

Volunteers' Health & Safety Guide



waterway recovery group

Useful information

This booklet contains important initial Health & Safety information that new volunteers need to know.

Further Health & Safety information, including downloadable versions of this booklet and the much more detailed Practical Restoration Handbook, is available on the WRG web site:

www.wrg.org.uk

The contact address for all WRG Health & Safety matters including Driver Authorisation, requests for further copies of this booklet and the address for accident reports to be sent to is as follows:

Waterway Recovery Group, PO Box 114, Rickmansworth WD3 1ZY

email: enquiries@wrg.org.uk



Always ensure that you are working a safe distance away from other people.

This booklet was written by WRG and typeset by Martin Ludgate. Photos by WRG.

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Introduction

To most of you, work on a canal or other waterway is a new experience. Despite its peaceful setting the site you will be working on is basically a construction site that represents hazards to you, your fellow volunteers and members of the public. It is therefore subject to many of the same safety rules as a professional building site.

The fact that we are a volunteer organisation without the resources of a large professional construction company does not mean that we should be prepared to accept any compromises at all on such an important matter as Health & Safety.

This brief guide has been issued to you to explain some of the safety requirements and dangers and **must** be read before you start work.

It represents only the first part of your Health & Safety induction; when you arrive on site you will be given all the training and information necessary for you to carry out the work safely and enjoyably. In particular a Health & Safety Plan will exist for the project - you should consult this whenever you have a query; if you are unsure about anything you should ask the Site Leader.

You **must** follow the Site Leader's instructions at all times.

IF YOU FAIL TO FOLLOW SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS YOU WILL BE BARRED FROM SITE.

Always remember that you are responsible not only for your own safety but also the safety of others working with you.

If you see anyone else working in an unsafe way, you have a duty to notify the Site Leader to stop this - **do not just ignore it.**

We hope that you enjoy your work with us. You are more likely to do that if you follow these simple guidelines.

1.1 General work habits

The well-known phrase 'a place for everything and everything in its place' is one of the guiding principles of accident prevention. Good housekeeping not only reduces accident risks by eliminating the physical hazards, but personnel can work more easily in clean and tidy surroundings than when disorder prevails. Too many accidents occur as a result of poor housekeeping.

The simplest contribution you can make to the safety of yourself and others is to practice good housekeeping within your own work area. For example:

- (a) Never leave tools in a position where they represent a hazard to yourself or others, for example on top of a wall or lying on the ground. When you have finished using them, put them away tidily and in a clean and serviceable condition.
- (b) Always tidy up after completing the job, and keep it tidy while you work.
- (c) If you see any material or equipment in a position that is likely to cause an accident, move it to a safe place. *For example broken glass and nails protruding from boards are common causes of injury.*
- (d) Encourage others to follow your efforts in good housekeeping.
- (e) Keep roads, gangways and all other routes free from obstruction at all times.
- (f) Materials must always be stored safely, neatly and tidily and they should never be over-stacked so that they become a potential falling hazard.

1.2 Makeshifts make accidents

Always use **the right tool for the right job.**

Do not try to perform an unfamiliar job without instruction. Always observe common-sense safety practices and if in doubt, don't hesitate to ask!

Keep your eyes and mind on the work in hand. Think the job out before you start.

Encourage others by working safely and setting a good example, and look out for the safety of others including members of the public and other visitors to the site.

Always ensure there is safe access to wherever you are working. *For example do not expose yourself to risk by climbing up scaffolding or brickwork - use a ladder. Make sure that it is leaned to the proper angle and secured to prevent movement, and that there isn't mud on the steps or on your boots that will make it dangerous - both for yourself and the next person to use the ladder after you. Do not use a ladder with damaged or missing rungs.*

THINK SAFELY - ACT SAFELY.

Personal Protection

2.0 Protective clothing and equipment

When working it is almost inevitable that you will come into contact with some form of material - liquid or solid, which can cause harm to you if protective clothing is not worn. Make sure that you have the correct type of protection for the job. Always take good care of protective clothing and equipment required for your safety, otherwise it may become a danger to yourself and others who may use it.

Your site leader should provide you with all mandatory safety equipment. If you think you need something to protect you, ask for it and make sure you get it.

2.1 Protection of head

It is mandatory that you wear a safety helmet conforming to BS5240 when instructed either by the site leader or in the Site Safety Plan. In practice, almost all WRG work sites are 'hard hat areas'.

