

BDMLR Health and Safety guidance



Introduction

BDMLR recognises its volunteers and staff are its most important assets. The charity is obliged by legislation to protect its volunteers and employees' health and safety when they are acting on behalf of BDMLR. This duty is taken seriously by the charity, which has developed health and safety procedures and guidance to ensure risks are recognised and managed. The organisation will supply appropriate training. It is important to follow your training, guidance and direct instruction given to you when taking part in BDMLR organised activities and incidents.

This document is part of this guidance process and is intended to provide a summary of the full Health and Safety policy for general use, not to replace it. So you are asked to read it carefully, it complies with legislation across the United Kingdom.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Trustees of BDMLR are responsible for agreeing and setting policies for the organisation including Health and Safety policies and the HSE Coordinator is responsible for managing, monitoring and ensuring any required updates to the policy are implemented.

All Managers and Area Coordinators are responsible for ensuring the volunteers and staff under their control are trained and knowledgeable about the Health and Safety policy and the guidance in the policy is complied with at all times. Managers and Area Coordinators are also responsible for ensuring any reportable incidents are raised as soon as practicable.

Personnel duties

Volunteers and Staff have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act to ensure their own safety, and those of others while in BDMLR facilities and at rescue incidents. This is managed by complying with this Health and Safety policy and ensuring they:

- Use all Equipment and devices in accordance with training and manufacturer's instructions
- Inform BDMLR of any situation which represents a threat to Health and Safety or of any shortcomings in the HSE policy and protection arrangements.

BDMLR Purpose and Duties

BDMLR's primary purpose is to attempt to rescue marine mammals stranded or otherwise in difficulty around the UK coastline. BDMLR recognises this means close contact with large and potentially dangerous animals in already hazardous conditions, which means volunteers and staff can find themselves in dangerous situations. Regardless, BDMLR has a duty to volunteers and Staff to minimise the overall exposure to risk and the aim of the organisation's safety policy is to create an environment and culture in which risk is properly assessed and managed ensuring awareness of health and safety is high and everyone is kept as safe as possible.

Incident Procedure

When involved in an incident, any injury – however trivial – should be seen by a first aider as soon as possible and where necessary escalated to a minor injuries clinic or accident and emergency department as appropriate. A small wound can be just as dangerous as a large one and exposure or hypothermia can also lead to complications that may need medical observation.

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Office: 01825 765546 Email: info@bdmlr.org.uk Website: www.bdmlr.org.uk

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Remember there is a risk of zoonotic infections and any individual with a seal bite or symptoms after exposure to cetaceans should seek prompt medical advice and take with them the seal bite or zoonosis letter from BDMLR that is printed in the Medic Handbook.

All injuries, bites or other medical conditions following a callout or accident on BDMLR premises should be reported to the BDMLR HSE Coordinator as soon as possible. This includes dangerous occurrences, which are incidents that have the potential to cause harm but may not have actually resulted in injury on that occasion – these are sometimes referred to as ‘near misses’.

Reporting

The reporting procedure for all of these accidents, injuries and occurrences is by filling in the linked form ([BDMLR Accident Report Form](#)) which should be emailed to: mark@bdmlr.org.uk

Working around water

Bodies of water are inherently dangerous, from the risk of drowning, of exposure leading to hypothermia and a variety of other potential complaints. It is important for all staff and volunteers to protect themselves as much as possible from water-based risk. No lone worker should undertake operations that would result in water entry and all marine mammal Medics are to report to Head Office/Out of Hours when safely off the beach. Life jackets or a suitable personal floatation device (PFD) must be worn when operating in or over water (including pierside where a risk of falling in remains). In addition an immersion suit (wet suit, dry suit or survival suit) must be worn when entering the water or when there is a reasonable risk of immersion (i.e. disentanglement team activity), such a suit should be suitable for the weather conditions and temperature and must be properly maintained and done up before approaching the water.

All volunteers and staff should be aware of the risks of hypothermia in cold water, and of hyperthermia in dry suits on a warm day and should look out for warning signs in each other and themselves and take action to relieve anyone showing initial symptoms

Working at height

In general working at height is discouraged wherever possible. However if a rescue is required on an elevated surface then appropriate PPE must be worn, including an helmet and if over water an immersion suit and lifejacket/PFD.

When ladders are used they must be secured either by being fixed or by a person at the base securing them, they must be in good condition and climbers must maintain 3 points of contact.

Should abseiling or rappelling be required for an incident this will only be undertaken by trained personnel with a suitable qualified individual overseeing the operation.

On BDMLR premises, if you must climb, use a proper stepladder or step stool. Do not attempt to climb on desks or chairs etc.

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Working with Animals

By nature of BDMLR's work Volunteers and Staff will interact with animals which are in distress and will therefore be unpredictable and potentially dangerous whether through direct aggression or accidental damage.

Anyone interacting with an animal must be confident in their training and in the task expected of them.

