



WE DISCOVER, WE GROW

Girlguiding

Be prepared: health and safety

Advice for managers and owners of small Girlguiding properties

If you manage or own a Girlguiding property, making sure you're up to date with health and safety and are doing everything right is really important.

After all, what could be more vital than protecting the girls using your building from harm?

We know it can be a bit difficult to get your head round it all. How do I do a risk assessment? What about fire safety? How do I make sure my electrical equipment isn't dangerous?

This guide will answer all your health and safety questions, so you're ready for anything.

Is this the right guide for me?

This guide is for managers or owners of small Girlguiding properties.

By small property we mean one made up of maybe a main hall with a couple of meeting rooms off it, a small office and kitchen, a couple of toilets and some parking outside.

If you hire a property or a space, take a look at our other guide [here](#).

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Your first step: a risk assessment

When it comes to health and safety, the place to start is with a risk assessment. That means going round your property and, step by step, identifying things that could cause harm, and coming up with ways to get rid of or minimise these risks. By small property we mean one made up of maybe a main hall with a couple of meeting rooms off it, a small office and kitchen, a couple of toilets and some parking outside.

There are three things you should write down in your risk assessment:

1. The hazards you've found
2. Who might be harmed by them and how (Children, public, visitors? What could happen to them?)
3. What you're doing now to control the risks, and a 'to do' list of anything you need to start doing

We've got a handy [risk assessment template](#) for you to use, and also some examples of [filled-in templates](#).

You'll need to review and update your risk assessment whenever necessary - for example, after an accident or changes to equipment or staff.

What hazards should I be looking for?

- **Slip/trip/fall hazards** - uneven floors, stairs, steps (inside and outside) and wet floors due to cleaning
- **Boiler risks** - carbon monoxide, gas leaks, potential explosions and fire
- **Ovens** - burns, carbon monoxide, gas leaks, potential explosions and fire
- **Electricity** - fires and electric shocks from poor wiring, damaged plugs/leads and overloaded sockets
- **Water systems** - tanks dirty/contaminated, potential for legionella and other disease, and scalding from hot water
- **Asbestos**
- **Fire in general** - build-up of combustible materials, flammable chemicals/fuels/gas cylinders, and ignition sources such as electricity, cigarettes or bins left next to building
- **Dangers of working at height**, for example while doing roof maintenance, clearing leaves out of gutters or decorating inside
- **Equipment risks** - not being serviced and breaking down more often, becoming dangerous, safety devices failing to work, and using equipment not suitable for the task

Top tips for doing your risk assessment

- When you're assessing the risks of equipment like ovens, computers or boilers, check the safety instructions that came with it and make sure you're following them all.
- Look back at any accidents that have happened in your property. Are you doing everything possible to make sure they don't happen again?
- It can be a good idea to start your risk assessment with a list of activities you do, then for each one try to think of any hazards. Consider:
 - The equipment being used
 - How many people are involved
 - The age of participants - will they understand instructions, be excitable etc?
 - Are there any hazards in the area where the activity takes place, like sharp edges, trip hazards or chemicals?
 - Are there any other dangers, for example being close to roads, open water, steep drops, the public, workmen or animals? Could bad weather cause a problem?
- Ask your colleagues for help - they might help you think of some hazards you'd forgotten.
- Remember, it's impossible to eliminate all risk - it's part of everyday life. But you do need to do everything 'reasonably practicable' to protect people from harm.

Protecting your property from fire

Protecting against fire is another huge part of making your property safe. The law says you have to do a fire risk assessment for your property. This is similar to a risk assessment, but looking specifically for fire hazards, and working out what you're going to do to remove or minimise them.

You can use our [fire risk assessment template](#) to do this. We've also got an example of a [filled-in assessment](#).

If you don't feel comfortable doing your own fire risk assessment, lots of companies or the local fire authority can do it for you, for a fee. If you decide to use a company, make sure to get at least three quotes.

You need to keep your fire safety risk assessment up to date. If there are changes to your premises or the people who work there, you'll need to review it.

