

Thank you to the Association of Running Clubs (ARC) for the following guidance that all our Run Leaders refer to.

SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR ENDURANCE TRAINING GROUP LEADERS

RISK ASSESSMENT

The process of 'risk assessment' is widely used to ensure health and safety in a variety of situations. Here it simply describes the thought processes that a coach or group leader should go through before embarking on a run. Factors to be taken into account should include:

THE TRAINING GROUP

- **Age** - younger athletes will need a greater degree of control than more mature runners.
- **Ability** - capabilities, current fitness, athletes 'carrying' injuries
(a varied ability group will be more difficult to lead than one with runners of similar ability).
- **Experience** - runners' experience of the type of terrain, knowledge of the area as well as general running experience.
- **Health Conditions** - a well organised club should already have made the group leader aware of any relevant conditions e.g. asthma, diabetes, heart problems, limited hearing or vision.
- **Size** - inevitably a larger group (particularly of young athletes) will present more difficulties.

CONDITIONS

- **Weather** - snow, sleet, rain and wind may all increase the possibility of hypothermia. Strong winds increase the risks of falling branches etc. and of runners being blown in front of traffic. Exceptionally (in the UK) heat may be a problem.
- **Underfoot** - ice and compacted snow are common winter hazards. Mud and/or deep water are potential year round problems.
- **Daylight** - availability of daylight will particularly influence winter route choices.

THE ROUTE

- **Traffic** - the presence of traffic, the availability of footpaths and the need for major road crossings are all factors to consider.
- **Street lighting** - risks from traffic and of sprained ankles and falls will be reduced (in the absence of daylight) if well-lit routes are chosen.
- **Terrain** - often the purpose of a training session will be to train over more challenging terrain, but account must always be taken of weather conditions and the abilities of those in the training group.
- **Clarity** - is the route easy to follow or do all the runners already know it?

The basic question the group leader should ask is:

- **Is the route suitable for the people in this group in these conditions ?**

(In many situations there may also be a need to consider the availability of shorter return routes for the less fit or those developing injuries etc.)

PRECAUTIONS which can be taken to reduce the level of risk include:

SUITABLE EQUIPMENT

Runners have their own duty to come along suitably equipped for training sessions but a much more interventive approach should be taken for younger or less experienced runners. Making informal critical comments may be all it is reasonable to expect the group leader to do for experienced athletes (unless club rules on clothing are being breached).

- **Clothing** - high visibility or white clothing should be worn for training in hours of darkness, particularly if the route includes areas without street lights. Weather conditions may justify the wearing of adequate quantities of clothing and possibly windproof or weatherproof garments.
- **Footwear** - difficult terrain (fells, muddy routes) will justify the use of appropriate footwear.

COMMUNICATION

- **Information** - runners must be aware of the proposed route before they set off and of any other important information (e.g. 'holding points' - see below). For complicated routes issuing some photocopied maps may be appropriate. New athletes (particularly younger ones) must be made aware of any relevant rules e.g. re. audio equipment (see below).
- **Audio Equipment** - many clubs prohibit the use of this on club runs because of the difficulties of communication or hearing warnings, and decreased awareness of traffic.
- **Mobile Phone** - whilst this may only be a desirable feature to take on routine urban runs, it becomes much more important in difficult terrain or remote areas (assuming there is a signal) or bad weather.

ORGANISATION

- **'Sweepers'** - in larger groups, particularly with younger athletes, the appointment of one or more 'sweepers' to run at the rear should ensure no-one gets dropped off the rear of the group.
- **'Mindors'** - for inexperienced athletes or those not sure of the route an informal 'minder' (of similar ability) will be beneficial.
- **'Holding Points'** - 'holding points' can be identified to everyone in advance (or to those at the front of the group) where the group (or sections of it) should wait and allow everyone to catch up, or jog back to meet those at the rear. This will often enhance the training experience for many as well as having safety benefits.
- **Road & Rail Crossings** - particularly for younger athletes there will be a need to designate busy road crossing and any rail crossings as 'holding points'.
- **Alternative Routes** - in seriously deteriorating weather conditions (or in the case of a serious injury) there may be a need to use a shorter or safer route back.
- **Checking** - a check should be made at the end that everyone is back safely.

With a larger group a head count or confirmation by the 'sweeper(s)' may be necessary.

If a runner cannot be accounted for then checks should be made with other runners, as well as of kit in the changing room or vehicles in the car park. It may be necessary to run or drive back along the route and/or make calls to mobile or home phones. The stage at which the emergency services will need to be involved will depend on various factors - the age and any health problems of the runner, weather conditions and the nature of the route.