



Information and safety awareness for volunteering with Banstead Commons Conservators

Introduction

This leaflet has been written to help you carry out practical countryside management tasks as safely as possible. By following these guidelines, you will not only reduce the risk of accidents, but you will also make better and more efficient use of the tools and so increase your own enjoyment of the work.

Essentials

You should:

- always wear old clothing and strong boots and carry waterproofs in case it rains.
- not wear overly loose clothing.
- ensure you have an up-to-date tetanus vaccination.
- bring your own personal welfare items, such as suncream, insect repellent and antihistamine.
- know why the work is being carried out, and how to carry it out. Don't be afraid to ask.
- have the correct tools, in good condition.
- keep children and dogs under control, and well away from people working with tools, children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult.
- bring a packed lunch and refreshments.
- not carry valuables.
- If you arrive late or leave early always tell the task leader.

We provide:

- tea, coffee, water and biscuits
- personal accident insurance
- safety equipment
- trained task leaders who are qualified first aiders



GENERAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Introduction

The Task Leader will describe the day's task on arrival at the site, together with safety information and precautions. He/she will give detailed instructions to any volunteer who needs them - please ask if you are unsure of any aspect of the work, or the tools to be used.

Safety Clothing

Wear suitable footwear for outdoor tasks. Safety helmets, ear protectors, safety goggles and gloves are always available.

Safety helmets must be worn where material over head height is being felled, when working with a tool above head height, or when undertaking construction work. It is advisable to wear a safety helmet when using long handled tools, or when they are in use nearby.

Ear defenders must be worn if a chainsaw or other machinery is being used within 5 metres and at all times when power tools are being used in a workshop.

Safety goggles and dust masks should be worn when creating sawdust or in excessively dusty conditions.

Gloves are not to be worn when using 'swinging' tools (e.g. hammer, clearing axe).

First Aid, Illness and Fatigue

A first aid kit is in every vehicle and one is always taken to the work area. The Task Leader is normally the first aider and any injury or near miss must always be reported to them. Always wash cuts and grazes and have any injuries, however 'small', seen by the first aider. Record all injuries, regardless of severity, in the accident book, kept in the first aid kit.

Emergency Action

In the event of an emergency: ensure the Task Leader is informed immediately. Stop all work. Make sure someone calls an ambulance.

If you have an illness or you are under any medication which could affect your work such as diabetes, asthma or epilepsy, please tell the Task Leader, it will be treated in complete confidence. Some of the work carried out can be tiring. Work at your own pace and stop as often as necessary - do not work when overtired - this can lead to accidents. Do not work in extremely hot, cold or wet conditions. Drink plenty of fluid. Do not drink any alcohol as you will not be insured if you have an accident.

Ensure your tetanus injections are up to date. If working in or near to a pond or ditch, always wash your hands with the clean water provided before eating or drinking, and keep any cuts covered with a waterproof plaster. This is to avoid the risk of catching [Weil's disease](#). Wear long trousers and long sleeves if working in long vegetation. This is to avoid bites from ticks,



which may carry [Lymes disease](#). It is recommended that you carry a tick remover, check yourself regularly, particularly at the end of the day. For further information on these diseases, plus sepsis which can develop after an injury, visit www.nhs.uk and use the search bar to find advice on causes, symptoms and prevention. Another potential hazard is exposure to oak processionary moth, we will avoid working at known nest locations, but recommend you familiarise yourself with the information available at <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/oakprocessionarymoth>.

Please bring your own personal welfare items such as suncream, insect repellent and antihistamine etc as we don't provide these. Remember to use a high factor sunscreen (min SPF 15 is advisable) and keep covered up, especially between 11am and 3pm when the sun is at its hottest. Wear a hat with a wide rim that protects your ears and the back of your neck. Even on cloudy days UV radiation can still filter through.

Mobile Phones

The task leader will have a mobile phone which is available for emergencies.

