

Risk Management Policy for Member Activities

ASF Members running caving trips and other activities have an obligation to establish appropriate risk management procedures and implement the ASF risk management policies for those trips and activities.

This policy document is a series of principles. It is not a set of specific procedures. These should be developed by the member clubs and Special Interest Groups (SIG), to suit their specific risk management needs and conditions.

Risk Management and the ASF focus

Club activities are generally organised through the Corporate Member Clubs, Provisional Member Clubs or Special Interest Groups (SIG). Specific procedures and protocols for Risk Management are developed and implemented by the club, using the ASF Risk Management Policy as a guide.

All ASF speleological trips are expected to have in place a risk management procedure incorporating the principles set out in this policy.

ASF members will aim to minimise incidents arising from risk and manage risk so that incidents, particularly ones involving injury, are minimised.

Activities that involve natural environments such as caves and karst surface environments have many hazards (see Table 1). The ASF accepts that it is impossible to completely remove risks. This policy requires that clubs, leaders and members assess the risks and give members advice on managing them.

This policy applies to all speleological events which are organised and run by ASF members, including but not limited to; ASF conferences, speleological trips, photography trips, cave diving trips, exploration trips, beginners trips, expedition trips, training and sporting trips (e.g. "Speleosports" events).

Relationship to the ASF Codes and Guidelines.

Procedures are to be developed by ASF members to suit their specific risk management needs and conditions. Members should refer not just to this policy and its guidelines, but should consider all other ASF codes and guidelines, such as the ASF Safety Guidelines, the ASF Leadership Scheme, ASF Free Diving Codes and other codes in the development of their own risk management procedures. Note that it is a requirement that all clubs subscribe to the ASF Code of Ethics and Conservation and Minimum Impact Caving Code.

Aspects of Risk Management

Five broad aspects should be considered in the management of risk that members need to incorporate into their procedures;

- Risk Assessment
- Leadership
- Participant Experience
- Safety (including equipment maintenance and assessments)
- Accident/Incident responses

Only when all five aspects are considered is effective Risk Management achieved, even if an outcome is not positive.

Risk Assessment

A hazard is a source of potential risk or a situation with the potential to cause injury, loss of life or property damage.

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Risk is the chance of something happening that will have a negative impact upon the group's collective trip objective/s. For the individual it is the potential for physical harm, or the loss of something of value. Risk is measured in terms of consequences and likelihood.

An accident is an event that causes death, endangers or threatens life, property or the environment. An incident is a near miss.

Incident response can be defined as measures taken during and immediately after an incident to ensure its effects are minimised. The level of any response may vary from an internal group response, to a local basis, or be nationwide.

Risk management practices are the engagement of measures that positively modify the characteristics of hazards, communities and environments to reduce the level of risk. Caves are natural places and we have little control over the conditions of the environment, but we can prepare ourselves so that the risk level becomes acceptable in most cases. When organising activities Trip leaders must assess the likelihood of particular risks and put into place procedures to minimise these risk.

Table 1 is an indicative list of examples of common physical hazards related to caving activities that may be applicable to particular trips. All caving areas are unique and may present other hazards not listed. Clubs that frequently visit an area may assume a greater role in sharing their knowledge of particular risks within that area and are a good resource in finding out information relating to particular considerations (e.g. flooding danger, cave temperatures). The ASF Safety Guidelines may help to identify areas that require assessment of risk and modification.

<i>Hazard</i>	<i>Related to</i>	<i>Description</i>
Falls	Slippery surfaces or collapsing false floors or loose surfaces	These often occur and can range from minor cuts, scatches, bruises and grazes to more serious injuries.
Laceration	Sharp Limestone surfaces.	The surface karst may cause injuries if a walker slips and falls.
Floods	History, catchment and weather forecast.	After severe storms or tropical cyclones the creeks and rivers can be flooded for some time, isolating the area and flood caves.
Rockfalls	Identified unstable breakdown areas.	Are a concern in caves either from earthquake movement or by stepping onto loose rocks
Exposure- Heat	Walking under the hot Sun.	Sunstroke and heat exhaustion are possibility if walkers are not fit, carry insufficient water and spend too long in the sun.
Hypothermia	Exposure to the Cold.	Hypothermia is a serious condition that can occur in cold caves where it is likely that participants will get wet.
Surface and in cave navigation problems	Inexperience	Lost caver/s in or out of the cave are possibility if they lose their map or are new to the area and fall behind those who know the area.
Exhaustion from Foul Air	Especially but not exclusively Carbon Dioxide (CO ₂)	High concentrations of CO ₂ in cave atmospheres can reduce a caver's ability to move and react effectively. The higher the level the more negative the impact on the caver.
Dehydration and hunger	Being unprepared.	Dehydration can occur quickly and without warning, and has the potential of causing harm to a person through shock. Hunger contributes to exhaustion.
Stings, bites, disease	Examples include bees, spiders, snakes, histoplasmosis	Bites etc near cave entrances or in caves can cause objectives to be reduced
Severe Falls, becoming lost	Equipment failure	Equipment failure can result in serious incidents.

Table 1: A list of some hazards found in caving. **It is not exhaustive or applicable to all situations.**

ASF Member Responsibilities

All ASF member clubs and SIGs are expected to undertake risk assessment and management according to the procedures developed by their club or SIG organising the trip.

The ASF Safety Guidelines specifically state, *“Risks can be reduced to acceptable levels but never eliminated. The way to minimise risks is to undertake caving with an attitude of self-reliance, responsibility and preparedness. In practical terms this means careful planning, competent organisation, appropriate provisioning and thorough training.”*

For trip leaders, risk management starts at the planning stages of a trip. Clubs and SIG's are required to adopt strategies for their Trip leaders so that they may undertake risk management decisions based on reasonably foreseen circumstances throughout the course of an activity.

Policy Principles

1. Risk Management procedures developed by Clubs and Special Interest Groups must comply with the ASF Cave Safety Guidelines, Code of Ethics & Conservation, Minimal Impact Caving Code, ASF Cave Diving Code of Practice and may use the ASF Caving Leadership Scheme as a general guideline.
2. All ASF Trip leaders are expected to undertake risk management according to the procedures developed by the club organising an activity. Clubs are expected to have procedures in place for managing risk.
3. Club trips and activities require a suitably experienced leader, accredited by the club according to its leadership procedures.
4. Participants must be made aware of what risks are involved. Those with less experience will require more guidance on what to expect and how to prepare themselves. Communication is part of responsible leadership. Trip leaders should be prepared to adjust trip objectives to suit the capabilities of participants. Ideally this should occur prior to entering a cave,
5. Participants also have the responsibility to communicate any concerns they may have to the Trip leader, for example, any medical conditions that may impact on the trip. In the case of minors it is the responsibility of that minor's guardian to provide this information.
6. Trip leaders and members who accompany minors on caving activities should be aware of the extra risks involved. Trip leaders may request that the minor be accompanied by an adult and seek consent from their parent or guardian.
7. All participants must be aware of what the incident response plan entails for the proposed activity.
8. Incident reporting can be valuable in increasing knowledge and refining club processes. The ASF has an incident reporting form, which is used for the purpose of determining statistically what is likely and what future safety focii should be. This form, which is available on the ASF web site www.caves.org.au, should be used to report incidents.

Note: The term “Trip leader” in this document can refer to the chief organiser of any activity.