervision.

## GUIDANCE NOTE

Known or suspected misuse should lead to consultation between site leaders and volunteers to agree a way forward.



Restoration groups can help volunteers who have drug and alcohol issues by providing support to the volunteer by talking to them and advising that they seek medical help.

## USEFUL RESOURCES:

**The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations**

**HSE Managing for Health and Safety HSG65**

**The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations;**

**HSE Tackling work-related stress using the management standards approach**

**The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations**

**HSE guidance on drugs and alcohol misuse**

Sign up to read the full Practical Restoration Handbook and supporting resources here: **[waterways.org.uk/practicalrestorationhandbook](http://waterways.org.uk/practicalrestorationhandbook)**







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