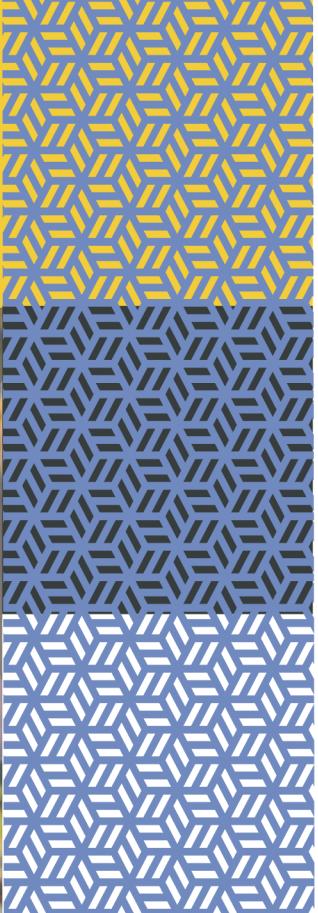
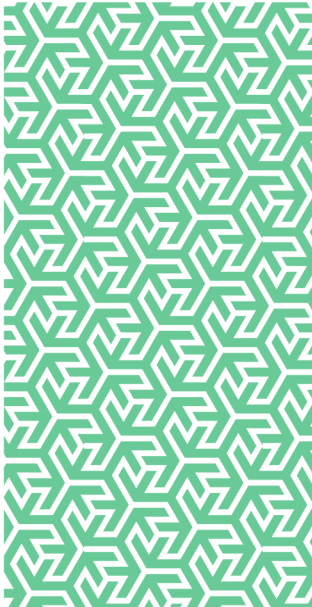


rmp

Risk control

Managing High-Risk Events in Higher Education



In partnership with



Managing High-Risk Events in Higher Education

Introduction

This guidance document is designed to assist Higher Education Institutions in planning and managing high-risk events responsibly and safely. Examples of High-Risk Events include abseiling, rock climbing, and other adventure based activities. The focus of this document is on ensuring the wellbeing of participants, staff, reputational risks and the success of the event.

Establishing a framework for identifying, assessing and mitigating risks associated with high-risk events is essential. Institutions enabling adequate planning for these types of event will create an environment that promotes adventure and safety.

This document will be of interest to all Higher Education Institutions both organising and hosting high-risk events, whether on or off campus.

Planning and Risk Assessment

It is essential that significant planning takes place for high-risk events. Identifying potential risks associated with the high-risk event/activities will enable suitable and sufficient risk control measures to be identified. Consideration should be given to environmental factors, equipment failure and participants health.

Undertaking a risk assessment will allow planning for emergencies, contingency plans should be developed for unexpected situations, including adverse weather conditions participant injury or other relevant emergencies.

Person(s) Undertaking Risk Assessments

It is a legal requirement to assess the risks to health and safety of employees and risk to the health and safety of persons not in your employment (potentially participants) to which they are exposed while they are at work.

The person(s) conducting the risk assessment must be competent to do so with the degree of competence dependent on what it is that is being assessed. If the person(s) is not competent they may fail to identify all relevant hazards or evaluate the risk etc. The more complex the event/activity, the more areas of competency the assessor should have. It is incumbent upon the institution to ensure that whoever are carrying out the risk assessments that they are competent.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines competence¹ as a “combination of training, skills, experience, and knowledge that a person has and their ability to apply them to perform a task safely”.

Additionally, they also suggest factors such as attitude and physical ability can affect someone's competence.

Therefore, the person(s) conducting the risk assessment must have these attributes relative to the high-risk event/activity being assessed.

Successful risk management relies on proactive planning, thorough training, effective communication and a commitment to continuous improvement. It may be necessary for the person(s) conducting the risk assessment to consult with relevant experts, health and safety advisors, and other stakeholders to ensure the effectiveness of the risk assessment.

Relevant stakeholders may include event organisers, participants, other staff and emergency services. Ensure that all relevant parties are involved in the risk assessment process.

Risk assessments shouldn't be conducted in isolation, taking a team approach to risk assessments is beneficial and members should include subject matter experts in event planning and safety.

Undertaking Risk Assessments

Systematically identify and list all potential hazards relating to the high-risk event/activity. Consider various aspects such as the venue, activities involved, equipment required, and external factors like weather conditions.

