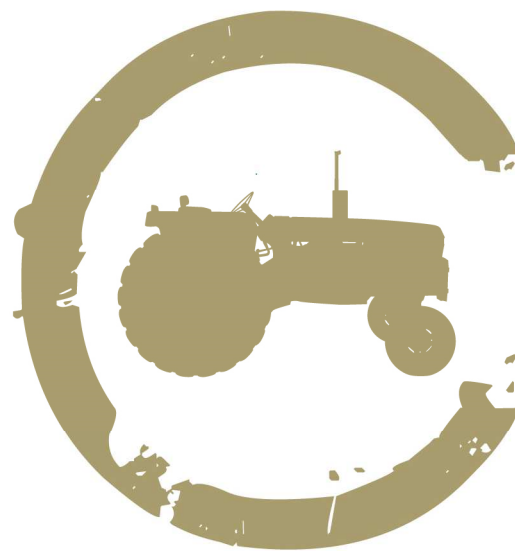


SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE



Community Supported Woodlands and Hedges

Wood fuel and other benefits from small woodlands and hedges
A Tool-kit for Communities - v1.0 July 2013

Chapter 6: Workday Practicalities

Prepared by Kate Royston and Dave Readman (Cotna)
Robbee Smole Sustainable Business Solutions
For Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



CORDIALE was selected under the European Cross-border Cooperation Programme INTERREG IV A France (Channel) – England, co-funded by the ERDF.

Robbee Smole
Sustainable Business Solutions

TamarValley
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Chapter 6 Workday practicalities

Practical working in the woods or with hedges is often a key part of the enjoyment for community group members. There a number of pre-requisites that must be in place before the practical work can be safely undertaken. Once in place, it is also important to make sure that the workday is well planned and managed. This section discusses the important topics of:

- Insurance
- Risk assessment and management
- Leadership and workday processes and procedures (incl. the workday register)

It concludes with 'On the day – A Guide for Leaders of Woodfuel Groups'.

6.1 Insurance

Insurance is essential for any community group engaging in woodland work, either with hedges or in woodland. Apart from anything else, if your group is not a company, its officers (Chair, Treasurer and Secretary, for example) could be personally liable for damage caused by negligence. Insurance can be obtained from The Conservation Volunteers (TCV); contact Retail@tcv.org.uk or 01302 388 834. If any member of the group will be using a chainsaw, the group will need to pay for chainsaw cover for that individual, who will also need to produce evidence of current National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC) certification. They will then be issued a chainsaw card by the insurer.

Insurance cost Bovey Climate Action (BCA) roughly £215 in 2012, plus a chainsaw premium of roughly £30 per year. In BCA's case, this also covered their community garden and other events. The cost of insurance can be recovered from a membership fee, which is much lower per person than the value of the wood harvested.

Thanks to the Dartmoor Circle Community Toolkit for this section

6.2 Risk assessment and management

The TCV's 'Woodlands: a practical handbook' provides a useful explanation and definition of risk assessment:

Employers are required to assess the risks to their employees and volunteers arising from the work being planned. The purpose of the assessment is to enable the employer to decide what measures are necessary to comply with all applicable health and safety legislation. This may include safe systems of work, personal protective equipment or guarding of dangerous parts of machinery. A risk assessment first involves identifying the hazards which could arise from the work, the machinery or equipment used, or the workplace. If hazards cannot be eliminated, the extent of risk must be evaluated. Risk is the likelihood that a particular hazard will cause harm, together with an estimation of the severity of the consequences. For further details see *Risk Assessment – a learning resource pack* (BTCV 1998) and *Generic Risk Assessments* (2002).

There is a generic risk assessment template example provided in the appendices to this document. Details on how to complete it and who is responsible are listed below in section 6.4.1. It must be remembered that anyone working in the woods should complete the risk assessment form before commencing work. You should also sign the workday register (example appended). An example Accident Report is also appended. New members to the group must also complete a Member's Information and Joining Form (appended).

6.3 Leadership and workday processes and procedures (incl. the workday register)

The person leading the work session should be experienced in felling, cutting and chopping wood, and experienced at working with volunteers. The practical skills are important to be able to safely and effectively lead the group in the day's activities, but the personal skills to motivate and encourage are just as important. New members need to be welcomed and valued for the work they do, no matter how inexperienced. For some people just undertaking physical work outdoors, maybe for the first time in years, is a challenge, even before new skills are learnt. For the community group to flourish, new people should always be welcomed and helped to understand the nature of the work and the rewarding satisfaction of being with a like-minded group. Some experience or qualification in teaching or training is beneficial to good leadership.

6.4 On the day – A Guide for Leaders of Woodfuel Groups

This guide is adapted from the Dartmoor Circle Community Toolkit. It is for the person or people who will be leading a group felling, cutting or chopping wood as part of a community group. Quite a lot of the guide concerns safety, which is important not just for its own sake but because of insurance requirement. If certain procedure is not followed, the group's officers may not be covered.



