# **Taking Action Safely**

### **For Local Action Groups**

Health & safety, welfare and insurance is, for most, the less fun side of volunteering, but it really is a must to invest some time addressing these aspects before getting stuck into the practical outdoor work.

#### The Government's Health & Safety Executive (HSE) says:

If you carry out volunteering, either as an individual or as part of a community group that has no employees then health and safety law will not normally apply to you. However, you should still carry out your role safely and follow any local government guidelines. For example, a community group of volunteers on a [Himalayan balsam pulling and] litter-picking exercise should check with their local authority if there are any restrictions, such as avoiding public highways.

Under the common law, voluntary organisations and individual volunteers have a duty of care to each other and others who may be affected by their activities. In some cases, people may sue you for damages using the civil law if they are injured as a result of negligence, for example a volunteer injuring a passer-by with a falling branch while carrying out tree maintenance.

## **Health & Safety**

Like many outdoor conservation activities, Himalayan balsam tasks can sometimes take you off the beaten track where the risk of an accident might be raised. With common law duty of care comes the responsibility to understand and communicate the health and safety aspects associated with your tasks. This Balsam Action Toolkit provides some forms to help you with this:

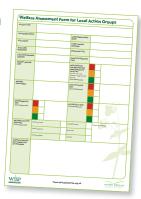
#### A Risk Assessment Form

Help with identifying the hazards and risks associated with balsam tasks, and the measures to minimise risks and deal with emergencies. A completed example risk assessment is provided together with a blank working form that you're welcome to use.



#### A Welfare Assessment Form

Help with addressing welfare aspects e.g. where to wash hands or go to the toilet during tasks. A completed example welfare assessment is provided together with a blank working form that you're welcome to use.



For safety, we recommend that at least one or more members of your group holds a relevant, up-to-date First Aid qualification.

Your local authority Volunteer Coordinator might be able to assist you with the training or the costs towards the training. Do get in touch with us and we can point you in their direction.



There's also a useful Kit List provided in the Balsam Action Toolkit to help you assemble everything you and your group might need for a successful and safe Balsam Bashing event.







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## **Public Liability Insurance**

There's no law that says you must buy insurance for a voluntary or community event, but it is generally regarded as good practice and you might want to make sure you and your group is covered in case something goes wrong i.e. someone makes a claim for an injury sustained while volunteering with you.

#### The HSE says:

Sometimes another body, perhaps a local council you have contact with or someone that you contract with (such as a landowner if the event is taking place on their land), will require you to have public liability insurance. If this is the case, you can ask why they are requiring this because it is not compulsory in law. Sometimes signing a disclaimer will be adequate instead of buying insurance.

If you are hiring equipment check with the company you are hiring it from whether their terms of hire include insurance and read any conditions carefully (particularly any exclusions). If external businesses are providing services, such as food, you should check they have their own insurance, and that it is in force on the day of the event.

If you feel it best to have Public Liability Insurance, there are two avenues you can explore:

#### 1) Teaming up with existing local groups or your community/parish council

See if there are any local volunteer bureaus, community interest companies (CIC) or charities, local conservation or clean up groups, who might already have insurance cover for volunteer work. Ask if you could team up with them and be covered under their policy.

Some community / parish councils provide insurance for local volunteer footpath wardens, and they might be able to add your group to that policy if you help with some path maintenance, for example balsam pulling along local Public Rights of Way. Your county council Volunteer Officer might also be able to help you with this aspect, so do get in touch with us and we can point you in their direction.

## 2) Taking out insurance for your own group

Here are two examples of organisations providing insurance for outdoor volunteer work:

- The Conservation Volunteers: If you are a member of the TCV's Community Network (it's easy to join and there are superb conservation resources you can then tap into) you can benefit from discounted insurance underwritten by Zurich. You will need to quote your TCV membership number when you call Zurich to get a quote. Otherwise Zurich offer an online package of insurance from £96 a year, but member discounts are not available for this package. It includes public liability, personal accident, employer liability, contents cover etc.
- Keep Wales Tidy: KWT runs a Community Group Insurance Scheme, which provides free basic insurance cover to groups formed and constituted in the last 12 months. For groups who have been in existence for longer than 12 months, KWT is asking for a contribution of £50/£35 towards the cost of the basic cover. They will be keen to see your group litter picking alongside your core conservation tasks.

### We welcome your feedback!

We'd be interested to hear your experience with volunteer group health and safety and insurance matters so please do get in touch with us via our website Contact Us page www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk

www.hse.gov.uk/voluntary/volunteers/volunteer-health-and-safety.htm

www.gov.uk/government/publications/can-do-guide-for-organisers-of-voluntary-events/the-can-do-guide-to-organising-and-running-voluntary-and-community-events#part-6-do-i-need-insurance