If handlers are trained there is a low risk of seal bites occurring and most of these happen during a lapse in concentration. The risk of zoonotic infection from a seal bite is significant though and any bite should be cause to visit an A&E clinic to seek medical advice carrying the BDMLR seal bite letter.

Cetaceans are not likely to try and bite humans, however the danger from these animals comes from the strength of the tail stock and from potential zoonotic infection via exhalation. Therefore great care should be taken to ensure no personnel step over, lean over or otherwise get too close to the tail. All medics getting into close proximity of animals should have at least gloves, masks and protective suits on and no eating or drinking should happen anywhere near then animals.

Handling of cetaceans can also pose risks including blunt impact from newly released animals or crush/ pinned injury when rolling an animal in confined spaces. All staff and volunteers need to be aware of their surroundings and to listen to feedback from all team members and be ready to assist everyone should something unexpected happen.

The public should also be kept back for their own protection, with the exception of any locally inducted volunteers who must meet the same requirements for PPE.

A debrief should happen after every cetacean rescue in which a reminder to be aware of symptoms of zoonotic infection and to seek medical advice if they appear should be made. There should also be a mechanism for advice and help for anyone suffering distress after the incident, especially but not limited to incidents where animal fatalities or euthanasia occurred.

Maternity

Any member of staff who is pregnant, has given birth in the last 6 months or is breastfeeding should inform her manager or HR as soon as possible so that a risk assessment can be carried out into the work she does.

Should anyone attending an incident identify themselves as currently, potentially or recently pregnant, they should be given roles away from close contact with animals given the increased health risk to mother and child from zoonotic infection.

Manual Handling

When dealing with heavy loads, including sets of pontoons, other equipment and seals or small cetaceans there is a need to lift or move potentially heavy or awkward loads. Manage the situation to decrease the amount of manual handling required, ensure the best route is selected, given the topography of beaches this is usually, but not always, the shortest route so consider options carefully. Ensure you have sufficient numbers to manage the lift, bearing in mind the average weight of the affected species. Appoint a single person to call out and manage the lift and subsequent lowering of the load. Ensure all team members lift with the knees not the back and arrange personnel of different heights to mitigate any strains this may cause.

If the substrate is hard to see or flooded ensure there is a guide to identify any hazards that the lifters may not be able to see. Lift and move smoothly to avoid jerking and injuries caused by sudden movements.

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Driving Vehicles

Whether personal vehicles or BDMLR vehicles, driving is a significant requirement of staff and volunteers.

Attending incidents, relaying seals or moving other animals, all vehicles must be maintained and taxed, hold a valid MOT and insured as appropriate. Any equipment or animals within the vehicle must be secured in such a way as to ensure that they will not come loose and cause injury or distraction to the driver during the journey.

If compressed air tanks are on board, a green diamond "Compressed air " sticker must be fixed to the rear of the vehicle. At all times drivers should comply with advertised speed limits and drive to the actual road conditions.

No smoking should take place in BDMLR vehicles at any time, nor in private vehicles when animals are on board. Driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol shall be considered a gross misconduct offence.

Boat handling

All BDMLR boats should be operated by or under the direct supervision of someone with at least an RYA Powerboat 2 qualification (or equivalent) and incident commanders should check that any supporting vessels are similarly crewed. All vessels must be in contact by VHF radio and for live incidents notice should be given to coastguard before operations begin. All personnel on boats must be wearing life jackets or appropriate PFD's and immersion suits. All BDMLR boats should be serviced and maintained regularly and held in readiness for launching. Boat trailers should likewise be regularly serviced and crews trained to safely launch and recover boats as well as operating them.

Gas canisters

Pressurised air canisters are a requirement to allow the fast and efficient filling of whale pontoons, however these do carry some potential risk. The valve should be protected as a catastrophic weak point on each cylinder. Cylinders should be laid flat when not in use, secured in vehicles for transit and should be carried in 2 hands when on site. The free flowing air exiting a filling tube has the potential to cause injury and on rare occasions an air embolism so care should be taken not to point the filling tubes at close range of people or animals. The metal work on the valve and the filling tubes will reach very low temperatures, likely frosting and can cause exposed skin to stick to the metal with potential frost burn so gloves should be worn when operating this equipment.

All gas canisters require to be periodically visually and pressure tested by certified technicians and this will need to be managed in conjunction with BDMLR equipment officers.

Fire

Under the Fire Reform Act (UK) and the Fire Act (Scotland), BDMLR must ensure that its premises and company vehicles have a low risk of fire. Fire risk assessments have been completed for all BDMLR premises. It is important that Staff and volunteers follow any instructions given to them. Below are guidelines that can be used in most environments:

- Check you know what to do in case of fire.
- Know the sound of your fire alarm.
- Know your escape routes.
- Keep passages, corridors, stairways, fire doors and all escape routes clear and unobstructed.
- Don't obstruct access to fire extinguishers. Learn how they operate.
- Don't hang clothing over or near heating equipment.
- Don't let paper, oily rags or other rubbish accumulate.

