

WEDNESDAY CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS



You can see where we've been!

WCV Safety Guidance

WCV is a voluntary group carrying out conservation work in the countryside; the health and safety of group volunteers and any third parties are very important to us. There are no pressures to rush our work and no need to take risks.

Essential Guidance is for all volunteers to:-

- Follow the instructions and advice of the Task Leader
- Work within their own physical and competence capabilities
- Be alert and look after themselves
- Take advice from other volunteers who notice an avoidable risk
- Speak up in the pursuit of the health and safety of themselves and others

The following are recommendations and practical guidance on how to be prepared for a day's volunteering and reminders of likely hazards and the recommended safe methods of working to avoid or reduce injuries and health risks

Here are our topics

1. **Be Prepared** – recommendations to volunteers in readiness for a day's conservation work
2. **Work Safely** – recommendations to volunteers during a typical day's conservation work

WCV have additional guidance for the following specific tasks

3. **Tree Felling**
4. **Undergrowth Clearance using Mechanical Tools**
5. **Working In Woodlands**
6. **Fencing Work**
7. **Hedge Laying**
8. **Bonfires**
9. **Footpath Work**
10. **Timber Shelter Work**

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1. Be Prepared	
Footwear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boots or shoes with protective toe caps and soles, good grip soles, stout material and preferably waterproof. Wellington boots are preferable at some sites
Trousers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stout long trousers to protect against bramble and thorn penetration and as a sunscreen
Jacket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-sleeve jacket to protect against bramble and thorn penetration and as a sunscreen
Under layers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several light layers allow better control of body temperature
Hat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WCV provide hard hats and recommend they be worn at all times Please provide additional insulating and wide brim hats for either cold or sunny weather
Eye protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WCV provide eye protection safety glasses and recommend they be worn at all times Some volunteers wear their own eye protection to ensure a comfortable fit
Gloves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WCV can provide work gloves for protection against cuts, abrasion and thorn penetration Most volunteers wear their own gloves to ensure a comfortable fit
Hydration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recommend volunteers bring their own drinking water to ensure they can maintain their own hydration especially in hot and windy weather. If you become short of water and need a drink please ask, as other volunteers may well have surplus supplies
Sunscreen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember to bring your own sunscreen appropriate to your skin type on hot sunny days
Waterproofs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember your waterproof over clothing for the wet any days
Insect Repellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember to bring your own insect repellent if you are susceptible to bites from insects such as midges, mosquitoes and horse flies
Rest Breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We stop for a rest break at about 11am and for lunch at about 1pm Volunteers bring their own hot and or cold drinks Volunteers bring their own packed lunch 'Birthday cakes' are gratefully consumed by the rest of the group at the morning break following good hand hygiene
A seat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most volunteers bring a collapsible chair to use at our rest breaks
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be ready to give your next of kin details and any health details in case of emergency Covid; be sensitive to the ongoing risk of Covid. Stay away if you may be infectious Cover any existing cuts with waterproof dressings Use the sanitizer provided by WCV before handling food If you carry an EpiPen please advise the group on how they might need to help you use it