2.2. Protection of eyes

YOU CAN LOSE YOUR SIGHT ONLY ONCE - SO PROTECT YOUR EYES

Whilst working, follow these rules:

- (a) You must wear goggles or other eye protection (to BS2092) to protect your eyes whenever you are working near any of the many different types of potential eye hazard. *For example dust, splashes from concrete mixers or pouring concrete, flying particles, fumes and injurious light and heat rays.*

Make sure you have the correct eye protection for the work and wear it properly.

- (b) If you are doing work involving chipping, grinding, etc., remember the passer-by. Where necessary erect a screen.



Almost all WRG work sites are 'hard hat areas'.

2.3 Protection of Hands and Skin

If you experience any skin irritation, stop working and consult the site leader at once.

Wash your hands at break times, after work and whenever they are contaminated. Use soap and water and dry them thoroughly.

If a mild cleansing agent is necessary, only use a proprietary brand designed for that purpose, then remove it thoroughly with soap and water and rinse well.

Do not use motor spirit, paraffin or abrasives to clean the skin. Use of these can cause skin irritations and dermatitis.

Where gloves or barrier creams are required, use them.



Make sure that you have the correct type of protection for the job.

2.4 Protection of Feet

You are strongly advised always to wear safety boots or shoes with toe and sole protection - they have prevented many crippling accidents.

For some jobs - for example those involving moving heavy materials such as stone - the use of safety footwear is compulsory. The site leader will ensure that only people wearing appropriate foot protection will be permitted to do these jobs.

Do not wear boots and shoes that require repair.

2.5 Protection of Hearing

Prolonged exposure to high intensity noise levels will lead to permanent impairment of your hearing. When working with noisy machinery, or when working close to somebody who is using noisy machinery, you must wear ear protection.

Always consider other people when you are using noisy machinery: make sure people working close to you are wearing ear-protection; look out for passers-by, stop work if they come close to you and do not start again until they have passed.

A good 'rule of thumb' is that if you have to raise your voice to talk to people near you, then you (and they) should be wearing ear protection.

2.6 Protection from extremes of temperature

Take precautions against the effects of hot or cold weather conditions:

- (a) In hot weather use sun protection and drink plenty of cold drinks.
- (b) In cold weather wear warm clothing and drink hot drinks.

If working in hot or cold weather, watch out for any signs of heat exhaustion, sunstroke and hypothermia - in yourself and other volunteers. If you start suffering from the effects of heat or cold, it is not only dangerous to your own health but could easily cause loss of concentration and consequent danger to others too. Stop work immediately and inform the Site Leader.

Site Hazards

3.0 Substances hazardous to health

On a site you will meet many substances which, if not properly handled, may injure your health.

These may include fuel, oils, greases, creosote, tar, paints and cement/concrete. Information on the hazards these present will be available in the Site Safety Plan.

Cement dust and wet concrete and mortars are particularly hazardous. With sensitive skins, burning can take place very quickly and all users should be fully aware of the hazard and of the precautions necessary. *A particular danger is trapping of dust or splashes, e.g. around the top of boots, where damage is accelerated by abrasion and rubbing.*

Information on the hazards these present will be available in the Site Safety Plan.

Where protective equipment is indicated, use it! It is provided for your safety.

First Aid Measures

Eye Contact: wash eyes immediately with plenty of clean water for at least 15 minutes and seek medical advice without delay.

Skin Contact: wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water before continuing. Clothing contaminated by wet cement, concrete or mortar should be removed and washed thoroughly before use.

If irritation, pain or other skin trouble occurs, tell the site leader and seek medical advice.

3.1 Correct handling and lifting

Correct manual lifting and handling of a load prevent strain and reduce effort. The persistent use of bad lifting methods causes strains which may eventually become severe. If you have suffered a back strain you will know the agony that can result.

When lifting a load always:

- (a) Get help if the load is beyond your capacity or is awkward in shape. Check the Site Safety Plan, and use mechanical assistance if it is available.
- (b) Look out for splinters, projecting nails, wire or sharp edges.

- (c) Wear gloves when handling materials.
- (d) Stop work immediately if you feel a strain: to carry on might result in a serious injury.
- (e) When working in a gang, take your instructions from one person only.

Always lift in the approved manner:

- Feet apart about 12-18 inches (300-450mm).
- One foot in front of the other.
- Chin in - avoid your head dropping backwards or forwards.
- Knees in the crouch position.
- Get a firm grip on the load.
- Lift with your back straight and use your thigh muscles.

Lift in easy stages.

Do not change grip whilst carrying.

To lower a load, always use the reverse of the above directions.