How can I prevent a fire?

Remember the fire triangle, which shows that fires can start from a mix of:

- **Heat**
heaters, lighting, naked flames, electrical equipment, cigarettes, matches or anything else that can get very hot or cause sparks
- **Fuel**
wood, paper, plastic, rubber, foam, loose packaging, rubbish, furniture or chemicals
- **Oxygen**
the air around us



How can I prevent a fire?

- **Keep sources of ignition (like matches) and flammable substances apart**
 - Use a flammable-resistant cupboard or container for things that might ignite.
 - Don't store flammable substances in electrical cupboards.
 - Check the chemical safety data sheets of your cleaning products to see which chemicals shouldn't be mixed, and store them in separate areas.
- **Avoid accidental fires**
 - Make sure heaters can't be knocked over.
 - Don't store combustible materials close to lights.
 - Remove phone chargers from sockets after use.
 - Don't overload electrical sockets.
 - Regularly check that electrical appliances are working well.
- **Keep your property tidy**
 - Avoid letting rubbish that could burn build up.
 - Keep external rubbish bins away from building (in case of an arson attack).
 - Empty cigarette bins.

What fire safety equipment do I need?

You need a fire detection system in your property - as a minimum, smoke alarms in every room. An alarm that sounds throughout the building automatically if there's a fire is also a good idea.

If you don't have this automatic alarm, you should have a system thought out for how you would quickly alert everyone in the building that there's a fire, for example by shouting 'fire!' or sounding a foghorn.

If you're using your property for sleepovers, you must have an automatic alarm.

You also legally need to have fire extinguishers. Someone with the right training, most likely from a local fire protection company, needs to install these and make sure they're working on site. They'll also be able to advise you on what types of fire extinguishers you need, how many, where they should go, and train you how to use them.

Maintaining your fire safety equipment

Another crucial part of fire safety is maintaining all your equipment, servicing and testing it regularly. It's a good idea to keep a log book of your maintenance checks - we've got a [log book template](#) you can use.

Here's what you need to think about in terms of maintenance:

- Your fire extinguishers should be serviced every year by a qualified contractor. After 5-10 years you might need to replace your extinguishers, but this will depend on the environment you keep them in.
- At least every month, you need to check extinguishers are in place, at the correct pressure, their locking pins are intact and their tamper seals are unbroken.
- Your fire detection and alarm systems should be serviced every six months by a qualified contractor, like an electrician. Depending on the system's size, it may need serviced every three months. You should test it's working once a week, setting it off from different places to make sure it's working fully.
- Sprinkler systems, if you have one, need to be serviced every year.
- Gas suppressant and gas automatic shut-off systems should be serviced every year, along with smoke extractors.
- You should give your fire doors a formal check every six months, and more often if they're used heavily. After a fire alarm test, you'll need to check doors which close automatically to make sure they've worked properly.
- Test your emergency lighting, if you have it, every month.

If there's a fire...

Everyone in your building should know what to do if there's a fire. Every Girlguiding group using your property should do a fire drill at least once a term.

Make sure everyone knows:

- How they'll know if there's a fire (a bell or siren sounding, for example)
- Where all the emergency exits are, and where to gather outside the building (your assembly point should be well away from the property)
- How they should behave while leaving (stay calm and listen to the person in charge, for example)

If there's a fire, your responsibilities as the person in charge are to:

- Know how to use the fire extinguishers (although your priority should be to evacuate)
- Have a plan for evacuating the building, including for people with disabilities
- Call the emergency services and liaise with them when they arrive
- Make sure the building's been cleared and everyone is accounted for
- Make sure you have emergency contact details for girls' parents/ guardians so you can let them know what's happened
- Have a plan for getting your group home if they can't get back in the building
- Put together an 'emergency pack' to grab in case of a fire with details of the building, such as its electrical plan (cut-off switches etc), gas supply/storage, water supply and storage of chemicals or flammable items. Also include a torch in case it's dark outside when you evacuate
- Ensure escape routes are clearly marked and kept clear at all times, with signage that's visible even in the dark

Make sure you get training if you need it on any of the above.

