

Parades and charity walks

Large numbers of people walking along roads obviously creates a hazard, and unless adequate precautions are taken to safeguard walkers, there is a high risk of death and injury.

In hours of darkness, the danger is even greater and therefore The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA in the UK) discourages walks at night. Whereas in the past the Gardai would take control of walks and parades, close roads, stop traffic and provide general marshalling, they are now much less likely to be prepared to do so. This means that there is a much greater responsibility on the organisers to provide the necessary stewarding.

Initial planning

The following should be done prior to the event:

Contact the Gardai for guidance and give them full details of the route, numbers involved, times and nature of the walk or parade

Ask the Gardai if they are able to marshal the event. They may still be prepared to do so in your area

Assess if any official road closures are required for the event. If so, contact the local authority. Note there is normally a charge for this application

Carefully plan the route to avoid dangerous junctions and minimise the number of roads which need to be crossed

Restrict walkers to a single side of the road

Recruit sufficient numbers of safety marshals so they can be positioned at all key points; at road junctions, at the front and rear of the walkers and alongside on the offside of the road

Provide marshals with high visibility jackets

Remember that members of the public do not have any legal powers to stop or direct traffic. However, drivers do have a duty of care and should stop if someone in a high visibility jacket is helping children to cross a road

RoSPA advice for charity walks

The following precautions have been devised by RoSPA to minimise the risk of accidents:-

1. A minimum age of at least 16 years is preferable
2. Where younger persons are included they should be adequately supervised by responsible adults
3. Suitable walking footwear should be worn
4. Bright clothing should be worn by walkers to help drivers to see them.
5. During the day, wearing something fluorescent is best. In the dark walkers should wear retro-reflective materials
6. The Gardai should be asked for their advice on choice of route, time and day and their directions should be obeyed
7. In any event, heavily trafficked roads should be avoided, especially at night Walkers should be started at intervals;
8. mass starts are dangerous The start and finish should be off the road
9. RoSPA advice refers walkers to the UK Highway Code, please refer to the Irish Rules of the Road - specifically to Rules for other Road Users - Pedestrians and Signaling (hand signals)
10. Where there is no footpath, participants should walk on the right hand side of the road, facing oncoming traffic.
11. Any vehicles used in a supervisory capacity should not travel at a slow speed and thus cause obstruction
12. to other traffic
13. In rural areas, walkers should be sure to close any gates they have to pass through, so that animals cannot stray onto the highway
14. There should be a follow-up system so that no participant is left behind needing help

(Please note that the ROI Rules of the Road should be referred to under point 9 above)