



Landcare Notes

Risk management: why worry?

All Landcare groups such as yours are involved in activities which involve some risk. This Landcare Note outlines what is risk, ways to consider risk and how to deal with it in a logical and methodical way.

Understanding the different type of risks, and considering the consequences of each, will allow your group to work confidently while reducing the chance of any 'harm'.

What is risk?

Risk is the possibility of something undesirable happening. 'Undesirable' is generally considered in terms of harm (personal safety) to anyone in your group or involved in the project you are doing, but it can also include the inability to finish a task.

Minimising risk

Risk management is about critically evaluating your activities, such as running a planting day, and then making any changes to your plans that might be necessary to reduce the possibility of anyone being hurt.

Risk management is a basic part of good management practice. It involves you being aware, observant, and adaptable and it's about learning better ways of doing things. It can improve the success of the group's activities and result in better outcomes for everyone.

Risks for Landcare groups

The types of risk you might experience include:

- Inappropriate ways of doing a task which could lead to failure, such as inadequate fencing which allows stock to destroy your plantings
- Weather conditions which could lead to seasonal failures, such as seedlings you've planted dying off in dry spells

- Inadequate management such as lack of supervision or training, which could lead to injury (see Landcare Note 7.5: Personal Safety), unlawful and non-approved activities (see Landcare Note 7.6: Permits and Permissions in Victoria)
- Inadequate coordination and actions which lead to project failure, such as an inability (for some reason) to complete the project as agreed.

Once a risk has been identified, you will find you need to consider three components of that risk:

- The probability of that risk occurring
- The vulnerability of your group, or its work, to the risk
- Any impact of the risk on your group, your members, your project or the local environment.

These three components provide the basis for risk management. They are listed in order of importance.

If you are going to manage risk efficiently, then it's best to reduce the probability of it happening as your first step. If it's not possible to avoid the risk, minimise your vulnerability by isolating it. If it is not possible to isolate it, minimise the impact by educating and protecting those who might be involved.

If any one of these components is reduced to zero, the other two components will not matter.

How to do it

Risk management is essential in today's environment. Don't see it as additional to your responsibilities but an integral part of it. It's not difficult but it needs a realistic, un sentimental and tough approach. And don't forget that 'risk' refers not just to personal safety but to all aspects of your group's activities such as running project.



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The risk management steps

For activities of your group, give one of your members the task of being the group's risk manager. Break your 'risk' plan into definable and achievable steps by considering the following three questions.

To illustrate the process, we will use the example of holding a farm walk on a neighbour's property.

1. What could go wrong?

List the known and relevant risks and the probability of something happening, the impact or what would result. For example, the risk of snakebite.

2. What can we do to minimise it?

This refers to a list of all the personal safety, activities, planning, training and work practices you could use to reduce each risk. For example, wear long pants and boots, and avoid walking through long grass.

3. What will we do if an incident does happen?

This means drawing up an emergency response plan for the 'just-in-case' scenario because it's impossible to mitigate all risk. For a farm walk you should ensure you have a phone or other communication device, know the emergency numbers in your area, and aim to have a person with first aid experience at the event.

It will help you to have a documented Risk Register – essentially a list of the risks and responses you have identified. This can be quite a simple document that can be added to or modified as you learn more. It should contain:

- A description of each risk
- The probability of it happening (referring to the three components above)
- An evaluation of the impact of such a risk if it did happen
- A summary of how you will reduce the probability of it occurring

- A summary of how you will respond if it does happen.

Key tools

A sense of responsibility and an understanding of dealing with causes and effects underlie getting risk management correct. It needs awareness (including observation, planning and diligence) and a practical and experienced person.

Policies, plans, procedures and manuals

Make risk assessment part of your general activities and develop and document some general risk management principles for the group.

Develop operational instructions and, codes of conduct for what you are doing. Document them and store them so they are safe but easily accessible, along with equipment maintenance and operation manuals where relevant. You should also keep records for the storage and safe handling of any dangerous materials used.

Risk assessment templates

Getting your hands on a risk assessment template will make this task much easier and will work out your group's risk obligations and give you a sound basis to build your group's safety culture and processes. If you work on public land, the land manager may need you to use a specific template (ask about this), otherwise there are many available that can be used (see below).

Forms and other administrative tools

There are a number of other types of documents and equipment that you should consider keeping up-to-date and storing appropriately, including:

- A chemical usage register
- Participant registration lists and consent forms
- Lists and checklists of participants, the gear required



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- Field day needs, chemicals used for your group's activities
- Incident report forms or injury register
- Safety equipment (shoes, gloves, goggles, helmets, hats, clothes, protection gear, flagging tape)
- A comprehensive first aid kit
- A current insurance policy (see Landcare Note 7.3: Insurance for Landcare Groups).

Further References

Department of Sustainability and Environment (2007) – *Creating a Safe Working Environment for the Victorian Landcare Program: Landcare Group Risk Prevention Toolkit – part A:*
www.landcarevic.org.au/resources/health-and-safety/

Landcare coordinators in your region – contact your Catchment Management Authority

WorkSafe Victoria (2008) – *Volunteer health and safety: A handbook for community service organisations:*

http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/9526/Volunteer_handbook.pdf

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ISBN 978-1-76047-279-5 (pdf/online)

Volunteering Australia (2003) – *Running the Risk: Risk management tool for volunteer involving organisations:*

https://volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1377053059VAManagersrunningtherisk.pdf

Related Landcare Notes

This Landcare Note is one of a series. These notes provide an excellent guide for the ongoing operation of your group.

Landcare Note 7.2: Incorporation for Landcare Groups

Landcare Note 7.3: Insurance for Landcare Groups

Landcare Note 7.5: Personal Safety

Landcare Note 7.6: Permits and Permissions in Victoria

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