

Guidance for Coaches – Off-track running

Off-track running is popular recreational and competitive activity for endurance runners. With the ease of access and the obvious health benefits the sport provides a range of benefits at relatively low cost. The following text offers guidance to coaches who are designing, implementing and delivering running activities for participants in this environment. *NB for those who coach or lead activities off-road, such as on trails and mountains, please refer to the Off-road guidance.*

This guidance has been developed to raise awareness and help identify the potential hazards a training session presents and examples of how to mitigate the risks of accidents and injuries occurring. 'It is the responsibility of all coaches and athletes to ensure that all training sessions are conducted in a safe manner' (UKA Code of Practice, 2022).

What are the Hazards and who might be harmed?

'A hazard is something with potential to cause harm to an individual. This can be an object, an activity, a medical condition (diagnosed or unknown), environmental conditions and even substance abuse' (UKA Code of Practice, 2022).

Whether a coach is familiar with a venue or using a facility for the first time, hazard identification and applying control measures to mitigate risk will form an integral part of session preparation, planning and delivery. Pre-activity, during activity and post-activity checks should be made to ensure the environment is safe for all users. An athletics training facility is a dynamic, changeable environment often comprising multiple user groups with differing needs and objectives. When coaches work together and communicate well this is beneficial to the safety, well-being and enjoyment for all athletes, coaches, and event disciplines.

What is a Risk Assessment?

A risk assessment is an inspection which is carried out to identify any hazards which may occur during an activity. The purpose is to identify, assess and determine the level of risk or likelihood that the hazard could cause accidents and injuries.

It is best practice to conduct a risk assessment as part of club activity, both generally to cover all areas of the clubs training and competition activities at all venues, as well as a specific event group risk assessment. Once in place the risk assessment can act as a reminder and check list when conducting all aspects of training.

Some of the common Hazards include

- Slips, trips, and falls
- Collisions with others
- Equipment
- Environment.

Slips, Trips and Falls

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IN
PARTNERSHIP
WITH



- Plan routes in advance, considering experience level of group
- Advise on correct footwear for the route planned
- Plan routes in well-lit areas where possible
- Headtorches/Lights advised in poor visibility or night-time
- Carry back up light / batteries
- Advise athletes to dress appropriately for the conditions. For example, wear reflective clothing and headtorches when dark or poor visibility
- Recce route in advance and be aware to advise athletes of hazards on the route, such as bollards and kerbs
- Advise athletes the risk of slips, trips and falls increase when tired. Wet, cold or under-fuelled and advise to carry a small snack and extra clothing with them during longer outings
- Consider varied road conditions at different times of year or day eg: risk of ice.

Collision with others

- Use designated pedestrian crossings where available and where possible
- Consider your visibility to others may be limited or unexpected if entering another road from the side and adjust your running accordingly
- If running at night increase visibility of group with high viz/reflective clothing and lights
- Be aware of other road / sidewalk users, eg pedestrians, cyclists and dogs and respect their rights of way
- Athletes instructed to run in a group or single file when necessary
- Ensure recommended coach to athlete ratios to maintain safe training to athletes, coaches and others
- Activities should be arranged so that runners are well spaced, and the likelihood of collision is limited
- Athletes should be involved in ongoing assessment of the route and encouraged to flag any risk to the coach and others
- Use a routinised and habituated system of informing others of approaching hazards eg. 'Car up' / 'Car down' as used in cycling
- Follow the guidance contained in the Highway code.

Equipment and equipment failure

- All equipment shall be checked prior to use
- Athletes should be encouraged to get involved with safety checks to promote good health and safety practice
- Advise athletes to ensure kit choices, footwear, water/wind-proofing and head torches are in good repair before the run
- Advise athletes to check waterproof/windproof material before longer outings
- Laces should be well tied
- Regularly check contents of safety equipment if stowed long term in a bag
- Advise athletes to ensure headtorch/light is fully charged and working before running in dark. Potentially carry small emergency light or spare batteries for battery operated headtorches
- Damaged equipment shall never be used

- In general, equipment should only be used for the purpose that was intended. If equipment is to be used for a purpose for which it was not primarily designed, great care must be taken
- Glasses should be with plastic or unbreakable lenses
- Athletes should take responsibility for not using damaged equipment and report damaged equipment to the coach.

Environment – off-road terrain poses a number of safety issues; surface underfoot, weather, isolation, distance from help if an incident occurs.

