



**Somerset**  
Council

# Highway Volunteer Handbook



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## Introduction

This handbook has been designed to provide simple guidance to City, Town or Parish Council volunteers working alongside and on the highway, including metalled public rights of way (more guidance will follow regarding public rights of way maintenance). It provides information on where to find support if an incident occurs, as well as guidance to help ensure all volunteers remain safe whilst helping improve the local highways.

This handbook is not fully comprehensive. Individuals are responsible for their own safety and ensuring any tasks they undertake are within their own capability and skill set.

City, Town, and Parish Councils are responsible for providing the appropriate levels of insurance to cover the low risk activities defined in the volunteer safety awareness training course, and we advise that City, Town, and Parish Councils discuss the appropriate levels of insurance with their insurance provider.

Safety is paramount for anyone working on or near the highway – if in doubt, STOP, and seek advice from your City, Town or Parish Council.

## Safety first

- Ensure you are safe!
- Ensure people can still pass by safely.
- Think about where you will store your equipment.
- Think about where you are going to store any arisings (waste products).
- Don't start something you can't finish.

## Risk

A risk assessment is the process of evaluating hazards in the environment in order to understand the risks posed. The main purpose of a risk assessment is to:

- To keep people safe
- Manage risk by identifying hazards
- Protect the City, Town and Parish Council from possible prosecution
- Make sure that work can be carried out with little or no risk
- Provide information for auditors

When talking about the subject of health and safety, people sometimes use different terms interchangeably, which can lead to confusion. Before we move on, let's check a few definitions.

- A hazard is something that has the potential to cause harm
- A risk is the chance that someone will be harmed by a hazard
- An incident is an occurrence that is unplanned and undesirable
- An incident does not necessarily lead to injury.
- Harm is the impact of a hazard. Harm can be sustained by objects in the form of damage or by persons in the form of injury. Harm is a common consequence of an incident.

So before determining that particular activities can be performed by volunteers, the activity should be subjected to an appropriate level of risk assessment by the City, Town and Parish Councils.

## **Key hazards and potential control measures**

### **Hazards and Risk Levels:**

- Hazards include anything (objects, persons, conditions etc) that could cause harm
- Risk levels are categorized as Low, Medium, High, or N/A (not applicable)
- Control measures are implemented to mitigate risks

### **Physical Hazards:**

- Uneven or slippery ground surfaces
- Steep banks, reed beds, shrubs, brambles, and tree branches
- Visibility
- Cyclists and pedestrians
- Tools
- Weather
- Parked vehicles
- Vehicle speed
- Sharps, needles

**Potential control measures:**

- Safety goggles
- Heavy duty gloves
- Heavy duty shoes or boots
- Work around vehicles where safe to do so
- Wear suitable clothing for weather conditions (e.g., sun hat and sun cream in hot weather, waterproof warm clothing in cold weather)
- On country lanes, a second volunteer will act as a buddy/look out whilst the other is carrying out the activity
- Carry out the activity in low speed and low volume rural areas
- Carry a First Aid kit
- Allow others safe passage by moving yourself and/or your tools

**Handling/Lifting Hazards:**

- Twisting or leaning
- Lifting more than you can easily manage
- Standing on uneven ground

**Potential control measures:**

- Keep feet apart, one leg in front of the other
- Use a litter picker to avoid unnecessary bending
- Lift and move items using your legs (not your back)
- Take regular breaks to prevent fatigue

**Weather Considerations:**

- Be aware of the weather conditions (e.g. hot, cold or wet / sunny, foggy, misty)
- Heat stroke
- Dehydration
- Hypothermia

**Potential control measures:**

- Wear suitable clothing for weather conditions (e.g., sun hat and sun cream in hot weather, waterproof warm clothing in cold weather)
- Take regular breaks out of the sun
- Carry water and drink regularly

**Chemical Hazards:**

- Ignition source and flammable materials (e.g. cigarettes, electronic devices, tools or other objects that may spark with use)
- Flammable liquids / flammable solids / flammable aerosols
- Acids and Cyanides
- Paint / petroleum products
- Pesticides / herbicides

**Potential control measures:**

- Report it by phoning this number 0300 123 2224 or report it via the Somerset website to [Report a problem on the road \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk)

**Biological Hazards:**

- Dirty water in ditches
- Faeces, vomit and used condoms
- Hypodermic needles
- Toxic waste (e.g. batteries, asbestos, chemicals)

