

Equipment safety

Guidance

Equipment safety

For many people, the use of various appliances, equipment and tools is an everyday occurrence in our homes. However, whilst the use of gardening tools, a food blender or an electric drill may be commonplace and considered relatively low risk in a domestic setting, the use of such equipment in a work environment may be subject to specific regulations that govern their safe use. Namely the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER) 1998, due to the legal duty of care present in a work setting.

The information included within this resource applies to any equipment used during youth work activity, either by young people themselves or the workers who are with them. Information in this resource does not cover workers' use of occupational work equipment. For example equipment used in office settings which young people do not have access to, or where a contracted third party may be operating machinery to set-up a site in advance of a youth programme i.e. to put up marquees or teepees.

There are of course, significant potential benefits and positive outcomes for young people from engaging in some activities that involve the use of equipment and youth work organisations and their workers are encouraged not to be unduly deterred by the presence of the regulations. It is however important for youth work organisations and their workers to have a general understanding of the regulations as it is possible that some activities could easily introduce the use of relatively common everyday equipment that fall within the scope of the Regulations when used in a workplace setting.

What is work equipment?

HSE describes work equipment as 'any machinery, appliance, apparatus, tool or installation for use at work (whether exclusively or not). This includes equipment which employees provide for their own use at work. The scope of work equipment is therefore extremely wide.' The use of work equipment is also very widely interpreted and '...means any activity involving work equipment and includes starting, stopping, programming, setting, transporting, repairing, modifying, maintaining, servicing and cleaning'.

Types of work equipment that may be used on youth programmes?

It is important to note that the scope of the PUWER regulations is very broad and many items that are used without significant thought at home would come within the scope of the regulations when used on a youth work programme. This is more likely to apply to youth work that involves experience in the workplace, manual operations, the use or maintenance of machinery, off-site programmes that include physical labour or during social action projects.

Items that would fall within the regulations (unless more specific legislation applies) include: hand tools or power tools, gardening tools, cooking equipment such as food mixers and stoves, glue guns, vacuum cleaners, floor polishers, washing machines/dishwashers, drills, hammers, handsaws, knives, sharpening tools, workshop equipment or apparatus, pressure washers, ladders including stepladders, and office machinery such as shredders and photocopiers etc. This is not necessarily an exhaustive list and youth work organisations do not necessarily need to have specific knowledge of items which do or don't fall under the regulations. However, if youth work organisations do not explicitly know that a particular item or piece of equipment falls outside of the regulations then they are advised to apply the same principles as if it was.

Risk assessment

PUWER states that any organisation using work equipment must manage the associated risks and ensure that all equipment provided is: safe to use; suitable for the intended use; accompanied by appropriate health and safety measures; subject to maintenance and inspection; and used only by individuals who have received adequate information, instruction and training.

It is acknowledged that many items classified as work equipment can be used safely by young people, with minimal training and instruction, and some items would not in normal circumstances necessitate a risk assessment - the use of a photocopier for example. However, any maintenance work or attempt to fix any such equipment carried out by an untrained individual would carry with it increased risk. Any planned youth work activity involving maintenance or repair work therefore would need to be risk assessed and managed in accordance with the regulations.

Youth work organisations should conduct a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for the use of any work equipment. If there is insufficient time or expertise to train and instruct young people in the use of the equipment to the required levels, it may be better to seek an alternative item or activity, or commission an external contractor to manage the specific.

activity requiring use of the work equipment, allowing young people to carry out alternative tasks. For example, during a gardening project, any use of power tools or work requiring the use of ladders or step ladders may be left to trained staff or a contracted third party.

The complexity of the risk assessment should be proportional to the risks introduced by the equipment and may need external expertise. The use of work equipment must be risk assessed, managed and delivered by an individual(s) who is competent to understand the risks, apply appropriate controls and to provide adequate instruction and training to all users including young people.

Key principles when using work equipment:

- Use should be appropriately risk assessed by a competent person who crucially must be able to assess the risk in the context of a work environment and when working with young people
- Consideration should be given to the benefits to young people using the equipment and whether they outweigh the potential risks. Additional consideration should be given to the maturity, capabilities and particular needs of young people and take into account the setting and any environmental factors that may influence the use of equipment including distractions, fatigue, temperature and weather conditions (wind, rain, light)
- The activity and use of equipment should be planned in advance and not decided at the spur of the moment and outside of any existing programme risk assessments
- Items used should be selected for the specific purpose for which they have been designed and manufactured, and not be adapted for different uses
- Equipment should be used in accordance with instructions provided by manufacturer
- Equipment should be safe for use, checked in advance before using and correctly maintained
- Information, instruction and (where identified as necessary) training that is proportionate to the risk should be provided to all users including young people
- Where training is required to use specific equipment, the use of such equipment should be restricted to those that are trained
- Instruction should include, as applicable, safe manual techniques to minimise muscular strain and impact injuries, as well as group management practices to avoid injury to others including the identification of safe working areas
- Supervision should be provided that is relevant to the risk introduced by the equipment, activity or abilities/maturity and individual needs of young people
- Portable electrical items will need to be subject to additional safety inspections
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) identified as necessary or recommended in manufacturer instructions should be provided and used as instructed

Use of personally owned equipment

Youth work organisations are advised to apply additional caution to the use of any personally owned equipment brought in from home by workers or young people. In most cases it will be harder to assess the risk adequately and accurately without knowledge of the history and condition of the equipment and therefore its suitability for use.

Where it may be deemed appropriate for workers or young people to use personally owned equipment, organisations are encouraged to include this within the risk assessment and consider additional measures such as items being checked by a competent person before use during youth work activity, and/or items only to be used by the owner.