

Volunteers

Whilst charities make extensive use of volunteers they are often overlooked when it comes to health and safety.

Responsibilities and accountabilities are often confused and contradictory. Controls can be minimal, ad hoc and unpracticed. Older volunteers may be unfamiliar with modern health and safety practices and are often reluctant to accept change. It is of the greatest importance that the same level of health and safety information, instruction training and protection should be provided to volunteers as to employees.

A detailed record should be maintained of all volunteers and a formal system should be introduced to ensure that volunteers are regularly appraised to ensure that they are able to undertake their duties without risks to their health, safety and welfare and that they do not endanger the health, safety and welfare of others. Volunteers should have regular reviews in the same way as if they were employed to ensure that they are aware of exactly what their duties comprise, the procedures that are in place to perform them and that they have the necessary instruction, information and training, and protective equipment in order to carry these out safely.

The appraisal is not a substitute for the training, instruction etc. itself, but is a formal meeting to give the volunteer the opportunity to confirm that they do understand what is expected of them and that they have everything they need to carry this out safely. By the same token of course, the volunteer can use the opportunity to say that they are not sure what they are meant to be doing and that they feel they need more training, instruction etc. and a timetable can then be agreed to put this in place.

The health of the volunteer should be discussed to ensure that they are still able to undertake their duties and that they are still happy to continue doing so. With increasing numbers of older volunteers it is possible that persons may be undertaking duties for which they are no longer suited, such as jobs involving manual handling or climbing stairs.

In summary, the appraisal is really an opportunity for both parties to agree that they are happy with the current situation or if any changes are required. It could be that a volunteer is no longer keen to be involved with carrying cash, or undertaking activities which require a large amount of physical effort. Without an opportunity to raise such concerns persons may feel obliged to continue duties that could result in an accident or injury.

A formal record should be kept of the meeting ideally signed by both parties. The appraisal should be carried out by the Head of the Department, Personnel Officer if there is one, or the person with overall responsibility for volunteers. Ideally this exercise should be undertaken on an annual basis.