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- Don't smoke in areas where it is forbidden.
- Use proper containers for flammable liquids.
- Handle flammable liquids at a safe distance from possible sources of ignition.
- Switch off at the mains any electrical equipment not in use.

Check the whereabouts of the fire extinguisher nearest your place of work and make sure you know how to use it. Make yourself aware of the types and uses of the extinguishers in your area. These are shown on a label on the case of each extinguisher and another label on the wall above it.

Water-filled extinguishers must never be used on electrical or flammable liquid fires.

Breathing any pressurised gas or powder can cause unpleasant and possibly damaging effects. If this happens get to fresh air without delay. Spaces affected should be thoroughly ventilated. When cleaning up the affected area, respiratory protection must be used.

Electricity

Under regulations relating to electricity at work, any work on electrical installations or equipment must be carried out by a qualified electrician. Unqualified people should not undertake work of this nature. No electrical equipment should be introduced for use on BDMLR premises without first being checked and certified as safe to use.

- Never overload electrical equipment.
- If a fuse blows, report it. Don't fit a replacement.
- Switch off and disconnect any equipment that sparks, stalls or appears to be faulty.
- Don't let cables trail across the floor. If they have to cross the floor use the safety covers available.
- Don't use lighting circuits for portable tools.
- Don't pull the cable to disconnect, pull the plug.
- Avoid twisting or crushing cables.
- Keep all electrical equipment clean and dry.
- Don't use portable tools near flammable liquids or gases.
- Don't stand on a wet area when using electrical equipment.
- Ensure all electrical equipment is obtained from a reputable manufacturer, is sufficiently robust for the use intended and is checked by a competent person prior to use.
- Extension leads should be completely uncoiled. Don't use one with only a small amount of the lead pulled out.
- All electrical appliances and equipment should be tested periodically, generally on an annual basis. The guidance here will also apply to any portable generators used to support BDMLR incidents to power lighting or pumps etc.

Some equipment should be checked more frequently due to the arduous conditions under which it is used. It is very dangerous to touch any equipment or machine with an electrical fault. Report any suspected faults immediately and label the equipment or machine with a note saying it is faulty. Remember: electrical repairs or alterations should only be done by a qualified electrician.

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PPE

While critically important to ongoing health and safety, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be regarded as a last line of defence and all staff and volunteers should look to reduce the risks to health by actively considering the risks around them and adopting the safest possible behaviours.

However, as previously stated immersion suits must be worn, properly donned and sealed, when approaching or working over water.

Likewise lifejackets or suitable PFD's should be worn when approaching or working over water. An exception to this would be planned seal rescues on a beach where any water entry is unlikely to be more than midleg in which case waders or long boots may be suitable. A seal rescue on crags or overhangs above deep water should still be approached with immersion suits and lifejacket given the risks of falling in.

When approaching cetaceans facemasks of at least FFP3 standard must be worn and face shields should be worn by any personnel standing at the blowhole. Surgical type gloves should be worn by anyone intending being in physical contact with an animal.

Helmets should be worn in any incident around rocks or cliffs and any other situation where head injuries could be deemed to be possible.

This is a minimum level of PPE requirement and specific hazards may require increased levels or higher standards which will be communicated either by head office in a general update or by incident commanders for specific issues.

Working in offices

If you operate any equipment with a screen, such as a computer, on BDMLR business for over an hour per day, make any necessary adjustments to your chair or desk layout. A Display Screen equipment (DSE) check should be performed whether you work remotely or are office based.

When working with a screen; the keyboard and screen should be separate; the screen should be tilted to a comfortable angle; the screen should be glare-free and its brightness and contrast should be adjustable and the screen should be 60–90cm from the user.

Employers only have to pay for glasses for DSE work if the test shows an employee needs special glasses prescribed for the distance the screen is viewed at. If an ordinary prescription is suitable, employers do not have to pay for glasses. Cables should be secured in a safe way and should not trail across the floor unprotected. Your desk should be tall enough for you to fit your legs beneath it. Its surface should be matt, not shiny, to prevent the reflection of light. The desktop should be large enough to allow any screen to be at optimum viewing distance.

The back of your chair should provide support for the small of your back. Its legs should be sturdy. The seat should be at the correct height to allow a 90° angle between your forearms and your body and a 90° angle between your thighs and your calves. A footrest may prevent pressure on the backs of your thighs when seated.

Artificial lights should be masked and should not reflect on any screens. Ensure any flickering lights are repaired to prevent eyestrain. Screens should not face windows, although blinds can help regulate the amount of sunlight in a room.

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General Advice

Rescue Incidents can be highly emotive, dynamic situations and it can be easy to concentrate on tasks and outcomes to the exclusion of all else. Be aware of the risks and hazards around you, don't take on or try to move weights beyond your capacity and make sure you respect the environment as well as the size and strength of animals around you.

Watch your step and take particular care when boarding or disembarking from boats. Don't engage in horseplay or distract others. Wear and use the PPE provided correctly. Watch the rest of your team and make sure they are not struggling with how to wear PPE, with the effects of exposure or with recognising any of the surrounding hazards.

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