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2. Work Safely	
Stay with the Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We usually work together as a group in the designated work areas as directed by the Task Leader but on occasions away from the group with at least one other volunteer Please notify the Task Leader if you plan or decide to leave early or for a short break
Tiredness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We encourage volunteers to take breaks from the work tasks to ensure they don't exceed their comfortable capacity. We share the work tasks at all times The Task Leader will be happy to reallocate a volunteer to lighter duties if asked
Work within your limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our volunteers have a range of physical capacity and practical aptitude. We encourage everyone to only take on tasks they are confident in carrying out correctly and safely; if in doubt ask another volunteer for help
Be open to advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our volunteers have extensive knowledge on achieving the desired quality of work and in the correct use of the tools so if you are in any doubt please ask. We all look out for each other and we expect volunteers to be open to advice on either quality or safety
Keep work areas safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In your own work area keep materials and tools tidy and be ready to stop your work if others encroach into your safe working area
Keep out of other peoples work area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pay attention to the other work activities and ensure you don't encroach into their safe working area without first making the other volunteers aware before you enter In respect to machinery being used the operator must give clear acknowledgment that you wish to and can approach into their work area
Hand Tool Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WCV have a wide selection of tools. We expect volunteers to take the time to get the right tool for the job and to use them properly; this ensures the work is done as well as possible, the tools are not damaged and there is no unnecessary risk to the user and people nearby When not being used lay down all tools in a safe place and manner; do not stick loppers or bow saws in the ground nor hang them from branches Refer to TCV leaflet 'Hand Tools – a guide to safe use and care' Inspect tools before use and do not use any that are damaged or have loose handles We ask volunteers to report damaged or broken tools or equipment to the Task Leader
Swinging Hand Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A glove is not to be worn on the hand(s) gripping hammers or other striking tools that require a non-slip grip to be used safely Ensure you have a clear work area and good footing
Third Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We place signs to alert the public of our work, please stay within our marked work areas Keep alert and stop work to allow the public safe passage through our work areas Be particularly alert to allowing safe passage for loose dogs and horse riders Wear high visibility tabards when working adjacent to any trafficked routes
Existing Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take note of the Task Leaders Briefing on avoiding any overhead or underground services Before starting to dig a new hole an assessment should be made on the likelihood of there being an underground service to be avoided

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2. Work Safely	
Manual handling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for help when lifting awkward or heavy loads such as logs, fence posts, gates, rolls of wire stock-fencing and rolls of fencing wire • Key recommendations to protect your back when lifting <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep your feet shoulder width apart 2. Use your legs to lower into a squat; bend your knees and push your bottom out 3. Keep your back as upright and as straight as possible 4. Engage your core muscles, grasp the object and push back up using your legs 5. Hold the object close to you • When carrying tools don't try to carry too many, we're never in that much of a rush! • Don't be afraid to decline to lift a load if it will be too much for you, even if shared
Slips, trips and falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspect the site and clear, cover or mark existing trip hazards especially holes or pits • Be aware of residual trip hazard from tree and sapling stumps and trailing plants • Move carefully taking into account the ground conditions and residual trip hazards • Wear well fitting footwear with good grip • Keep work areas tidy. Take time to tidy up materials and keep tools safe
Stay Hydrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On hot and/or windy days ensure you drink sufficient water to keep properly hydrated
Avoid Sunburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On high UV days cover exposed skin and apply sunscreen suited to your skin type
Hygiene & avoidance of insect, soil and water borne diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use hand sanitizer provided before handling food • Promptly wash and cover any cut received using the WCV First Aid Kit • Make yourself aware of the preventions against and the symptoms of possible insect and soil and water borne diseases. See WCV copies of published Information Guides <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lyme Disease – http://www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk/ -Caused by being bitten by a disease carrying tick ○ Tetanus. https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/tetanus/ due to the long established vaccination program Tetanus occurrences in 2019 were only four cases in the UK ○ Leptospirosis – also called Weil's disease, is an infection you can catch from the urine of infected animals. It's rare in the UK https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Leptospirosis/
Needlestick Injuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very unlikely event in WCV work; if drug abuse litter like syringes are discovered the area must be cordoned off and the landowner notified to arrange a specialist clean up • If a needlestick injury does occur, emergency treatment should be obtained. The needle should if possible be collected safely and passed to the medical services
Snakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only UK venomous snake is the Adder. If encountered leave alone and warn others of its existence. Adders are not aggressive and will normally only use their venom as a last means of defence if caught or trodden on. https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/snake-bites/ • If a snake bite is received get emergency treatment as soon as possible, record the description of the snake to aid the medics. Loosen clothing around the bite, take off any rings and bracelets and stay as calm as possible. No other first aid is recommended
Wasp and Bee Nests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a wasp or bee nest is encountered it should not be disturbed, the area cordoned off and the group volunteers notified