When pushing, pulling, dragging or shovelling any load always apply the above principles.

3.2 Fire prevention and control

Fire Prevention

Fire prevention is the key objective. Good house-keeping will go a long way towards preventing fires. Rubbish, paper, oily rags, etc. can ignite by heat and fumes from mechanical plant, or by discarded cigarettes or sparks from bonfires.

Allow engines on mechanical plant to cool before refuelling.

Remember, trenches and lock chambers can fill with dense fumes.

Prevent means of ignition from coming into contact with a fuel/air mixture, e.g. overheating mechanical equipment, faulty/over-heating electrical equipment.

Do not allow the accumulation of flammable material.

If you smoke, be very careful when discarding a cigarette end.

Bonfire Safety

Bonfires can be a safe method of disposing of cut down vegetation etc. on site if you follow these safety precautions:

Never use petrol to light a fire.

Choose your bonfire site carefully:

- on level ground.
- where it will not block access for volunteers or passers-by.
- where smoke will not be a nuisance or hazard on the site or to local residences or nearby roads
- away from dry grass or vegetation that might catch fire.

Never light a fire under or close to trees or power cables.

Never light a fire in a strong wind, as it may blow out of control.

Never over-stack a bonfire such that it is likely to fall over.

Always watch that sparks and flying embers do not set light to anything.

Never leave a fire unattended: always wait until it has burned down before leaving site.

Remember to stop feeding a bonfire early enough to allow it time to burn down before the end of the working day.

Dealing with Fires

Ensure that the Site Leader is informed if fire breaks out, if a bonfire has got out of control, or if there is a fire hazard e.g. spilled petrol.

If there is a fire on site or in the accommodation, follow the agreed emergency plan. Do not put yourself at any risk if you attempt to extinguish the fire - make sure that somebody calls the Fire Brigade to deal with it

Ensure that you and the other volunteers get to a place of safety away from the fire.

If a person's clothing is on fire don't hesitate to use a water or powder extinguisher on them. Alternatively throw a rug or blanket over them to smother the flames, and roll them on the ground.

As soon as possible cool any burnt skin with cold water. Do not attempt to remove burnt clothing. Seek medical attention.

3.3 Hand Tools

- (a) Always use the correct tool for the job.
- (b) Do not use damaged or worn tools.
- (c) Report any breakages to the site leader.
- (d) If using a sharp tool, keep your hands behind the cutting edge.
- (e) Do not keep sharp tools in your pocket.
- (f) Keep all tools clean and in good condition. Sharp tools when not in use should have their cutting edges covered.
- (g) Always wear gloves and other personal protection if they are appropriate to the tool and the job.
- (h) Always ensure that you are working a safe distance away from other people, *especially when any of you are using tools such as mattocks and axes which are swung around at arm's length.*

3.4 Portable Power Tools

You may only use portable power tools such as drills, breakers, and strimmers with the site leader's permission. If you have not used that type of power tool before, you may only use it after training on site and with initial supervision by an experienced user of that type of tool.

Always wear the correct protective clothing.

Before you start a power tool, **always** make sure you know how to stop it.

If a power tool breaks down do not try to repair it yourself; take the tool to the site leader: otherwise you could make a simple repair into a major one.

3.5 Weil's Disease (Leptospyrosis)

There has recently been an increase in reported cases of Weil's Disease in people who work in a wet or agricultural environment. It is carried by rats and spread through their urine. Humans can catch the disease by contaminated water getting into cuts or skin abrasions.

If you have influenza-like symptoms after working in the canal, consult your doctor, telling him/her that you have been working in an environment where Leptospyrosis is a possibility. A simple blood test will give confirmation and the correct treatment.

WRG Vehicles and Plant

4.0 Driver Authorisation

WRG requires all operators and drivers to have received training before using plant or vehicles. When trained, you will receive an authorisation card which must be carried whenever you are using the equipment and which must be shown on demand to anyone requesting to see it. Your site leader will give you full details of the training required and of how to obtain it.

4.1 WRG Road-Going Vehicles

The following are minimum requirements for eligibility for training to drive Waterway Recovery Group owned or insured road-going vehicles.

Any driver must:

- (1) Be 25 years of age or over.
- (2) Have held a full driving licence for this class of vehicle for one year.
- (3) Have no current penalty points on the licence.
- (4) Have no medical condition which requires notification to DVLA.
- (5) Have no special terms currently imposed on their own policies.
- (6) Have their driving licence on their person.
- (7) Be a competent driver of that type of vehicle.
- (8) Be authorised by the Site Leader or the keeper of the vehicle to drive it.
- (9) Be entirely sober.