6.4.1 Preparing for the session

- Make sure you know what is expected of both the group and the landowner – if necessary, read the agreement with the landowner and the management plan/work schedule.
- Check whether a health and safety risk assessment has been completed for the site where the activities will take place, and that it is read and understood. If one is not in place, one will need to be completed beforehand, and two copies should be made for everyone involved. A Health and Safety framework is included in this toolkit.
- Make sure you have a first aid kit big enough for the group, and has the right items to address anything highlighted in the risk assessment. If the leader is a first aider, that's great. If not, check if anyone else in the party knows first aid.
- Take a supply of membership forms (see template in this toolkit) for any new people to complete, as well as the copies of the health and safety assessment. Make sure you have read the membership form, and can explain it. Also, take a register form or book so you can list who is there on the day.
- Take an accident book or report forms with you.
- Ensure there are sufficient tools to bring to the session and that their standard of maintenance / durability is suitable for the tasks.

6.4.2 At the start of the session

- Welcome everyone, introduce yourself and your role in the group and give membership forms to anyone who is new to the group. Ensure that they are signed, and if anyone is under 18 make sure a person over 18 also signs their form.
- Give each person two copies of the risk assessment: one to read, sign and return, and one to keep.
- Give a copy of the safety guidance to everyone.
- Make a note on the register form of everyone who is present.
- Explain anything which people need to know to minimise risk. This may include safe tool carrying, handling, use and storage, as well as how to carry out the practical work scheduled for the day. Provide a background to the site and its management to date, including the habitat, heritage and landscape value, and give people the bigger picture of the site's place in the environment and the ultimate reason why the work is being carried out.
- Lead everyone in some warm-up exercises as appropriate.

6.4.3 During the session

Always listen to the landowner and do as requested (if it is safe to do so).

Hedge cutting and laying

- Before starting work, barbed wire must be removed and reeled up. Fencing pliers, a claw hammer and thick leather work gloves are essential. The job will be much easier if stock fencing and stakes are removed too.
- Cut out all dead wood, brambles and tall/thick vegetation so the shrub and tree stems can be seen more easily.
- Remove brushwood unsuitable for burning, or can be cut up and stored separately for kindling. Stack it tidily (all stems in the same direction) at least 3 metres from the hedge, so that it can be dealt with later.

- If coppicing the hedge, saw the wood of thicker stems at an angle, so that it falls to the side of the hedge where you wish to stack it. Cut the stems about 12 cms above ground. Folding or pruning saws are very useful for cutting where there isn't much space.
- Stack firewood in 40-100 cm lengths which are easily moved around without back injury.
- If laying the hedge, have an experienced hedge-layer in the group to direct which stems to remove and which to lay, as well as directing and teaching the technicalities of how to lay, or pleach, the stems.
- If laying on a slope, start the cutting and laying at the top of the slope and work downhill so the laid stems lie uphill. Cut and keep straight 1.5 to 2m lengths of wood that can be sharpened and used for stakes to hold the laid (pleached) stems in place.
- If there are several people working on a length of hedge, it is very important to allow a good space between workers. If felling, allow the height of the hedge-wood that is being felled. Give others warning before felling!
- Check whether everyone is using the saw or other tool they have safely and efficiently.
- If possible, remove the logs you've cut at the end of each work session. Either share them out, or take to an agreed store for sharing out later. It is best to store wood for about a year, for maximum burning efficiency.
- Call off work if the weather turns very bad – either very wet or high winds.
- Remember to leave some trees/saplings to grow for wildlife, and for their beauty!



Woodland work

- Make sure everyone is comfortable with carrying all the necessary tools, equipment and tea kit onto the work site.
- Establish a safe base for tools and fuel/oil cans away from felling operations and fires.
- Assign a work area for any chainsaw operator and assistant well away from other workers. Any felling should take place at least two lengths of the tree to be felled away from others. Brief all workers on the safe practice of working around chainsaws and felling operations: be observant, watch for signals from the operator and assistant and if it is necessary to approach the operator do so where you are clearly visible from their front.
- Once any chainsaw work is underway assign tasks to the group, e.g. cutting brambles where access is needed for walking/carrying or along designated paths; clearing undergrowth around trees/coppice stools that will be felled during this season; moving previously felled/cut timber to stacks or cords near the access route. Do not stack timber against a standing tree, and if on sloping ground use sharpened stakes driven into the ground to hold the timber pile. Stack the timber lengthways up the slope where it cannot roll away, in 40-100 cm lengths that are easily moved around without back injury.
- If coppicing or felling with hand tools cut the stems about 12 cms above the ground. Folding or pruning saws are very useful for cutting where there is not much space.
- If there are several people working in one area of woodland, it is very important to allow a good space between workers. If felling, allow twice the height of the tree or shrub that is being felled. Give others warning before felling!
- Check whether everyone is using the saw or other tool they have safely and efficiently.
- If possible, remove the logs you've cut at the end of each work session – either share them out, or take to an agreed store for sharing out later. It is best to store wood split and under cover but in open air for

about a year, for maximum burning efficiency.

- Call off work if the weather turns very bad – either very wet or high winds.
- Remember to work carefully around young trees/saplings to let them grow on for natural regeneration of the woodland, for wildlife, and for their beauty!
- Do not leave any trees hung up at the end of the session; use great care to winch or roll trees fully onto the ground.

6.4.4 At the end of the session

Make sure the worksite is left safe and tidy with all tools and equipment counted back in and cleaned. If any tool maintenance is needed before the next session aim to get this done immediately or at least well in advance; agree who will take this on. Make sure there is an appreciation by all the group of the work that has been achieved, as well an understanding of what will come next either on the same site or on the next workday. Ask what has been learnt, and how things could have been managed better. What new skills would people like to learn?