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3. Tree Felling	
Client Approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Client/Landowner to clearly indicate the trees to be cut down and to confirm any necessary permissions are in place
Overhead power lines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not undertake felling work within 2 tree lengths of overhead lines without consultation with the electricity company • In the event that a tree does touch an electricity cable, do not touch it and call the electricity company immediately
Public Rights of Way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post lookouts with HiViz tabards on footpaths or vehicle routes within 2 tree lengths • Place 'Warning Signs' at each entry point to the work area • Stop work as necessary to allow public to clear the work area
Chain Saw Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCV and its insurers require that chain saw operators have current training certificates for the specific size of trees to be felled
Chainsaw Tree Felling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The WCV chain saw operator has full authority and responsibility for directing, in agreement with the Task Leader, other volunteers on the support they require for the safe felling and reduction of the felled trees • The chain saw operator has a nominated experienced volunteer wearing specific PPE as close support during the felling and reduction process • All other volunteers to stay well clear during the felling and reduction process and only act on the direction of chain saw operator or their nominated support and in conjunction with the Task Leader
Bow saw Tree Felling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller trees are felled using bow saws and the principles for controlling the direction of felling are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Check the fall zone x two is clear of people and animals and any valuable items ○ Clear the work area around the tree to allow unobstructed movement ○ Cut a directional notch at right angles to the desired direction of fall, the horizontal undercut being 20% of the tree diameter ○ On the back of the tree start to make a horizontal felling cut a few inches above the front under cut and take care to leave an uncut hinge of thickness about 10% of the trunk diameter ○ If necessary use a felling wedge in the back felling cut to initiate the tree falling and be ready to move sideways to avoid any springback

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4. Undergrowth Clearance using mechanical tools	
Approved Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WCV and its insurers require that only trained volunteers wearing task-specific PPE are to use mechanical equipment such as hedge trimmers and brush cutters
Safe Use of mechanical equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The WCV Trained Operator has full authority to direct the group on how to support them in the safe clearance of dense undergrowth Volunteers to only act in response to the directions of the trained operators
Safety Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteers to stay at a safe distance from the mechanical tools; 15 metres from brush cutters and 5 metres from hedge trimmers

5. Working In Woodlands	
Safe Distance for Tree Felling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteers to stay at least 2 tree lengths clear of any tree felling until directed otherwise by those in charge of the felling operation
Safe Distance for mechanical cutting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteers to stay at a safe distance from mechanical cutting tools; 15 metres from brush-cutters and 5 metres from hedge trimmers
Wear Hard Hats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Falling dead-wood is a hazard when working in woodland especially following adjacent tree felling, wearing a hard hat will reduce possible head injury A hard hat will provide protection against impact injury when walking through low branches and past protruding dead branches WCV Issue Hard Hats to all volunteers to be worn at all times
Wear Eye Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct penetration or whiplash from branches and twigs can easily cause serious eye injuries when moving through woodland or when cutting down and handling material or being close to others doing the same WCV Issue eye protection to all volunteers to be worn at all times
Stay Alert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep aware of and stay clear of the work of the other volunteers Keep well clear of tree felling operations, machine cutting operations and those using swinging tools and be ready to take direction from those in charge of such operations
Avoid Spring-back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When using handsaws and loppers to cut down small saplings and brambles or when reducing felled trees be aware of the risk of spring-back from the large energy ready to be released in bent and partially supported branches Before starting a cut ensure there is an easy and safe retreat route if spring-back occurs Before starting to cut larger pieces ensure other volunteers are aware of your intentions Cut carefully and be prepared to stop to allow the energy to dissipate before full separation occurs

