



MANAGING VOLUNTEER RISKS – WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Assess your current awareness and action to manage risks in your organization's volunteer program.

1. Have you analyzed tasks volunteers perform from the standpoint of safety considerations for volunteers and for others around them? Yes No

If so, how?

2. Have you analyzed those tasks from the standpoint of skills that might be required of volunteers? Yes No

3. Do you interview potential and current volunteers to learn what skills they do or do not have, and assign work accordingly? Yes No

4. Do any volunteers drive either their own vehicles or vehicles belonging to the organization during the course of their duty? Yes No

If so, do they transport other volunteers, staff, or clients? Yes No

5. Have you inspected the locations where volunteers are assigned for potential hazards such as:

- Slip and fall hazards Yes No
- Potential fire hazards Yes No
- Poor security Yes No
- Poor lighting Yes No

6. Do you use, or have you identified the need for, any special equipment or tools required to enable volunteers to work safely? Yes No

Do you provide these? Yes No

Do you train volunteers in the safest ways to use these? Yes No

7. Do you interview volunteers about any medical conditions they have, such as allergies, that might pose a risk for certain tasks? Yes No

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8. Do you have a formal or informal training program for volunteers, to ensure that they can perform their tasks skillfully and safely, and know how to report any problems that they encounter?
___ Yes ___ No
9. Are supervisors accountable for making sure volunteers perform their duties the way they have been trained? ___ Yes ___ No
10. For volunteers who interact with children, elders or others who might be vulnerable to abuse, do you conduct criminal background checks? ___ Yes ___ No
11. Do you have a specific action plan in the event a volunteer is injured, injures someone, or damages someone's property? ___ Yes ___ No
12. Do you have a process to investigate complaints against volunteers and take appropriate action?
___ Yes ___ No
13. Do you provide insurance protection for your volunteers? ___ Yes ___ No
If so, what kind?

Checklist to minimize the most common volunteer risks

A few practical measures to consider, in addressing the most common risks resulting in claims we have seen in the VIS® program:

- Ensure each volunteer is given a thorough orientation to his or her role, the environment in which he or she will be working, all risks involved, and any procedures or protocol that will help minimize the risk.
- Clear walkways, building entrances, steps, etc. of anything that might cause a volunteer to slip or trip.
- When volunteers are assigned to another location, make sure those areas also have been freed of fall hazards.
- Caution volunteers that they might need to use more care walking than they do when they are in their own homes.

If volunteers are asked to lift or carry:

- Is the material light enough and compact enough to lift safely?
- Have volunteers been trained in safe lifting techniques?

- Can you reduce the risk of injury by rearranging items to be lifted, assigning more (or stronger) volunteers to the task, or obtaining hand trucks, a dolly or other materials-handling equipment?
- Identify what equipment or tools volunteers use.
- Have they been trained to use these properly?
- Have they demonstrated that they truly can use these safely?
- If there is a risk of cuts or scratches in the volunteer's work, require long sleeves and gloves.
- Consider any allergies or special medical needs the volunteer might have, before assigning tasks.
- Have – and enforce – a formal policy for screening and supervising volunteers. Require volunteers to follow your rules, and hold them accountable for doing so.
- Make sure volunteers know – and follow – the chain of command for reporting abuse or other problems they observe in the course of their work.
- For volunteers who are caregivers, train them in the communication aspects of their duty, so they can understand the wants, needs and fears of the person they are caring for.
- Obtain motor vehicle records and copies of drivers' licenses for all of the volunteers who will drive your organization's vehicles or use their own cars on organization business.
- Devote adequate time to vehicle safety, particularly with respect to driving in inclement weather.
- Monitor the driving of elderly volunteers. VIS® can suggest resources for help in doing this. Contact William Henry of VIS (william.henry@visvolunteers.com) for more information.