**Potential control measures:**

- Report it by phoning this number 0300 123 2224 or report it via the Somerset website to [Report a problem on the road \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk)

**Verbal/Physical Abuse:**

- Hitting, slapping, punching
- Belittling, name calling, threats of harm, intimidation
- Racist or sexist abuse, abuse based on a person's disability and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment

**Potential control measures:**

- Advice will be provided for any specific precautions needed to be taken at certain locations
- Adopt a non-confrontational attitude. Do not react to verbal abuse or provocation; remain calm. Any incident of abuse must be reported
- Provide up-to-date contact details to your City, Town or Parish Council

## First Aid

The City, Town or Parish Council will provide first aid kits for volunteer use.

First Aid kits will be kept on site and volunteers should know where it is and be familiar with its contents and how to use them. In an emergency call 999.

First Aid kits will conform to BS 8599-1.

It is recognised that although volunteers are not employees of the City, Town and Parish Councils, under Health and Safety Legislation where they are operating under service direction they are protected under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, as non-employees who could be affected by their Council's undertaking.

Any incidents involving actual, or the potential of, harm to volunteers must be reported to your City, Town and Parish Council and entered onto the parishes accident / incident recording system.

## Hospital Emergency Departments

Name and Address	Phone	Website
Yeovil Hospital BA21 4AT	01935475122	<a href="http://somersetft.nhs.uk">Yeovil Hospital - Yeovil Hospital (somersetft.nhs.uk)</a>
Musgrove Park Hospital Parkfield Drive Taunton, TA1 5DA	01823333444	<a href="http://www.nhs.uk">Departments and services - Musgrove Park Hospital - NHS (www.nhs.uk)</a>

## Urgent care – Walk in Centre

Name and Address	Phone	Website	Opening times
Chard Community Hospital Crewkerne Road Chard, TA20 1NF	01460 238220	<a href="#">Departments and services - Chard Community Hospital - NHS (www.nhs.uk)</a>	8:00am to 8:30pm open 7 days a week
Frome Community Hospital Enos Way Frome, BA11 2FH	01373 454770	<a href="#">Departments and services - Frome Community Hospital - NHS (www.nhs.uk)</a>	8:00am to 9:00pm open Monday to Friday
Bridgwater Community Hospital Bower Lane Bridgwater, TA6 4GU	01278 436555	<a href="#">Departments and services - Bridgwater Community Hospital - NHS (www.nhs.uk)</a>	8:30am to 5:00pm open Monday to Friday  open 9:00am to 5:00pm weekends
Minehead Community Hospital Luttrell Way Minehead, TA24 6DF	01643 701715	<a href="#">Departments and services - Minehead Community Hospital - NHS (www.nhs.uk)</a>	8:00am to 9:00pm open 7 days a week
Shepton Mallet Community Hospital Bucklers Way Old Wells Road Shepton Mallet, BA4 4PG	03333 218278	<a href="#">Departments and services - Shepton Mallet Community Hospital - NHS (www.nhs.uk)</a>	8am – 8:30pm open 7 days a week
West Mendip (Glastonbury) Community Hospital Old Wells Road Glastonbury, BA6 8JD	01458 836454	<a href="#">West Mendip Community Hospital - NHS (www.nhs.uk)</a>	8:00am to 9:00pm open 7 days a week

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The City, Town or Parish Council will provide standard PPE consisting of:

- Class 3 high visibility jacket or tabard
- Construction gloves
- Safety goggles/glasses

High visibility clothing must be worn at all times, and we encourage volunteers to wear their own suitable footwear.



## Hand tool management

It is likely that many of the tasks you may undertake as a Highway Volunteer will involve using tools which could include spades, brooms, pruning tools, rakes, wire brushes etc.

Volunteers can bring their own tools providing they are in good condition, and must take responsibility for them, so as not to cause risk to themselves and others.

When the volunteer has finished using a tool, they must ensure that it is placed somewhere safe at the location, where it will not create a hazard to highway users or your fellow volunteers.

On completing an activity, volunteers should return all tools to the City, Town or Parish Council.