Control Of Substances Hazardous to Health and Risk Assessments

These have been compiled for every product or tool which we use or activity we carry out which is considered to be potentially damaging to health. The site risk assessment gives further safety information. They are available on site and should be read by everyone.

Safe Lifting

Never lift more than you can easily manage. Always ask for assistance for lifting heavier loads. Lift in easy stages - from floor to knee, then from knee to carrying position. Reverse this when setting a load down. Do not jerk, shove or twist. Awkward movements to the body can cause injury. Hold weights close to the body. Let the legs and the knees do the work - keep the back straight. Grip the load with the palms of the hands, not the fingertips, and do not change your grip while carrying the load.

Check your route is clear before starting and do not allow the load to obstruct your view. Use a wheelbarrow when available. Try to organise the work to minimise the amount of lifting necessary. When help is needed to lift heavy or awkward loads - get everyone to work together, with one person giving clear, unhurried instructions.

Moving About

Do not move into an area where trees are being felled. Please walk around the work site; do not run, particularly when carrying tools. Never hitch a ride on a vehicle not designed for passengers. Do not stand on a trailer or sit in a dumper truck. Inform the task leader if you are leaving early or having a break and taking a walk.

Safe Working Practices



When using 'swinging tools' such as slashers, billhooks, axes, mells etc, it is important to work at a safe distance from anyone else. This should be a minimum of twice the length of your arm plus tool. Never work in an area where a tree is being felled. You should be a minimum distance of 5m or twice the height of the produce being felled, whichever is the greater. Also do not work too close to a fire (except when loading). You must keep both feet on the ground at all times when using tools.

Safety with tools

Carrying

- Never carry more tools than you can comfortably manage.
- Always carry tools at your side, with the business end facing forward and points or blades facing towards the ground.
- Always keep a good distance between yourself and others when carrying tools, in case you slip.
- Never carry tools over your shoulder - heads are easily damaged.
- When not in use all tools should be laid flat on the ground, in an obvious place.
- Spades, shovels, forks and rakes should be placed with points downwards.
- Do not leave saws hanging on branches, or clearing axes stuck in stumps.
- Always bring tools back into a central position near the tea box at lunch and tea breaks, and when you have finished with them. Also, please help to carry them back to the vehicle at the end of the day.

Using hand tools

- Before you use any tool, check the handle is not chipped, split, or broken. Ensure it is sharp (but not by running your finger along the edge). Sharper tools are safe because they do not bounce and work more effectively.
- Always use tools correctly, and use the correct tool for the job.
- Use a mell on wood only, never on metal or concrete.
- Never wear a glove when swinging any tool - your bare hand gives better grip, (tools which you swing include hammers, billhooks, slashers and clearing axes) and do not use these tools in heavy rain.
- Be careful not to strain your back when levering with an iron bar.
- Always ask the Task Leader for instruction on how to use, or how to sharpen any tool.



Maintenance

- A well-maintained tool is safer, lasts longer, and is easier to use.
- Make sure tools are clean and rust free, blades are sharp and heads are secure.
- Inform the Task Leader if a tool is damaged and ensure no one else uses it

Fencing/Digging holes

- When digging holes, check for electrical cables etc. - cable and pipe detection equipment is available and should be used by trained staff and volunteers only.
- Fill all holes in by the end of the day (with posts/wood etc) to make safe.
- Do not cover holes with a tarpaulin.
- Always wear a helmet when using a drivall, or a mell. Drivalls are two person tools and are heavy, do not strain yourself.
- Take care when straining wire. Keep people away from wire being strained in case of snapping. Never leave strained wire unsecured.
- Ensure all carpentry tools including drills etc are collected together at breaks and put away in the tool boxes at the end of the day.