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5. Working In Woodlands	
Prevent Slips & Trips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to clear undergrowth especially any trailing growth and old stumps to ensure a sound standing area in which to work • Locate, fill in or mark any holes in the work area • Move about carefully and steadily, never rush
Safe Use of Hand Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the right tool for the job, use the right tool properly • Long handle pruners not to be used on over large or dead wood, use a handsaw • When not being used lay down all tools in a safe place and manner; do not stick loppers or bow saws in the ground nor hang them from branches
Safe Use of Swinging Hand tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Axes, billhooks and slashers need a large safe working zone. Users must ensure they have a clear working area in which to work effectively and safely • No gloves to be worn when gripping swinging hand tools
Safe Manual Handling of Timber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut logs and branches into manageable sizes; don't attempt large, awkward or heavy lifts or pulls • If available use carrying aids such as wheelbarrows to move logs • When pulling branches or brambles assume what you are pulling might snap or you lose your grip; make sure you have a sure footing and in case you still might fall backwards make sure before you start that the ground behind you is clear of hazards like tree stumps, thorn bushes or other sharp objects • Roping cut branches to drag them can reduce manual risks • Be aware of thorn injuries, wear stout gloves; grasp and pick up branches carefully

6. Hedge Laying	
Industry Good Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The South of England Hedge Laying Society has some informative videos on their website http://sehls.weebly.com/
General Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to WCV Guidance '5. Working In Woodlands'
Tree Felling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If trees need to be felled refer to WCV Guidance '3. Tree Felling'
Hand Tool Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Axes, Billhooks, bowsaws, pruners and slashers to lay saplings to be used carefully and as described in the TCV Guidance Document 'Safe Use of Hand Tools' • Sledge Hammer, Mells & Mauls for driving in stakes to be used with great care and as described in the TCV Guidance Document 'Safe Use of Hand Tools'

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7. Fencing Work	
Industry Good Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good reference is the document FISA 104 Fencing • Use this link to the FISA webpage and download a copy • https://ukfisa.com/Safety/Safety-Guides/fisa-104
Contact with Wood Preservative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear gloves when handling treated timber and be aware of symptoms of skin irritation from exposure to preservatives although the risks to WCV volunteers is very low as the frequency and severity of exposure are both very low
Post Driving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard Hats must be worn when using post drivers in case the driver catches the post top • If using a sledge hammer, mell or maul, steady the post with a post holder not by hand
Post Hole Augering and opening out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of our petrol driven post holes auger is restricted to experienced volunteers and is a two man operation to aid manual handling • Any associated hole clearance using bars and Shuvholers and hand clearance needs careful team work, never put a hand into a hole unless you know others are aware and will hold back on use of their hand tools
Handling Wire Mesh, Straining Wire & Barbed Wire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear Gloves and Eye Protection at all times when handling wire mesh • Use good manual handling techniques when moving roles of mesh or wire • Be aware of springing ends when :- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Untying rolls of mesh as they are often very tightly bundled ○ Cutting strands ○ Twisting strands ○ Opening roles of wire • Keep fingers out of wire mesh bundles and coils of wire • Restrain uncoiled mesh and wire to prevent re-coil and allow it to relax
Straining & Fixing Mesh and Wire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear Gloves and Eye Protection at all times when fixing mesh or wire with staples • Remove a glove when gripping hammers to install staples • Hold staples with the fencing pliers, which they are designed for, rather than fingers • Identify the wire grade being used, High Tensile (HT) wire can be tensioned far more than Mild Steel (MS) wire before it should break but any kinks or damage may cause a premature break and a dangerous recoil • The use of wire strainers and tensioners is a skilled task and a task leader should be identified to lead the activity until sufficient staples have been installed to control any breakage recoil • Keep the fencing party to the minimum until the straining wires have been stapled • Staples should not be driven fully in on intermediate posts so as to aid future removal
Concrete Post Mix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear Eye Protection and gloves at all times when handling post mix • Be very careful not get any dust or wet mix on hands or exposed skin. Cement is very corrosive and any contact must be washed off as soon as possible • Dispose of surplus post mix properly and prevent any contamination of water courses