## Transporting

- Never carry more tools than you can comfortably manage and always carry tools to your side with any spikes or blades facing down
- Always keep a good distance from others when carrying tools in case you slip

## Care when tools not in use

- When not in use tools should be laid flat with sharp edges and spikes facing downwards
- Always keep tools in a central location (do not leave saws etc. hanging in trees and bushes)

## Using tools

- Always use the right tool for the job and appropriate protective equipment
- You should only use tools that you are familiar/competent to use (it is ok to ask for help)
- Always inspect your tool for damage before and after use
- Always maintain a safe working zone, this should include the full length of the tool being used

## Access and lone working

Ensure there is good access and egress to work area, do not get yourselves in a place of no escape. Volunteers should never work by themselves, ensure that you are always with another person.

## Other users of the highway

Path users shall at all times retain the right to pass, where this cannot be maintained they shall be escorted through the work area.

Volunteers should always be aware of their surroundings. Where the activity is on a public accessible area, for example a footway or cycleway, be vigilant of other cycleway/footway users and to allow them safe passage by moving yourself and/or your tools.

## Infectious Diseases

### Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis or Wiels disease is a serious and sometimes fatal infection that is transmitted to humans by contact with urine from infected rats and cattle.

Early symptoms can include a flu-like illness with a persistent and severe headache, which can lead to vomiting and muscle pain and ultimately jaundice, meningitis and kidney failure and possible death

### Prevention

- Clean and cover any cuts or breaks in the skin and always wear gloves when working
- Always wash your hands and forearms before eating drinking or smoking and avoid touching your face whilst working
- In areas of heavy rat infestation consider extra controls such as disposable coveralls

### What to do if you think you have become infected

- Seek medical attention immediately, tell them the type of work you were undertaking and the location and report any suspected infection to your supervisor

### Lymes Disease

Lymes disease is transmitted to humans by the bite of infected ticks. Symptoms include fever, headaches and fatigue, a rash at the site of the bite, often appearing as a bull's-eye.

If left untreated, it can affect the joints, heart and central nervous system and can cause long term irreversible damage to your health.

If you find a tick on your body do not attempt to remove it by squeezing its body. Remove the tick by holding the mouth parts with tweezers or leave it in place and seek medical attention.

If you have a suspected bite and the rash appears seek medical attention.



## Natural Hazards

There are a number of naturally occurring hazards to be aware of when working on highway verges.

### Ragwort

Volunteers should be aware of this plant, and avoid it, unless they are wearing specialist protective clothing.

Ragwort is a poisonous weed of which *Senecio jacobaea* is the most common.

Ragwort is a tall erect plant to 90cm (3ft) bearing large flat-topped clusters of yellow daisy-like flowers from July to October.

It has finely divided leaves with a basal rosette of deeply cut, toothed leaves.



The plant is usually a biennial (living only two years and flowering in its second year) but damage to the base of the plant can make the plant behave like a perennial (living indefinitely), as new rosettes are formed.

Ragwort may occur in pony paddocks, railway embankments and areas of unimproved pasture. Cattle and horses are particularly susceptible to poisoning.

### Giant Hogweed

Volunteers should be aware of this plant, and avoid it, unless they are wearing specialist protective clothing.

Giant hogweed can grow up to five metres tall, often along footpaths and riverbanks.

If the sap of the plant comes into contact with your skin, it can cause severe, painful burns and make your skin sensitive to strong sunlight. The hollow stems are an attraction to children for use as a "pea shooter".



If you touch a giant hogweed, cover the affected area, and wash it with soap and water.

The blisters heal very slowly and can develop into phytophotodermatitis, a type of skin rash which flares up in sunlight. If you feel unwell after contact with giant hogweed, speak to your doctor.

**Location:** Roadsides, railway embankments, riversides, hedges and fields.

**Flowering period:** May to September.

## Oak Processionary Moth (OPM)

Oak trees are currently being inhabited by OPM. Initially nests are built between March and April, before hairy caterpillars appear from the nests and process up and down the oak tree.

The Caterpillars and nests, have hairs which can cause rashes and in extreme cases breathing difficulties.



Volunteers are advised to carefully check round Oak trees.

Check for nests either in the tree or on the ground with fallen leaves.

## Underground Utilities

### Statutory Undertakers pipes and cables

The highway has many underground statutory undertakers pipes and cables.

This can include water mains, gas pipes, street lighting electricity cables, and fibre optic cables.

The volunteer will undertake a dynamic site risk assessment on arrival at the location.

They will take note of any of these potential hazards, to assess for signs of cables, recent ground disturbance, or metal or concrete covers.