- Research weather conditions for entirety of the run planned and adapt route accordingly
- Have separate routes planned for bad weather and let someone not on the run know of route choice, timing and ETA
- Adjust session accordingly depending on weather, e.g., reduce volume in extreme heat
- Delay or cancel session to be considered if weather may impact on the safety of the session. For example, ice, fog, floods, snow, lightning or extreme heat
- Make athletes aware of route and potential weather before and at start of run
- Make sure athletes are dressed and equipped appropriately for the route and conditions
- Check athletes during run and consider a buddy system for larger groups
- Ensure distance and intensity is suitable for the ability of the group and support/ plan alternatives for those who become uncomfortable
- Athletes forewarned of known hazards
- Dynamic risk assessment route which is live and ongoing throughout the session
- Be prepared to change/adapt route and plans with regard to unforeseen changes in the conditions
- Ensure you are familiar with the route and it's suitability for the size of group
- If working remotely with an athlete, make sure they are aware they are responsible for route choice, risk management and appropriateness of terrain/conditions when training on their own
- So that athletes can hear instruction / warnings, recommend that athletes do not wear ear/headphones or wear bone-conducting headphones
- If running from a venue, follow facility providers instructions regarding Health & Safety and fire evacuation procedure.

Athlete Overload

- Ensure training is supervised by a qualified professional (qualified and licensed coach)
- Training prescription should be age-related and not age- determined. Prescription should be based according to biological status, training age, motor skill competency, technical proficiency, existing strength levels, and psychosocial maturity
- Ensure athletes are taught how to remain safe while road running and are technically competent
- Training volume and intensity should not be increased at the expense of technical competency
- Communicate before and check during session that loading and progression is appropriate for those in the group
- Be aware of general fatigue, tiredness, illness or minor injuries that might be due to overloading. Plan in extra rest days or adapt training where necessary.

Pre-existing medical condition

- Ensure appropriate athlete needs analysis is carried out
- Ensure medical questionnaire is carried out, including PARQs
- Have accessible ICE (In case of emergency) details for Leader/ Coach & participants
- Coaches shall discuss and share the above process(es) with parents/guardians (under18)
- Ensure athletes carry necessary equipment for pre-existing medical conditions, such as an epi-pen and that guidance for use has been shared with the coach and understood
- Remind athletes to ensure they are hydrated before the session starts and have access to a drink and refuelling either before, during or post session
- Have an outdoor First Aid Training certificate
- If other registered first aiders in the group, agree with them in advance that they are willing if necessary to act
- All accidents & incidents should be reported to UK Athletics via the online 'Accident and Incident Reporting Form'
- Have emergency contacts for those in the group and Coach/ Run Leader to have access to mobile phone (where applicable) for emergency situations
- Make sure those training remotely are aware that they should let others know their proposed route and timeline (with parental permission if U18).

Manual handling

- Seek athletes permission before any help is provided for obstacles such as stiles, terrain for example by asking “do you need assistance, are you comfortable with me placing my hand on your back / arm to help you over this obstacle?”.

Safeguarding

- Must always consider athlete welfare and wellbeing in line with the Coaches Code of Conduct and Safeguarding Training
- Ensure training is supervised by a qualified professional (qualified and licensed coach)
- Training prescription should be age-related and not age- determined. Prescription should be based according to biological status, training age, motor skill competency, technical proficiency, existing strength levels, and psychosocial maturity
- Anticipate potential risks of injury or harm, taking measures to eliminate or reduce them, and alert participants to these risks, including recommended coach : athlete ratios
- In the event of an incident consider the entire groups safety and well-being
- Be appropriately First Aid Trained for the environment you are coaching in
- Ensure athlete can hear instructions (use of headphones whilst training)
- Collate a register of attendees on arrival and check on conclusion of session
- Be aware of additional reliance on the coach/leader for safety in unknown terrain for athletes, especially inexperienced, younger or disabled athletes.

Other

- Coaches shall achieve and maintain professional certification(s) with continuing education requirements and a code of conduct
- Coaches must operate within their scope of practice; responsibilities and knowledge and understanding of road running and associated risks
- Athletes must be made aware of etiquette when using environments shared with other members of the public
- Ensure no litter is left behind

- Coaches should ensure that athletes wear appropriate footwear
- Footwear should provide appropriate support, cushioning and traction for the terrain and weather
- In the event that an athlete wishes to wear different clothing in accordance with their religion or cultural traditions, this should be discussed and a suitable outcome agreed on, resulting in maintaining respect for the individual's beliefs at the same time as enabling safe participation
- Be aware of risk from animals, both domestic and wild.
- Be aware of risk from other members of the public eg pedestrians
- Consider phobias and fears of group re: animals. (eg dogs or horses)
- Coaches should visually monitor athletes during the session to ensure they are engaged, safe and on task