

Unit 4 – Risk Management, Safety and Legal Issues

A. Risk Management:

Some consider Risk Management to be no more than common sense. This may be so but risk management requires detailed consideration. It provides a logical process of analysis of risks associated with leading a walk.

Risk management is about being aware of what can happen when you lead a walk and taking steps to limit the possibility of something not going to plan which could result in injury or loss. It involves assessment of actual risk and potential risk of all aspects of your walk including travel to and from your walk, recces and your actual walk. Because the risks can change daily with variable weather, unplanned track closures you will need to continually assess risks involved on your walk. You need to be aware that the perception of the risk varies between individuals, and that reassurance may be needed by some participants even when you have assessed the risks as being low level and manageable. Leaders unobtrusively do this in many ways by suggesting you take more water, take walking poles, walk along the track edge where it's not slippery etc. The majority of risks are handled with common sense, experience and require no formalised process.

What steps can you take to manage risk?

There are excellent guidelines in the Walksafe booklet – see reference at end of unit.

Step 1 – Identify the hazard / risk (real or perceived).

A hazard or risk is a situation with the potential for harm to life, health or property.

To do something about a potential risk we need to first identify a risk or hazard.

Remember what you may perceive as low risk may be more intimidating for a less experienced walker.

Step 2 – Assess the Hazard / Risk.

The risk or hazard is the chance for harm being realised. Risk can be assessed based on the likelihood of consequences.

Questions to ask are:

Can the risk be avoided?

Can the risk be overcome or controlled?

Is the risk acceptable? If so, what are the likely consequences? Should or should we not take the risk(s)?

One example of assessing risk:

<i>Hazard</i>	<i>Likelihood</i>	<i>Consequence</i>	<i>Risk rating</i>	<i>Some examples of controls (Not exhaustive)</i>
Bush fire	Moderate (mid summer - walk in remote bush for example) (Each time will be different)	High	High risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk leader must check with local park ranger before starting a walk in a forest area during fire season. • A radio and mobile phone must be carried on extended walks during the fire season to check daily fire status • Overnight walkers to take food that doesn't require a stove. • Research the walk area in terms of fire zone, emergency exit routes • Consider cancellation • No day walks in forest areas on a total fire ban day.

A simple way of obtaining a risk rating is to plot Likelihood and Consequence into a matrix like this:

Likelihood	Consequence			
	Critical	High	Medium	Low
Almost certain	High risk	High risk	Medium risk	Low risk
Likely	High risk	High risk	Medium risk	Low risk
Moderate	High risk	High risk	Medium risk	Low risk
Unlikely	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk

Look across the columns for the consequence that matches your hazard. Then look down the rows for the probability of the hazard occurring for the particular activity you are considering. Where the column and row meet gives you the risk rating. The risk rating is a guide to what degree of control action is required.

Source: www.bushwalkingvictoria.org.au Risk Management Guidelines for Bushwalking Victoria Member Clubs Version 3.0 July 2011 pages 4 and 6.

Step 3 - Control the Risk

Questions to ask are:

What are the alternatives?

When there is more than one way to deal with the risk, what are the options and consequences of each option?

How can we confine the risk(s) to the one(s) we have anticipated and evaluated?

Once you have identified hazards and assessed risks, you next decide on what is an appropriate control of that risk.

Low risks can be addressed with some simple precautionary measures such as:

- advisory notes;
- verbal reminders;
- checklists; or
- simple training.

Higher risks might require more definite actions such as:

- compulsory gear checks before a trip;
- a required training qualification or proven competency;
- a certain level of fitness.

When you assess the risk and decide that the risk is too high:

- Plan something less ambitious
- Plan another walk
- Alter the walk
- Shorten the walk
- Cancel the walk

B. Safety:

When we go for a walk we wish to remain safe and we also want to ensure that walkers in our care are safe. So how can we maximise safety during a walk?

Clubs should have specific policies to ensure safety.

What is your club policy regarding:

- High fire danger;
- High temperatures;
- Anticipated adverse weather;
- First aid equipment;
- Emergency communications equipment.

C. Legal Issues and Duty of Care:

The walk leader's duty of care is stated as:

“What a reasonably prudent walk leader would do to take reasonable care to avoid exposing fellow walkers (having regard to their age, experience, skill and other individual matters) to any unreasonable risks of injury or loss”

Source: www.bushwalkingvictoria.org.au Policies > Risk management guidelines for Bushwalking Victoria club members

As a leader you need to consider the following as part of your duty of care

- Plan thoroughly
- Ask for advice
- Check that the walk is within everyone's capabilities (including your own)
- Communicate details of the walk with the participants

BWV Walk Leader Training



- Check everyone's health and fitness - is everyone capable enough to complete the walk?
- Specify required clothing and equipment – and check at the start of the walk
- Ensure first aid kit is carried
- Know how to deal with an emergency situation
- Keep accurate records especially if an incident occurs
Refer to BWV website Guidelines for Critical incident management
- Check the weather conditions
- Ensure you have access to communications if needed.

Further reading

www.bushwalkingvictoria.org.au > publications>risk management for clubs

www.bushwalkingvictoria.org.au >walksafe

www.outdoorleaderonline > Chapter 6 Risk perception and risk management