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8. Bonfires	
Client Approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get Client /Landowners approval for the setting of any bonfire and the location • Agree with Client/Landowner the end of day procedures and protection
WCV Bonfire Warden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Bonfire Warden will be appointed by the Task Leader and will be responsible for the operation, control, loading and final making safe of the fire; all volunteers will be guided by and respect the Fire Warden's authority • General good practice for bonfires follows
Smoke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site the fire down-wind from working party • Do not allow work in significant smoke • Do not set fires near roads or occupied buildings • If very strong/gusty wind postpone fire
Spread of fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not locate fires <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ near existing overhead nor underground services ○ under trees nor close to dense undergrowth ○ directly over peat soil • Do not light fires <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ in very dry conditions ○ in very windy and gusty weather • Ensure one person is attending the fire at all times • Stop feeding material in time for the fire to die down and be safe before leaving the site • If hot embers are to be left, cordon off and place warning signs all as agreed with the client • Ensure adequate means of fighting fire available, eg. fire beaters
Flying embers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise people to wear hats, or caps, and long sleeves when working near fire • Ensure long hair is tied back and loose clothing is tucked in • All workers should work up-wind of the fire • Keep the fire as small as possible to do the job • Add material to the fire in small amounts to prevent sudden flaring • Sort material to exclude dangerous items such as aerosols, bottles and treated wood
Hand tool safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pitch Forks & Rakes must be put down carefully in a clear, obvious location when not in use • Handsaws and pruners used to cut up material to be put down safely when not in use
Flammable liquids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCV never use flammable liquids to start or feed bonfires • Fuel for power tools is kept at a remote safe distance from fires and ember drift
Avoid Eye Injuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear eye protection • Take turns to load material onto a fire and be aware of others doing the same • Avoid your material injuring others or being injured by material loaded by others

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9. Footpath Work	
Compaction Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCV only allow trained volunteers to use Vibrating Plate Compactors provided by Clients • Safety footwear and ear defenders to be worn by the Vibrating Plate Compactor operator and those in close attendance • Risk of Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVC) to be avoided by :- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limiting use to alternate 15 minutes periods of use/rest ○ Gripping the equipment loosely and keeping the hands warm
Mini Digger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCV have the use of a tracked mini digger owned and operated by Ben Spraggon • Ben will direct support volunteers to work alongside the mini digger as it is used to clear ground and to load wheelbarrows with granular material • Volunteers to keep clear of the mini digger and the rotating digging arm and only approach after getting clear acknowledgement from Ben that it is safe to do so • Don't assume Ben has seen you as there are blind spots and he is concentrating on operating the mini digger
Third Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our footpath work areas are signed at all locations where the public could approach • Lookouts wearing HiViz tabards to be used when the mini digger is being used

10. Timber Shelter Work	
Step Ladders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCV occasionally construct or repair timber shelters or hides which require working off step ladders supplied either by the site owner or a WCV volunteer • Set up for stepladders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Carry out a Pre-use Check to ensure no visible defects of all parts including the feet ○ Ensure there is space to fully open the ladder ○ Use and ensure locking devices are fully engaged ○ Ground should be firm, hard and level ○ Floors should be clean and not slippery ○ Ensure ladders are fitted with anti-slip feet • Stepladders in use <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Short duration work (maximum 30 minutes) and Light work (up to 10 kg) ○ A second volunteer should be in attendance to steady the ladder ○ Do not work off the top two steps ○ Avoid side-on working, use with the steps facing the work activity ○ Do not overreach – make sure your belt buckle (navel) stays within the stiles and keep both feet on the same rung or step throughout the task
Woodworking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear eye protection • Check that all tools; saws, chisels, drill bits and the like are sharp and undamaged • Ensure work pieces are properly supported and held before working with any tool