For each identified hazard, assess the likelihood of hazard realisation and the potential consequences. The use of a risk matrix will promote a consistent approach to evaluating risks. Once risks are evaluated then they can be prioritised, focus on those with higher risks allocating resources and attention to the highest risks first. Assess the effectiveness of existing control measures, identify any gaps or weaknesses and make necessary improvements.

The next stage is to Identify risk control measures for each identified risk. The risk control measures may identify training and supervisory requirements, safety procedures, equipment standards and checks and/or environmental considerations.

Suitable training for participants and staff should be identified and received prior to the start of high-risk events/activities. Ensure that participants receive comprehensive training and briefings before the event. Provide clear information on safety and emergency procedures and participant responsibilities.

Conducting regular training sessions will ensure that the delivered training remain fresh in the minds of the participants and staff.

Contingency and Emergency Planning

Developing robust contingency plans for high-risk events/activities is essential to ensure the safety of participants and staff, as well as the smooth management of unexpected situations.

Taking a similar approach to the risk assessment process, contingency planning should be a collaborative process including relevant representatives from event planning, security, emergency services and subject matter experts.

Using the outcome of the risk assessment process consider the factors identified such as weather conditions, equipment failure, medical emergencies, security threats and logistical challenges. Create specific contingency and emergency response plans for each factor, clearly outlining step-by-step procedures, responsibilities and communication arrangements for each contingency.

Situations may be identified that require evacuation of participants or staff, designing and communicating clear and robust evacuations plans with clearly marked evacuation routes will allow for an appropriate response from those involved. Conduct regular evacuation drills to ensure participants and staff are familiar with the procedures.

Contingency plans must include procedures if the high-risk event/activity needs to be stopped or abandoned early or cancelled due to circumstances that present a significant risk to safety.

Medical provision

Some high-risk events/activities may require medical provision to be provided, either on-site or available. Ensure that the relevantly trained medical personal are in place. Involving emergency services in the planning stages for any high-risk events/activities will ensure appropriate response in case of medical emergencies.

Security arrangements

Consideration of all aspects for high-risk events/activities may identify perceived or actual security threats. Ensure that security measures and procedures addressing potential security threats are implemented.

Weather considerations

Living in the United Kingdom varied weather conditions regularly occur, identifying the weather conditions that may impact on the high-risk event/activity will allow for the development of procedures to follow. Weather conditions should be monitored, using forecasts leading up to and during the event/activity. Ensure plans are in place for weather events such as storms, extreme temperatures or heavy rainfall.

Environmental impact

Evaluate potential environmental impacts of the event/activity and develop plans to minimise any environmental risks identified.

Logistical challenges

Anticipating and planning for potential logistical challenges for the event/activity, such as transportation issues, equipment malfunctions or supply chain disruptions will reduce the impact of any situation that may arise. Ensure that there are backup plans in place for critical resources.

Communication procedures

Ensuring clear communication channels are established for all stakeholders involved is essential. There may be a requirement to define a chain of command for different situations. Providing emergency contact details to all involved ensures the correct numbers are identified enabling quicker responses.

Monitoring

Ensure that relevant levels of monitoring are place before and during the event/activity. If the event/activity is in a remote location arrangements should considered ensuring that the institution is made aware of outcomes of these events/activities.

Recording the findings

Document all planning aspects for high-risk events/activities, including risk assessments, contingency and emergency plans and procedures these should communicated to all involved and retained by the institution for future reference and lessons learnt exercises.

Review and update

Regularly review and update risk assessments, contingency and emergency plans based on lesson learnt from training and actual events. Incorporate feedback from stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of the arrangements in place for high-risk events/activities. Positive and negative lessons learnt should be communicated across the institution to relevant people to enable continuous improvement for planning and implementation of management arrangements for high-risk events/activities.

Media

High-risk events/activity often spark the interest of media outlets or the involvement of social media content. Institutions should have existing arrangements for how media are managed, these arrangements should be communicated to everyone involved in high-risk events/activities. Reputational damage can occur if adverse situations are not managed adequately.

Conclusion

Effective risk and contingency planning is an ongoing process that requires collaboration, communication, and regular updates. This guidance documents highlights where institutions can better prepare for unforeseen circumstances during high-risk events/activities, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all involved.

References

1. Health and Safety Executive Website:
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/competence/what-is-competence.htm>

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your institution's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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