

Safety and Risk Management Resource and Checklist



a program of the Jane Goodall Institute

A successful Roots & Shoots program is a safe one. That is why Roots & Shoots encourages all of its groups to carefully consider safety issues while planning events and activities.

The following risk management review offers suggestions for controlling and minimizing accidents. Successful and safe programs require advance planning and common sense.

Prepare in Advance

The following is a scenario of a Roots & Shoots group's activity that did not take safety into consideration:

A Roots & Shoots group plans to do a river cleanup on Earth Day. The group meets at the riverside. They have garbage bags and canoes. They split into two groups: one to walk along the riverside to pick up trash and one to take the canoes into the river to get hard-to-reach spots.

Everything starts out fine, but some of the members are wearing sandals that quickly get muddy. One student cuts his toe on a broken bottle hidden in the mud. They also do not have gloves, and everything they pull out of the water is slimy and gross. Soon the hot sun, combined with the buzzing of mosquitoes, makes everyone feel tired, thirsty and cranky.

Suddenly they hear screams from the river. One of the teams in the canoes was trying to haul an old tire out of the river when their canoe flipped over dumping everyone (and the trash) into the river. Everyone is wearing life jackets and three of the canoeists make it safely back to shore. However, it is clear that one of the canoeists is not a strong swimmer who takes a while to make it back in. One of the senior group members is certified in water safety and is able to encourage the person from the river.

The next day the group leader gets a phone call from an angry parent. Why was her son at the river? She never gave him permission to go. She is also very angry that her son came home sun burned, mosquito-bitten and distraught.

What could this group have done differently to keep the project from going sour?

Identifying Risk

The first step in preparing for a Roots & Shoots project is to identify potential risks. What are things that could go wrong? In the scenario above, the Roots & Shoots group could have asked some questions beforehand, such as:

- Are we familiar with the place we are going?
- What physical challenges are involved with this project?
- How could someone get hurt while volunteering for this project?
- Could someone not involved with the project get hurt?
- How could someone get hurt while going to and from this project?
- If something did go wrong, how could this hurt the reputation of our group and the Roots & Shoots program?

Of course, it is impossible to identify every risk that could occur because environments and circumstances change. That is why it is so important to be extra-sensitive to the importance of risk management before every project.

Evaluating Risk

The next step is to evaluate the risks that your group has identified. At this point, ask yourself what is the potential frequency of a particular risk, as well as its severity. While a greater number of people are more likely to get bitten by mosquitoes (high-frequency/low severity), a water accident is far more severe (low frequency/high severity).

By evaluating risks, your group can decide which ones are tolerable and which ones can be prevented. You can figure out which are covered by insurance and which are not. (Please remember that your group's activities and projects are not covered by the Roots & Shoots National Office's insurance. Ask the staff at your project's location for specific insurance requirements). Consider which risks can be reduced without sacrificing the quality of the project. A group can choose to scale back the project to one in which it can better control the outcomes (both positive and negative).

For example, by requiring everyone on the trip to have a signed parent permission slip and liability release form, access to sun lotion, a hat, proper shoes, gloves and insect repellent, many risks are controlled in advance.

By evaluating risk, the group may decide to make sure the canoes are staffed with people who have experience with water safety, or that everyone under 16 must wear a life jacket. Or the group may decide that the risks in the water are too great and eliminate the canoe element of the clean up and have members clean up the river banks instead.

Controlling Risk

Once the group has acknowledged the risks associated with an event or project, you can decide how best to respond. Group leaders have a few options to control risk:

- Avoidance:** Prohibit the activity if the risk is too great. For example, the group may decide that closed door, one-on-one contact between a minor and an adult should be avoided. Likewise, using electric tools without adequate supervision or proper training should be avoided.
- Modification:** Change the activity so that the frequency and severity of risk decreases to an acceptable level. A group can use written guidelines, provide training, conduct safety programs and ensure legal compliance to modify risk. For example, members can take a First Aid class or be provided with training on how to use simple tools.
- Transference:** Shift the financial risk through insurance and the legal risk through a contract. By holding an activity on school property, for example, the school's insurance may cover visitors to the school and the volunteer activities taking place there.

Use the Checklist on the next page to prepare for your project.

Safety and Risk Management Checklist

Location

Choose a safe environment for participants and conduct a safety inspection of site.

Make sure site is accessible for individuals with disabilities and special needs.

Be aware of other groups at the site and any potential conflicts.

If no one is familiar with the place the group is going, determine who can help you get oriented (i.e. park ranger, etc.).

Complete all necessary communication/costs/paperwork with site manager.

Determine what additional insurance your group needs, if any, or if the location of the project could cover the activities.

Plan for unexpected weather (i.e. access to shelter, means to contact parents in case of changes in location, etc.).

Adult Supervisors

Arrange for adequate adult supervisors (approx. one adult for 10 youth).

Have emergency action plan in place with a back-up system.

Have signed participant (including adults) consent for treatment, health and insurance forms in designated location, accessible to group leader and other adult supervisors.

Determine who is certified in First Aid/CPR.

Orient all supervisors for understanding of their roles.

Meet with all drivers to review planned route, provide maps and directions, set meeting times and destinations and exchange cell phone numbers.

Check driver qualifications, age and insurance.

Ensure that group supervisors or members are trained and/or supervised to use the proper equipment for the project.

Carry up-to-date First Aid kit, 2-way-radios, cell phones and emergency road kits, as necessary.

Organize event to prevent injury, fatigue or undue stress to participants.

Participants

Collect permission slips from everyone under the age of 18 and liability release forms from everyone.

Communicate drop-off & pick-up procedures to parents/guardians.

Organize a participant tracking system (i.e. check-in and check-out system, emergency numbers, etc.).

Provide participants and parents/guardians with project itinerary and emergency contacts.

Provide list to participants of needed supplies (i.e. gloves, sunscreen, walking shoes, lunch, etc.).

While en route, participants wear seat belts at all times and refrain from behavior that is distracting to the driver.

Conduct participant orientation to outline rules, policies, guidelines, safety notices and emergency procedures.

Provide enough safety equipment for those participating (i.e. safety goggles, gloves, etc.).

In Conclusion

Roots & Shoots and the Jane Goodall Institute, including all or their respective affiliated organizations, officers, directors, employees, volunteers and agents, are not liable for any losses, claims, damages and expenses of any kind or nature (including attorney's fees) resulting from, arising out of or in any way connected with a Roots & Shoots activity or any particular Roots & Shoots member's participation in an activity.

This responsibility rests solely on the group leader and the parents of any underage group members.

Roots & Shoots promotes care and concern for the environment, for animals and for the human community. By identifying possible dangers and risks, evaluating these risks and then making adjustments to your project, you are demonstrating care and concern for your Roots & Shoots members. We want you to be safe and incorporate careful planning and risk management into all your projects. By doing so, you will be on the road to a safe and successful Roots & Shoots program.