

Common Ground Suffolk

Health and Safety Policy

Keeping Our Volunteers, Members, and Beneficiaries Safe

Version: 1.0

Date adopted: [Date to be inserted]

Date of next review: [Date to be inserted — recommended annually]

Health and Safety Lead: [Name and contact details to be inserted]

Applies to: All directors, volunteers, and anyone participating in Society activities

This policy sets out Common Ground Suffolk's approach to health and safety across all its activities. It applies to all directors, volunteers, and participants in Society activities regardless of setting. It should be read alongside the Society's Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct, and any activity-specific risk assessments produced under this policy.

1. Our Commitment

Common Ground Suffolk is committed to providing a safe environment for everyone involved in or affected by its activities. This includes volunteers, members, beneficiaries, and any members of the public who may be present during Society activities.

We recognise that our activities, which take place across a variety of settings including private gardens, community growing spaces, indoor venues, and sites where water storage infrastructure is installed or maintained, carry a range of health and safety risks. We are committed to identifying those risks, taking reasonable steps to control them, and creating a culture in which health and safety is everyone's responsibility.

This policy is grounded in the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and associated regulations, including the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. While Common Ground Suffolk does not currently have employees, these obligations extend to volunteers and others affected by our activities, and we take them seriously.

2. Responsibilities

2.1 The Board

The board of directors has overall responsibility for health and safety within the Society. The board is responsible for:

- ensuring this policy is implemented, reviewed, and kept up to date
- appointing a Health and Safety Lead from among the directors or senior volunteers
- ensuring that adequate resources are available to manage health and safety effectively
- reviewing health and safety performance at least annually, including a review of any incidents or near misses
- ensuring that health and safety is considered in all decisions about Society activities and infrastructure

2.2 The Health and Safety Lead

The Health and Safety Lead is responsible for the day to day management of health and safety within the Society. Their responsibilities include:

- coordinating the production and review of risk assessments for all Society activities
- maintaining a register of all risk assessments and ensuring they are reviewed regularly
- ensuring that all volunteers receive appropriate health and safety induction and training
- investigating all accidents, incidents, and near misses and reporting findings to the board
- maintaining the Society's accident and incident log
- keeping up to date with relevant health and safety legislation and guidance
- being the first point of contact for health and safety concerns raised by volunteers or members

2.3 All Volunteers and Directors

Every volunteer and director has a personal responsibility for health and safety. All volunteers and directors must:

- read and comply with this policy and any activity-specific risk assessments
- take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their actions
- use tools and equipment safely and only for the purposes for which they are intended
- report any hazard, accident, near miss, or health and safety concern to the Health and Safety Lead promptly

- not undertake any activity they do not feel competent or confident to carry out safely
- follow any reasonable health and safety instruction given by the Health and Safety Lead or session leader
- never work alone in a situation that has been assessed as requiring two or more people to be present

3. Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is the foundation of our approach to health and safety. A risk assessment identifies what could cause harm, who might be harmed, and what steps we will take to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

Common Ground Suffolk will produce and maintain risk assessments for all its regular activities and for any new activities before they begin. Risk assessments will be reviewed at least annually and following any accident, incident, or significant change in activity.

The following categories of activity each require a specific risk assessment:

- volunteer gardening sessions in private gardens
- community growing sessions at allotments or shared spaces
- indoor sessions at community halls, schools, or other venues
- installation and maintenance of raised beds
- installation and maintenance of water storage systems
- installation and maintenance of composting systems
- any activity involving children or vulnerable adults
- any activity involving manual handling of heavy materials
- any activity taking place in adverse weather conditions

Risk assessments will be documented in writing, reviewed and signed off by the Health and Safety Lead, and made available to all volunteers carrying out the relevant activity. Volunteers must read the relevant risk assessment before beginning any activity.