There's no legal time limit for how quickly you need to get people out - it will depend on the complexity of the building. However, for a simple building like a hall you should be trying to get people out within three minutes.

Hazardous chemicals and substances




Do you use and store chemicals in your property, for cleaning or other purposes? There are some health and safety procedures you need to bear in mind.

Look carefully at all the chemical products you use. If they have a hazard symbol (see below), you need to do a risk assessment, according to the national Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations.

You can use the [Girlguiding COSHH risk assessment form](#), which comes with an example of how to complete it. The Manufacturer's Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for each product will help you do the assessment - it should come with the product or you'll be able to find it online.

Key things to look at in your assessment are what protective clothing you need to wear to use the product, what first aid would be needed if someone had an accident with the product, whether it can be mixed with other products, and how to dispose of it.

And of course, you'll need to store hazardous products properly and keep them out of reach of children. Always keep hazardous products in their own, clearly labelled bottles too.

What do the COSHH symbols mean?		
 Dangerous to the environment	 Toxic	 Gas under pressure
 Corrosive	 Explosive	 Flammable
 Caution – used for less serious health hazards like skin irritation	 Oxidising	 Longer term health hazards such as carcinogenicity

Managing water systems

From sinks, toilets and showers to hot water tanks, you need to maintain all your water systems, not only to make sure you have good quality water, but also to stop bacteria like Legionella developing.

Legionella can make people very ill, or even be fatal. It's often transferred in water, especially in water systems that aren't properly maintained.

To keep your water sparkling clean, your first step should be to do a risk assessment. Doing a legionella risk assessment and putting together a management plan is quite complex, so you should use a UKAS-approved contractor - get three quotes to make sure you get the best price.

The contractor will recommend you do weekly or monthly checks for legionella. If you're going to be responsible for them, you should think about going on a legionella awareness training course. The contractor may be able to provide this, or several companies offer online training, which can be cheaper.

Part of these weekly/monthly checks will be testing water temperatures - you'll need a good quality temperature gauge for this, which may cost around £100. Again, ask your contractor for recommendations.

A small, simple site should only need a legionella risk assessment once every two years. However, if there are lots of problems you may need to repeat it every year until your systems are in good order.

Find out more about legionella in the [HSE Approved Code of Practice](#) and [Brief guide for duty holder](#).

Managing electrical systems and equipment

The last thing you want is an electrical fire, so maintaining your wiring and electrical equipment and appliances couldn't be more important.

Most properties' fixed wiring should be tested every five years, by a qualified electrician. Some properties may need testing more often, for example if they're exposed to severe weather conditions. Swimming pools should be tested every year.

If you install new or alter your electrical systems, your electrician should give you an Electrical Installation Certificate (EIC) or Minor Electrical Installation Works Certificate (MEIWC), guaranteeing they're safe to use - keep hold of these in case of any problems.

When it comes to testing your electrical equipment (known as 'Portable Appliance Testing'), doing your own simple yearly check just by carefully examining the equipment for damage and checking it works, will usually be OK. You can find out more on the [Health and Safety Executive website](#).

In case of problems or an emergency, it's a good idea to have a plan of your building's electrical wiring, including where the distribution board and/or fuse boxes are, and where the main electrical power cable comes into your building.

Top tips for keeping your electricals in shape

- Think about doing an electrical awareness training course.
- Check leads and extensions more regularly than other equipment - it's much easier to damage them as they'll quite often be lying across floors or be jammed in doors.
- Don't allow block adaptors to be plugged into your electrical sockets - they can overload the circuit and are one of the main causes of electrical fires.
- Child safety covers for plug sockets are NOT recommended - UK power sockets have their own in-built safety mechanism, and covers actually stop this working. They can cause more danger, not less.
- Always remove chargers for electrical items after use - these could be a fire hazard if left plugged in and switched on, especially overnight.
- When you're using an extension on a reel, make sure it's completely unwound when in use, otherwise it could cause a fire.

You can find out more about electrical safety from the [Health and Safety Executive](#) and the [Electrical Safety Council](#).