This assessment will take place prior to volunteers carrying out any work.



## Exposed cables

Some statutory undertakers apparatus may not be buried to the correct depth.

The volunteer will undertake a dynamic site risk assessment on arrival at the location and report any exposed apparatus to [Report a problem on the road \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/report-a-problem-on-the-road)



## Vegetation works

### Overhanging vegetation

Trimming back overhanging vegetation can help passage along the carriageway and tidy up an overgrown area.

During March to August, special care must be taken to not disturb nesting birds.

Check areas of vegetation for nests before cutting, particularly amongst dense scrub and ivy.

Start lightly so if a nest is discovered, it can be left undisturbed.

From September to December, avoid cutting fruit and berry bearing branches unless absolutely necessary.

It is also important to ensure that any vegetation belongs to the City, Town or Parish, or Somerset Council, and is not privately owned.

These conifers (pictured above) are likely to be private, and hence should not be cut by volunteers without permission of the householder.

Areas such as this can be reported via: [Report a problem on the road \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/report-a-problem-on-the-road)

Provide a photo and good location details, and the team will deal with the overgrown private vegetation issue.



## Grass, brambles & weeds

Check no fences or wire cables within the vegetation before you start work.

Beware of 'flying' debris as you undertake the works.

Avoid 'wild flowers' – wait to the end of season, unless it is a safety issue.

Ensure the foliage debris doesn't block the footway – think about where to store them safely.

Hoe or use a stiff brush on weeds. Look out for litter and sharps.



## Epicormic growth

Is the annual growth that occurs on the lower part of the main trunk of the tree.

The growth can block the footway, and occurs mostly between May and August.

Volunteers may trim this new growth, but must ensure that it is as close to the main trunk as possible.



## Minor sign maintenance

### Sign cleaning including fingerposts, and vegetation clearance

If you wish to paint or repair a fingerpost please follow this link the Maintenance, Repair & Restoration Handbook [Fingerpost](#)

Over time, detritus and vegetation can cause signs to become unreadable or hidden within hedgerows.

Before working on a signpost, give it a head to toe check. Ensure that it is not rotten and won't collapse if leant on. The back of the sign should also be checked make sure that the bolts and clips are in place and the sign will not fall.

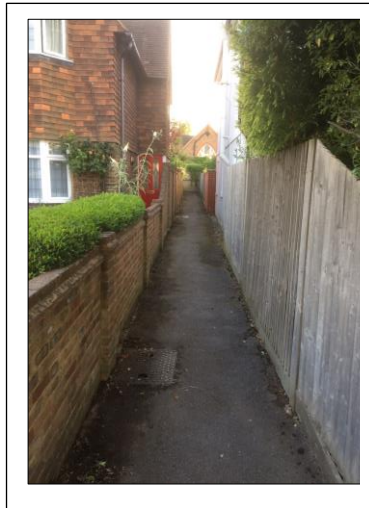
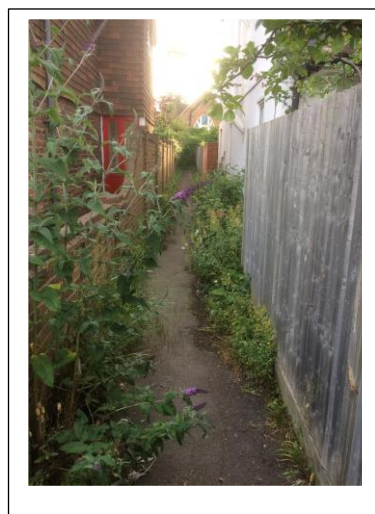
The volunteers will remove all detritus, foreign material, algae and graffiti to ensure the signs are clearly visible to highway users. It is important not to overreach when cleaning signs. Make sure that both feet are always on the ground.

Cleaning signs can be undertaken with water and soft brushes, sponges, mops or pressure washer. Signs have a retroreflective covering to ensure they can be seen during low light. For this reason, it is important not to use chemicals or to scrub too hard when trying to remove dirt or detritus.

Clearing and cutting back vegetation can be undertaken using hand tools, for example shears.

A check must be made to assess if the root base of the vegetation is the responsibility of the adjoining landowner and therefore it is imperative that the City, Town or Parish Council consults with the landowner of the tree, bush or hedge for approval before commencing work.

## Before and after images



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