4. Specific Hazards and Control Measures

4.1 Hand Tools

The use of hand tools such as spades, forks, trowels, hoes, rakes, and secateurs is central to our activities and carries risks of cuts, puncture wounds, strains, and musculoskeletal injury. The following controls apply:

- all tools must be inspected before use and any damaged, broken, or excessively worn tool must be taken out of use immediately and reported to the Health and Safety Lead
- tools must be used only for the purpose for which they are designed

- volunteers should use tools appropriate to their physical ability and should not attempt tasks that are beyond their strength or capability
- cutting tools such as secateurs and loppers must be kept sharp, as blunt tools require more force and increase the risk of slipping
- tools with sharp edges or points must be carried with the sharp end pointing downward and away from the body
- tools must not be left lying on the ground where they could be tripped over or stood on
- all tools must be cleaned and stored safely after use
- volunteers should wear appropriate gloves when handling tools and when working with soil or compost
- volunteers should wear appropriate footwear with good ankle support when using digging tools

4.2 Manual Handling

Manual handling, including lifting, carrying, pushing, and pulling of heavy or awkward loads such as bags of compost, timber for raised beds, or water storage components, is a significant cause of injury in gardening activities. The following controls apply:

- volunteers should assess any load before attempting to lift it and should ask for help if they are unsure
- the correct manual handling technique should be used at all times: keep the load close to the body, bend the knees rather than the back, avoid twisting, and move smoothly
- heavy or awkward loads should be carried by two or more people wherever possible
- mechanical aids such as wheelbarrows and trolleys should be used to move heavy materials wherever available
- volunteers with known back problems or other conditions affecting their ability to handle loads safely should inform the session leader and must not be asked to carry out manual handling tasks that could aggravate their condition
- the maximum recommended weight for lifting without assistance is 25kg for most adults, though individual capacity varies and volunteers should always work within their own limits

4.3 Working Outdoors

Much of our activity takes place outdoors and volunteers may be exposed to a range of environmental hazards. The following controls apply:

- volunteers should dress appropriately for the weather, including wearing sunscreen and a hat in hot weather and waterproof clothing in wet or cold conditions
- volunteers should remain hydrated, particularly during warm weather, and should feel free to take breaks as needed

- sessions should be suspended or moved indoors if weather conditions become unsafe, including during thunderstorms, high winds that could dislodge materials, or extreme heat
- volunteers should be aware of the risks of working on uneven ground and should take particular care on slopes or in areas with hidden obstacles
- volunteers should be aware of the risk of Weil's disease (leptospirosis), which can be contracted through contact with soil or water contaminated by rat urine, and should cover any cuts or abrasions before working with soil or water and wash their hands thoroughly after each session
- volunteers should be aware of the risk of tetanus when working with soil and should ensure their tetanus vaccination is up to date
- volunteers should be aware of the presence of potentially toxic plants in gardens and should wear gloves when handling unfamiliar plants or when pruning plants known to cause skin irritation

4.4 Water Storage Systems

The installation, maintenance, and operation of water storage systems including large tanks, water butts, and ponds presents specific risks that must be managed carefully. The following controls apply:

- large water storage tanks and any open water features must be assessed for drowning risk, particularly where children or vulnerable adults may be present
- open water storage must be covered or fenced where it presents a drowning risk to children or vulnerable adults, in accordance with the risk assessment for the site
- no volunteer should work alone near open water or large water tanks
- volunteers working near open water must be aware of the risks and must not allow children or vulnerable adults to approach open water unsupervised
- water storage systems must be inspected regularly for structural integrity and any damage or leakage must be reported and addressed promptly
- standing water can harbour Legionella bacteria, and where large water storage systems are installed the Society will seek appropriate guidance on Legionella risk management
- hoses and irrigation equipment must be stored safely after use to prevent trip hazards
- any electrical components associated with water storage or irrigation systems must be installed and maintained by a competent person and must be appropriate for outdoor use

4.5 Composting Systems

The installation and maintenance of composting systems carries risks including exposure to harmful microorganisms, physical strain, and the generation of heat in active compost heaps. The following controls apply:

- volunteers should wear gloves and, where turning or aerating compost, a dust mask to avoid inhaling fungal spores or other airborne particles

- volunteers should wash their hands thoroughly after handling compost or compost materials
- active compost heaps can reach high temperatures and volunteers should be aware of the risk of burns when turning or aerating hot compost
- compost bins and bays must be structurally sound and volunteers must inspect them before use
- volunteers should be aware that compost heaps can harbour rats and should report any signs of infestation to the session leader

4.6 Working in Private Gardens

Volunteer visits to private gardens present specific health and safety considerations because the environment is less controlled than a shared growing space. The following controls apply:

- volunteers must carry out a brief visual inspection of the garden before beginning work, identifying any hazards such as uneven ground, unstable structures, overhanging branches, or the presence of animals
- any hazard that cannot be immediately and safely controlled must be reported to the session leader or Health and Safety Lead before work begins
- volunteers must not enter any part of the property other than the agreed working area without the explicit permission of the householder
- volunteers should be aware of the possibility that gardens may contain hazardous materials such as asbestos in old outbuildings or lead paint on structures, and should not disturb any material they are unsure about
- the householder should be informed of the planned activities before they begin and should be asked to secure any pets during the session
- volunteers must follow the lone working guidance in Section 5 of this policy

4.7 Indoor Activities

Activities taking place in community halls, schools, or other indoor venues carry their own set of risks. The following controls apply:

- the session leader must familiarise themselves with the venue's own health and safety arrangements, including the location of fire exits, fire extinguishers, and first aid equipment, before the session begins
- fire exits must be kept clear at all times during Society sessions
- any hazards identified in the venue must be reported to the venue manager as well as to the Society's Health and Safety Lead
- any soil, compost, or plant material brought into an indoor venue must be contained and cleaned up thoroughly after the session
- trip hazards such as trailing cables, bags, or equipment must be managed carefully in indoor settings
- where sessions involve children, the venue must be assessed for child safety in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy

5. Lone Working

Lone working, meaning any situation where a volunteer is working alone without another Society representative present, carries additional risks and requires specific controls. Common Ground Suffolk recognises that some volunteer visits to private gardens may involve lone working and has put the following measures in place.

Wherever possible, volunteer visits should involve at least two volunteers. Where a lone visit is unavoidable:

- the volunteer must inform the Health and Safety Lead or another director of the visit in advance, including the address, the name of the householder, and the expected duration
- the volunteer must check in by phone or message with a designated contact upon arrival and upon leaving
- if the volunteer does not check in as expected, the designated contact must attempt to reach them and, if unsuccessful within a reasonable time, must contact the householder and if necessary the emergency services
- volunteers must carry a charged mobile phone at all times during lone working visits
- volunteers must not enter a situation during a lone visit that they assess as unsafe and must feel empowered to leave without explanation if they feel at risk
- any incident or concern arising during a lone visit must be reported to the Health and Safety Lead on the same day

6. First Aid

Common Ground Suffolk is committed to ensuring that adequate first aid provision is available during all its activities. The following arrangements apply:

- at least one person with a current first aid certificate must be present at all group sessions involving five or more participants
- a basic first aid kit must be available at all group sessions and must be checked before each session to ensure it is fully stocked
- volunteers carrying out lone working visits should carry a personal first aid kit including at minimum plasters, antiseptic wipes, and a bandage
- the contents and location of the first aid kit must be communicated to all participants at the start of each session
- any use of the first aid kit must be recorded in the accident and incident log
- first aid certificates must be renewed in accordance with the certification body's requirements, typically every three years

In the event of a serious injury or medical emergency, the emergency services must be called immediately on 999. The session leader must ensure that someone is available to meet the emergency services and direct them to the casualty.

The nearest hospital with an accident and emergency department to common activity areas in Suffolk should be identified and noted in the relevant risk assessment for each site.

7. Accident and Incident Reporting

All accidents, injuries, near misses, and dangerous occurrences must be reported and recorded. This applies regardless of how minor an incident may seem at the time.

The procedure for reporting is as follows:

- any volunteer or participant who is injured or witnesses an accident must report it to the session leader immediately
- the session leader must ensure that appropriate first aid is provided and that the emergency services are called if necessary
- the session leader must complete an entry in the Society's accident and incident log as soon as possible after the incident, recording the date, time, location, nature of the incident, persons involved, any injuries sustained, first aid provided, and any action taken
- the accident and incident log entry must be submitted to the Health and Safety Lead within 24 hours
- the Health and Safety Lead must review all accident and incident reports and take any necessary follow up action, including reviewing the relevant risk assessment
- the Health and Safety Lead must report any serious accidents or incidents to the board at the next meeting

Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR), certain serious workplace accidents must be reported to the Health and Safety Executive. While Common Ground Suffolk does not have employees, it should seek guidance from the HSE if a volunteer or member of the public suffers a serious injury during a Society activity, as RIDDOR may apply in some circumstances.

8. Personal Protective Equipment

The Society will provide or make available appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for volunteers carrying out activities that require it. At present this includes:

- gardening gloves for all volunteers carrying out practical growing activities
- dust masks for volunteers carrying out composting activities
- high visibility vests for volunteers working near roads or in low light conditions

Volunteers are expected to use PPE provided to them and must not carry out activities that require PPE without wearing it. Volunteers may use their own PPE provided it is appropriate for the task and in good condition. The Society will not provide PPE for activities that a volunteer is carrying out outside their authorised role.

