



Manx Footpaths Conservation Group

Ref. Final

Risk Assessment of Walks

Guidelines for Walk Leaders

Walking, especially the sort that we do on the Island is generally low risk. However, as walks are organised activities, those who organize and lead them are regarded, in law, as having an **'enhanced duty of care'** to the people who attend. In recognition of this potential liability and to ensure the safety of walkers and protect all members and officers against possible legal claims MFCG has relevant insurance in place through our affiliation with Ramblers. It is a condition of this policy that all walks are **risk assessed**.

There are two main reasons why a risk assessment is required:

1. In the event of an incident on a walk, there is a chance that an injured party could allege it was a result of negligence and attempt to claim damages from the Walk Leader and the Club. Being able to produce evidence of a properly completed risk assessment which showed that the Leader was aware of the risks on the walk and had taken appropriate action to mitigate them could be a crucial defence against allegations of negligence.
2. If done properly, a risk assessment can make a difference in helping to look after walkers. Walk Leaders should carry a copy of the walk risk assessment with them since it provides a handy check list of potential problems.

The club will appoint a Committee Member as the Safety Officer who will have responsibility for the oversight of safety issues, including walk risk assessments. Each risk assessment should be forwarded to the Safety Officer on completion, and in any event prior to the walk, and will form part of a reference database which can be accessed online by all walk leaders.

Risk Assessments

Risk assessments are the documentation of common sense and are not onerous to prepare. You should see them as a way of helping you to remember any special points of concern or actions to be taken on a walk. In general, it will be the responsibility of the leader to complete the risk assessment.

Risk assessment is not about eliminating risk – in any case, that would be impossible. It is just a way of formalising something that all of us do anyway – looking out for and assessing risks and taking steps to reduce them. It is important to document the risk because, in the case of an incident, we can protect ourselves by demonstrating we took due care in managing risks.

All routes being walked need to be risk assessed, in advance, but it is not necessary to do this before every walk. It is recommended that a risk assessment is updated every six months or every year – or at any time, if there has been a significant change on the ground. Similarly, if you undertake the walk with a new group of people with different needs a new risk assessment should be done.

Be mindful that what represents a hazard for a Thursday walk is not necessarily going to impact on a Saturday walk in the same way.

Important points to remember

- A pre-walk recce is recommended best practice for all walk leaders. There may be times (illness, holiday, work commitments etc.) when you cannot conduct a recce. In this situation, you can ask another walk leader to undertake the recce for you.
- Risks will vary from person to person. Remember that you need to assess risks for your walkers, not for you.
- Risks will vary according to weather conditions and season. Use your common sense to think about how changing conditions might affect a route, and risk assess in different seasons.
- Keep things in proportion! Walking is one of the lowest risk physical activities. Resist the temptation to see risks everywhere.

The most likely risks you will encounter are from:

- Traffic, particularly at road crossings and where walks run alongside / across busy roads.
- Slips and trips on uneven and slippery paths, steps and beach rocks etc.
- Animals, particularly farm livestock.
- Areas of inland and coastal water.

Carrying out the Assessment

It is acceptable for leaders to 'cut and paste' from assessments held in the database when preparing a new walk risk assessment. However, the conditions along a walking route should not be assumed to remain unchanged. For this reason, risk assessments held in the database are to be treated as research references when preparing your own recce and risk assessment.

There is no single risk assessment format that offers a best solution. However, a simple format that works well is using a scanned copy OS extract with the walk clearly marked. Numbered arrows can be used to mark the location of any hazard. These markers are then listed on the risk assessment, with a brief description of the hazard and the action to be taken to mitigate the risk. Alternatives formats are:

- a hand drawn map, which provides the same basic reference information (OS longitude / latitude box at start position, location of hazards along trek route etc.)
- a photo of the OS extract, as an alternative to a scanned copy
- copy extracts from walking books or guides