

Health & safety guidance for voluntary bat roost visitors: risk management

As a VBRV it's really important you understand how to manage to potential risks you face. Natural England has produced a number of bespoke **guidance documents** to help you think about some potential hazards including:

- Aggression and violence.
- Lone working.
- Animal related diseases.
- Churches, older buildings, spires and bell towers.
- Dangerous & hazardous substances.
- Manual handling.
- Personal Protective Equipment.
- Restricted spaces.
- Working at height.
- Driving.

The guidance is only one part of ensuring you undertake your visit safely. There may be other hazards present on site not covered by this list. And for every visit you will need to assess the risk to ensure that you minimise any potential harm.

What is a risk?

A 'hazard' is anything that may cause harm such as chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, an open drawer, etc.

The 'risk' is the chance - high or low - that somebody could be harmed by these and other hazards, together with an indication of how serious the harm could be.

What is a risk assessment?

The aim of a risk assessment is to:

- Avoid hazards where possible.
- Assess the risks from those hazards that cannot be avoided.
- Reduce the risks to the lowest level reasonably practicable.

The five steps to risk assessment are:

1. Identify the hazards.
2. Decide who might be harmed and how.
3. Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions.
4. Record your findings (using **NE Risk Assessment Form**) and implement them.
5. Review your assessment and update if necessary.

How do I reduce the risk?

You can do this in a number of ways for each hazard:

Eliminate the hazard

This should always be the starting point when considering the appropriate control to take. You may not always be able to eliminate the hazard, but it should be considered initially.

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Roost visit example

Avoiding working at height by doing the inspection from the ground using binoculars.

Reduce the risk or substitute

This may include doing a task in a different way; providing information, instruction and training; supervision arrangements; using equipment to reduce the risk, or substituting with a safer alternative.

Roost visit example

Reduce the hazards of lone working by taking another VBRV with you.

Prevent contact with the risk / separation

This could be achieved by enclosing the hazard in a separate area / building, or placing barriers around the hazard to direct people away.

Roost visit example

Ask the householder / caretaker to stop anyone coming near the ladders.

Safe systems of work

This could be in the form of safety procedures, safety rules, 'Do's and Don'ts', or more formal 'Permit to Work' systems. You should consider whether training is required to undertake a certain activity.

Roost visit example

Using a buddy system to ensure the alarm is raised if you do not return from a visit when expected.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

In some instances it is appropriate to manage risk by using PPE – where the preceding steps have all been considered. Natural England provides volunteers with PPE which meets the minimum standards required for this activity. See the Natural England '[Personal Protective Equipment](#)' Technical Information Note for more guidance.

Roost visit example

Wear hard hat to protect head against bumps and more serious injuries when in loft space.

This five point list is known as the hierarchy of control – if you start at the top of the hierarchy ('Eliminate the hazard') you will put in place the most effective control measures. You do not have to eliminate all risk associated with your visit, but you do need to ensure that you and others are properly protected by taking reasonable precautions.

Right skills and training

Training on how to spot and control rising aggression and violence is available to VBRVs on the Skillport online learning system via the [VBRV Training page](#) of the Natural England website.

Reporting an incident

You must report any accident, near miss or incident which occurs whilst performing or travelling to / from a roost visit to Natural England as soon as possible:

- Contact the Natural England 'near miss and incident reporting line' at any time on 0300 060 0100.
- If the incident results in injury to another person or damage to property please also contact: Martin Rhodes 0300 060 2676 or Lucy Foster 0300 060 0666.

Feedback

If you have any feedback about this guidance or would like to see additions / amendments please get in touch by emailing:

batvolunteers@naturalengland.org.uk.

Further information

Please see our website page and other VBRV health and safety leaflets at:

[Health and safety for voluntary bat roost visitors](#)
[Publications for voluntary bat roost visitors](#)

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: www.naturalengland.org.uk.

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For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

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