9. Volunteers with Health Conditions or Disabilities

Common Ground Suffolk welcomes volunteers of all abilities and is committed to making its volunteering activities as accessible as possible. We recognise that some volunteers may have health conditions, disabilities, or other factors that affect their ability to carry out certain tasks safely.

Volunteers are encouraged to disclose any health condition or disability that may be relevant to their volunteering activities so that appropriate adjustments can be made. This information will be held confidentially in accordance with the Privacy Policy and will be used only to ensure the volunteer can participate safely and comfortably.

The Health and Safety Lead will work with volunteers to identify suitable roles and make reasonable adjustments where necessary. No volunteer will be excluded from participation solely on the grounds of a health condition or disability without first exploring what adjustments might make their participation possible.

10. Young Volunteers

Where volunteers under the age of 18 are involved in Society activities, additional considerations apply. Young people may be less experienced, less physically developed, and less aware of risks than adult volunteers. The following controls apply to young volunteers:

- young volunteers must have the written consent of a parent or guardian before participating in any Society activity
- young volunteers must not be asked to carry out tasks involving significant manual handling, the use of sharp tools, or work near open water without direct adult supervision
- a risk assessment specifically considering the involvement of young people must be carried out before any activity in which young volunteers participate
- young volunteers must be accompanied by a parent, guardian, or responsible adult at all times unless the Society has made specific arrangements with parental consent for unsupervised participation

11. Adverse Weather

Outdoor activities are subject to the effects of weather and session leaders must be prepared to adapt or cancel sessions in response to adverse conditions. The following guidance applies:

- sessions should be cancelled or moved indoors in the event of thunderstorms, as lightning presents a serious risk in open spaces
- sessions should be suspended if wind speeds are sufficient to dislodge materials, structures, or equipment
- during periods of extreme heat, sessions should be shortened, timed to avoid the hottest part of the day, and adequate water and shade must be available

- in icy or frosty conditions, the risk of slips and falls on hard surfaces must be assessed before the session begins
- session leaders have the authority to cancel or suspend a session on health and safety grounds and must not feel pressured to continue in unsafe conditions
- members and volunteers must be notified of any cancellation as early as possible

12. Fire Safety

The risk of fire is relevant both to indoor venues and to outdoor composting activities. The following applies:

- all indoor venues used by the Society must have appropriate fire safety arrangements in place, including working smoke detectors and clearly marked fire exits
- the session leader must identify the fire exits and assembly point at the start of any indoor session
- composting must not involve burning of materials, as this presents a fire risk and may not be permitted under local bylaws
- any bonfire or burning activity on a site where the Society is working must be assessed for risk and conducted in accordance with any site rules and applicable bylaws
- flammable materials must not be stored near compost heaps or water heating equipment

13. Health and Safety Training

Common Ground Suffolk is committed to ensuring that all volunteers have the knowledge and skills to carry out their activities safely. The following training requirements apply:

- all volunteers must complete a health and safety induction before participating in any practical Society activity, covering the key risks relevant to their role and the controls in place
- at least one volunteer present at every group session must hold a current first aid certificate
- volunteers taking on a session leader role must receive additional training covering risk assessment, accident reporting, and emergency procedures
- the Health and Safety Lead must keep their knowledge up to date and complete relevant training as required

The Society will seek to provide or fund appropriate training and will signpost volunteers to free or low cost resources where available.

14. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed by the Health and Safety Lead and the board at least annually, and following any significant accident, incident, or change in the Society's activities. Any significant changes will be communicated to all volunteers and directors.

In addition to this policy, the Society will maintain a suite of activity-specific risk assessments that are reviewed and updated regularly. These risk assessments form part of the Society's health and safety management system and should be read alongside this policy.

15. Related Policies and Documents

This policy should be read alongside the following Society documents:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Conflicts of Interest Policy
- Rules of the Society
- Activity-specific risk assessments (maintained separately)
- Accident and incident log (maintained separately)

External legislation and guidance referenced in this policy includes:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR)
- Health and Safety Executive guidance for voluntary organisations

Policy adopted by the board of Common Ground Suffolk

Date: _____

Signed (H&S Lead): _____

Signed (Chair): _____