Gas safety

Fire, explosions, gas leaks and carbon monoxide poisoning. These are just some of the dangers poorly installed and maintained gas appliances can cause - so you'll want to follow health and safety advice to the letter.

A yearly gas safety check is the place to start, done by a qualified engineer who's on the [Gas Safe Register](#). You'll need someone qualified to inspect both domestic and commercial gas equipment. If you have liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) on your site, make sure your engineer is qualified to work with this too.

If you have steel gas pipes underground, they'll need to be inspected for corrosion and leaks. Any gas cylinders must be stored properly, in a lockable cage separating full and empty cylinders.

Find out more about gas safety on the [Health and Safety Executive website](#).

Maintaining other equipment

We've already covered a lot of the equipment you'll have in your property above. However, it's your responsibility to maintain every single piece of equipment so it works properly and doesn't cause any health or safety risks.

Other equipment you may need to consider includes:

- Ladders
- Hand tools
- Grounds maintenance equipment - lawn mower, for example
- Vehicles
- Kitchen equipment
- Security system
- Heating/air conditioning systems and duct work

For each piece of equipment, make sure to read its manual and set up any maintenance it recommends. Make sure you use a qualified contractor for any servicing needed, and budget for this. Also ask yourself:

- Is the equipment suitable for its intended use?
- Is it safe to use, maintained in a safe condition and inspected?
- Have the people using it had adequate information, instruction and training?
- Where applicable, does it come with health and safety measures like protective devices and controls (emergency stop devices, adequate means of isolation from sources of energy, pressure release systems, protective guards and clearly visible signage and warning devices)?
- Are you following the manufacturer's operating guidelines

[Continues overleaf](#)

Maintaining other equipment

Also bear in mind that some equipment will need specialist, mandatory inspections, including:

- Passenger lifts
- Lifting equipment (fork lifts, reach trucks)
- Eyebolts (for attaching harnesses etc)
- Pressure systems, for example, compressed air systems, pressure cookers, heat exchangers, pipework and hoses

Tell your insurers if you have equipment like this as they'll usually arrange for an independent engineer to inspect it.

Asbestos

Asbestos was used in building for many years, but was banned in 1999 when it was confirmed that it can cause serious health problems to people heavily exposed to it, including cancer.

Asbestos is a mineral made up of fine fibers that are resistant to heat, fire and many chemicals which is why it was used so much. You need to know if you have any in your building so that you can manage it.

If your property was built before 2000 and hasn't had an asbestos survey, you'll need to have this carried out by a UKAS-accredited contractor.

You can then use the survey to put together an asbestos management plan. Asbestos in a contained area won't cause any harm to people using the building - indeed, asbestos in good condition should be left in place. Your plan should set out how you'll make sure it isn't disturbed.

Find out more about managing asbestos from the [Health and Safety Executive](#).

Health and safety signs

You need to be really clear where there are health and safety risks in your building - and that means having good signage.

You should put up signs to show people:

- Prohibited areas
- Safeguards they need to follow - wearing protective clothes, for example
- Hazards to watch for - like a risk of tripping
- Where fire exits/equipment and first aid equipment are

Lots of companies sell the signage you'll need, so shop around for a good price. Remember, when it comes to fire safety signs, these need to glow in the dark (if you don't have emergency lighting).

Find out more in
Girlguiding's guides to
[Safety signs and signals regulations](#)
and [Fire safety signs](#).

Reporting accidents and incidents

If an accident or incident does happen on your property, it's important that you report it properly. Also remember to think about what you could do differently so it doesn't happen again - although of course some accidents are unavoidable.

First of all, report all accidents to Girlguiding - you can see how on our website.

You may also have to report serious accidents and incidents to the Health and Safety Executive - [find out more about what needs reported](#).

Keep a record of all the accidents and incidents that happen on your property, so you can identify any trends which may help you reduce accidents.



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Any questions about health and safety?

If you have any more questions, please get in touch with Girlguiding at propertygateway@girlguiding.org.uk