Timber

- When working with timber which has been treated with preservative always wear gloves and never allow the timber or off-cuts to be burnt.
- Always wash your hands after handling the timber and before eating or drinking.
- (It is advisable to consult the COSHH data sheets when using treated timber)

Tree Felling

- Always wear a safety helmet when you or anyone else is felling, or when in a felling area.
- Only fell trees after receiving guidance and instruction.
- Check for dead limbs or hung up branches which could be dangerous.
- Observe safe working distances, be aware of those felling near you and always look and warn anyone nearby before making the back cut.
- **Never leave a tree partially felled or hung up. Tape it off, or leave someone on guard, if you need to go for help.**
- Never fell trees in high winds.



- Place tree felling signs, warning tape or look-outs to warn people if felling in a public area, across or near footpaths or bridleways.
- Always clear away felled timber as you go.

Vehicles

- Volunteers are not permitted to drive any vehicle on Banstead Commons.
- Passengers in any of our vehicles must, at all times, wear seat belts.

Hazards to the Public

- Be aware of passers-by and warn them of any dangers, use warning signs/notices/tape and give warnings orally, particularly if using machinery or if felling trees.
- Report anything which seems dangerous, damaged or faulty to the Task Leader.

Smoking

- Do not throw cigarette ends away. Always extinguish all stubs.
- Do not smoke near flammable substances, or when plant or vehicles are being refuelled.
- Obey any 'no smoking' rules, especially in the workshop.

Fires

- Only light fires with the agreement of the Task Leader. Always have a shovel and a fire fork nearby before you light the fire.
- Never light a fire in a high wind.
- Site the fire correctly, away from trees, buildings, vehicles, roads etc and under no circumstances should you light a fire under or over power lines or gas pipes. Use judgement as to the height of the fire, as overhanging trees can be damaged.
- Take extra care on heathland as fire can travel underground and spread out of control. If this is a risk dig a trench around the area before starting a fire.
- Never use petrol, oil or tyres to start a fire.
- Keep tools away from a fire, especially chainsaws, brush cutters and fuel.
- Beware of wearing flammable clothing.
- If a fire is out of control, do not take risks, contact the emergency services.
- Always turn in the remains (or ashes) of a fire after allowing it to die down as much as possible. Fence off the area with tiger tape at the end of the day.



Ponds and Rivers

Conservation volunteers working in and around ponds must take extra care to ensure their own safety and protect the surrounding habitat. Volunteers should use appropriate personal protective equipment, maintain three points of contact when entering or exiting the water, and avoid working alone. Edges may be slippery, water depths can vary, and hidden hazards such as deep mud or sharp debris may be present.

Volunteers working on ponds on the Commons will receive a bespoke risk assessment for each task, outlining the specific risks and safety measures associated with that activity. Always follow guidance from trained leaders, assess conditions before beginning work, and stop immediately if the environment becomes unsafe.

Power Tools and Machinery

For health & safety and insurance reasons, all machinery use is restricted to those people who have received the relevant training for the tool in question.

Machinery can be used on site or at the workshops, but only with the permission of the Task Leader.

Electric Tools

Only those who have been trained and permitted may use power tools on Banstead Commons.

Chainsaws and Scrub Cutters

- Volunteers can use chainsaws and scrub cutters if certificated and have express permission from the Clerk of the Conservators.
- If using a scrub cutter you must wear a chainsaw hat, visor, ear defenders and leg protection.
- Never walk into an area marked out for chainsaw use.
- Never walk closer to a person using a chainsaw or scrub cutter than 15m or twice the length of the produce being cut, whichever is the greater. Stop work immediately if you see anyone within 15m.
- Never tap a chainsaw/scrub cutter operator on the shoulder to attract their attention - do this from a safe distance by shouting or waving.
- Never leave fuel cans anywhere near a fire.

Lone working

You will not be required to work by yourself as a volunteer carrying out practical tasks. Volunteers recruited and trained for stock checking will receive additional information to



cover lone working and working with livestock. Volunteers recruited and trained as wardens will also receive additional information to cover lone working.

If you would like further information regarding anything on this leaflet, please contact the Clerk on 07942 912858. Email enquiries@bansteadcommons.org.uk