Some of the above requirements can be modified in individual cases by written application to WRG at the address given on page 11.

Every vehicle has an official keeper and permission must be obtained from that keeper before authorisation is given to drive.

All vehicle documents are held centrally at the registered office and will be produced on request at Rickmansworth Police Station.

If you are stopped and do not have your licence with you, you will have to travel to Rickmansworth to produce it.



Ensure you are trained before using WRG vehicles.



Mechanical plant may only be used by competent persons.

4.2 Site Plant

Mechanical plant, including lifting gear, may only be driven or used by competent persons holding the necessary authorisation card and with the permission of the site leader who must satisfy him/herself that drivers/operators are aware of the correct method of operating the plant.

It is a legal requirement that anyone operating lifting gear of any type must be over 21.

Before you start a item of mechanical plant, **always** make sure you know how to stop it.

When the plant is being checked, prior to each working day, the most important points to look at are:-

- Tyres or tracks
- Steering
- Brakes
- Cracks and leaks on the hydraulic hoses and fittings
- Oil and engine coolant levels and leaks.

All plant and machinery must be kept and maintained in an efficient state, and in good working order and in a good state of repair.

Any defects must be reported to the site leader.

4.3 Points to Watch

When plant is being operated in a confined space or the operator's view is restricted, the operator must have someone to guide him/her.

Never reach under the raised body of a tipper lorry or dumper.

Never use plant or equipment for work it has not been designed to do.

Ensure that warning notices '**Keep clear of swing area**' are fitted to cranes and earth moving equipment that pivot round during operation.

Never carry passengers unless there is proper provision for them.

Never load a dumper with the engine running.

Never remain seated on a dumper while it is being loaded mechanically e.g. by an excavator or crane.

Never begin loading a dumper mechanically until the dumper driver has stopped the engine, got off and is out of reach of your machine.

Never reach you arm into the drum of a concrete mixer while it is running.

Accidents

5.0 What to do

The following is general information applicable to all sites. Additional information for your site will be provided by the site leader.

In the event of an accident involving personal injury the most important thing is to prevent further injury to the victim.

Make safe by turning off plant and making adjacent dangers secure.

Carefully support the patient and make comfortable. **Keep the patient warm.**

Report the accident immediately to the site leader.

5.1 First Aid Kits

First aid kits are provided in every accommodation, in WRG vehicles and on every site.

If you injure yourself - use them!

Report all uses of a first aid kit to the site leader so that they can arrange for replacement items and decide whether you need further attention and whether an accident report form need to be completed.

Do not remove first aid kits from their proper place.

Take care of first aid kits and keep them clean - you never know when you may need one!



*Remember the passer by:
where necessary erect a screen.*



Where protective equipment is indicated use it - it is provided for your safety

THE INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION and waterway recovery group HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

It is the policy of the Inland Waterways Association and the Waterway Recovery Group when engaged on or associated with any restoration work or other projects connected with waterways to ensure that all reasonable and practicable safeguards are taken for the safety and welfare of all employees, volunteer workers, and visitors who are likely to be involved. This is not only for the benefit of such employees, volunteer workers and visitors but also to minimise pollution of the environment where possible.

Accident prevention has to have priority in all aspects of the Association's work. The Association therefore ensures that so far as it possibly can, all conditions in which its members and any others are involved are both healthy and safe.

The Association makes the maximum effort to see that all supervisory staff and others in authority observe the Association's policy in matters of health and safety working. The same is expected and required from its members, voluntary workers, and any person employed by it, at all times. To encourage this, the Association places great emphasis on the availability of both adequate and efficient safety equipment.

Whilst engaged in any project or associated with it in any way, members are urged in their own interests and that of their colleagues to observe health and safety standards and in no way to jeopardise the high standard required by the Association. Full co-operation and communication throughout the organisation, whether on site or otherwise, must therefore be maintained. Any matter which those participating in any activity consider may be a danger, to either health or safety, should be brought to the notice of their supervisors at the earliest opportunity.

Remember...

MOST OF THIS BOOKLET IS ABOUT SITE SAFETY, BUT MOST ACCIDENTS HAPPEN IN THE HOME (OR IN THIS CASE THE ACCOMMODATION).

BE SAFE AT ALL TIMES, NOT JUST WHEN WORKING ON SITE!



Always keep your workspace tidy.



Accident prevention is to have priority in all aspects of our work.