

RISK INFORMATION – CHURCHES COMMUNITY GARDENS

Some of our churches have initiated community focused ministries based around the provision of garden space and equipment - for members of their congregations and the wider community.

In pursuing this form of ministry, your church has a responsibility to maintain the garden as a safe place. If staff are employed to “work” in the Community Garden, WHS/OHS regulation requires that the workplace be safe.

Because gardening typically involves the use of tools and chemicals, risks arise that might not exist in other church promoted activities.

This information release sets out topics for consideration in conducting a risk assessment for a Community Garden.

Planning and Preparation

- Has soil at the garden site been checked for contaminants?
- Has site hazard identification been completed, e.g. trip hazards?
- Have separate risk assessments been undertaken in respect of any hazardous chemicals or equipment that are to be used?
- Does the site adequately separate foot traffic from motorised vehicles and equipment?
- Is there an agreed plan to execute in the event of emergency, e.g. medical or environmental (include bush fire preparedness where relevant)?
- Has consideration been given to the type of equipment needed to perform the tasks to be undertaken; using equipment that minimises risk? E.g. wheelbarrows
- Does your church provide on-site supervision of the garden? If not, are users made aware of this fact and associated risk and behavioural expectations?
- Has an induction session been planned for all new gardeners?
- Will children be present? What supervision standards will be implemented? Will leaders and supervisors have working with children certification?
- Do work plans include consideration of what to do if adverse weather is experienced, e.g. very hot, very cold, heavy rain and lightning?
- Is a well-stocked first aid kit available? Will trained first aid practitioners be present?

Organisation

- Administrative procedures:
 - Have you determined the membership rules for using the garden (including financial considerations)?

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- What orientation is provided to new gardeners? Are all gardeners trained in the correct use of equipment?
- Have you decided whether the garden will operate on the basis of individual plots or communal plots? Do membership rules clearly outline how plot usage is to be managed?
- If there are communal areas, have you developed usage guidelines including responsibility for maintenance of these areas?
- Are all members advised of expected behaviour of garden users?
- Have you developed clearly communicated dispute resolution procedures?
- Do guidelines identify allowed and/or disallowed plants?
- Have you developed procedures for reporting incidents and determining the causes of those incidents?

Hazardous Equipment

- Has responsibility been assigned for ensuring all equipment is in good condition, safe and available for use?
- Ensure that no-one removes any standard guards, maintain safety features, cut-off switches etc.
- Have Safe Operating Procedures (SOPs) been developed for all powered tools? Have operators of equipment been trained in the safe operation of such tools or equipment?
- Have powered tools been regularly serviced? Do you maintain a register of equipment service history?
- Have all power sources been tested and tagged, e.g. power boards, power leads, residual current devices? Is a safety switch in use?
- Are all power sources clear from water and foot traffic?
- Have traffic exclusion zones been planned for areas where equipment is to be operated?
- Have gardeners been instructed in the correct use of tools, both hand operate and powered? For example, what to do with rakes and garden forks when not in use.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Have gardeners been advised of the circumstances when PPE must be used, e.g. working with mulch or potting mix?
- Have gardeners been advised of the clothing and equipment that should be used in the garden? E.g. gloves, solid shoes, safety glasses, wide brimmed hats, ear protection?
- Is sunscreen and drinking water available at the garden?

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Training

- Before any equipment is used for the first time, make sure that the operator is trained in the safe operation of the equipment (based on SOPs).

Trips and Slips

- Has the site been prepared to eliminate trip hazards as far as possible?
- Is the site regularly inspected to ensure trip hazards are identified and eliminated as they occur?
- Where the garden site slopes, have steps and /or hand rails been installed to minimise the possibility of slips?

Lifting

- Are garden users trained to lift correctly?
- Does the garden provide equipment to minimise the need for lifting and carrying, e.g. wheelbarrows?

Weather

- Does the garden provide shelter for times of rainfall or extreme heat?
- Are garden users advised of the need to protect themselves from the sun – hats, sunscreen etc.?
- Do the garden rules outline expectations in relation to extreme weather conditions?

Food Safety

- Is food storage provided for gardeners (e.g. refrigerators)? Is the storage regularly cleaned?
- If food is provided to workers, have associated risks been considered, e.g. food preparation and handling, allergic reactions etc.?

Chemicals

- Dangerous materials (including: insecticides, pesticides, chemicals, petrol, diesel & lubricants) must be securely stored while not being used. Appropriate Material Safety Data Sheets must be available for all dangerous materials to guide handling and usage of those materials.
- Manures, mulches and potting mix may contain micro-organisms dangerous to health. Are gardeners provided with instruction on how to properly handle those items, e.g. masks, gloves etc.?

Other Matters

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Some other specific risks to be aware of and to take into account when undertaking risk assessments:

- The possibility of vandalism when the site is not being used
- Poisoning from wrong use of chemicals
- Risk of bites / stings / cuts from snakes, bees, wasps, spiders etc.
- Risk of drowning where open water (e.g. tanks, ponds, pools or dams) is present on the garden site
- Working at heights
- Damaged fencing or raised garden bed retaining walls causing cuts or lacerations

Examples of powered equipment which might be used in your Community Garden:

- Lawnmowers
- Rollers / cultivators / rotary hoes
- Slashers
- Chainsaws
- Edgers
- Line trimmers / brush cutters
- Mulchers / chippers
- Blowers / vacuums
- Hedge trimmers and loppers

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References

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University of South Australia, “Safe Operating Procedure Development”
<http://w3.unisa.edu.au/ohsw/procedures/docs/safeoperating.pdf>

SA Department for Education and Child Development, example SOPs are available from:
<http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/hrhealthsafety/default.asp?id=41574&navgrp=3961>

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