

# Health and safety guide for gamekeepers



## Introduction

This publication covers moorland and lowland gamekeeping, deer stalking and the work of water bailiffs and ghillies – for simplicity the term ‘gamekeeping’ is used. It gives basic practical advice on health and safety but it is not a substitute for proper instruction and training, or an exact interpretation of the law. However, following this advice will help ensure you meet your legal obligations under relevant health and safety legislation.

## What the law says

If you are an employer or a self-employed person who ‘conducts an undertaking’ involving gamekeeping you have a duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to take all reasonably practicable steps so no one is put at risk. In this sense an undertaking does not necessarily need to involve commercial gain. To do this effectively you need to systematically identify all relevant hazards and then decide the likelihood of anyone being injured. This publication shows some of the main areas you need to consider.

If you are employed as a gamekeeper you have a legal duty to co-operate with your employer on health and safety matters and to take reasonable care – not only for your own health and safety – but also for that of anyone else who may be put at risk by your work.

## Training

Employers should provide training for gamekeepers whenever it is needed to ensure health and safety. The self-employed should also have received adequate training for any work they do which involves work equipment. They may also need training if they use pesticides. Suitable training courses are available – see ‘Further advice’ section.

## Work environment

### *Working alone*

When gamekeepers work alone in isolated locations a system is needed for dealing with emergencies. As a minimum a check ought to be made at the end of each work period to make sure the gamekeeper has returned safely. In the event of illness or injury it will be vital to know where they are, so think about providing mobile telephones or radios where appropriate. An emergency plan needs to be prepared and rehearsed. When it is not safe to carry out particular jobs alone, work needs to be planned so that an assistant is available.

### **Weather protection**

Employers should provide clothing to protect gamekeepers against adverse weather. The clothing design should be compatible with safety in other areas, eg the safe use of guns. Consider providing emergency survival equipment, eg blankets or thermal bags, when working on moorland and similar terrain.

### **Violence**

Employers need to provide clear guidance on how to recognise and deal with potentially violent situations. It should advise when to get support from colleagues or the police and should be aimed at always achieving a satisfactory outcome without violence.

### **First aid**

Gamekeeping often takes place in remote locations where it may take some time to transport an injured person to proper medical facilities. Always carry a travelling first-aid kit and have reasonable access to a more comprehensive kit. This can often be kept in the vehicle used to reach the work area. Gamekeepers are recommended to obtain emergency first-aid training at a short course run by one of the organisations whose training and qualifications for first-aiders are approved by HSE. Overall first-aid provision should take account of any likely problems with transport and communications.

### **Duties to the public**

Assess the risks which might result from public access. Decide if there is a need to alter the way a job is done, or if access needs to be restricted or warnings given.

If you are working with clients or other members of the public taking part in an event, make sure you have informed them of any hazards which depend on local knowledge, and check that they understand the importance of being properly equipped and of obeying safety rules.

### **Hazardous chemicals**

Most animal poisons, rodenticides, herbicides, insecticides and timber treatment products are covered by the Control of Pesticides Regulations. These require that people using pesticides are competent and have received instruction in safe use. In most cases people who use pesticides that are classed as being approved for agricultural use will also need to hold a Certificate of Competence.

Make sure hazardous chemicals are properly stored so they do not pose a risk to people using them or the public. Transport pesticides and other hazardous chemicals in a robust sealed box.

### **Gassing compounds**

Gassing compounds are types of pesticides that need very special care when being transported, used and stored. They give off a very toxic, highly inflammable gas when exposed to moisture. The gas is very quick acting and a potentially lethal poison.

Anyone using them should:

- read the directions for use provided with the products;
- be trained in the safe use of the products;
- have someone else with them who knows what to do in an emergency;
- avoid using the products in wet weather;
- always open the containers outdoors;
- apply the products with the correct equipment;
- wear suitable protective gloves when handling the products;
- avoid all contact of products with the mouth or skin;
- recognise the early symptoms of poisoning (faintness, headache, giddiness, nausea);
- move into fresh air the moment any of these symptoms are experienced;
- carry the products in a secure, waterproof container outside the driver/passenger compartment of the vehicle.

If you come across containers left behind by poachers don't try to deal with them without wearing suitable respiratory protection. Call the emergency services if in doubt.

## **Off-road transport**

Employers should provide training in safe techniques for off-road driving especially where work involves negotiating rough and steep terrain. Training in safe procedures for debogging vehicles is also needed in many areas.

Wear a seat belt if one is fitted. Wear suitable head protection if you ride a motor-cycle or quad bike ATV. Helmets with neck protection are better, eg motor-cycle helmets to BS 6658.

When towing equipment behind quad bike ATVs, it is important to ensure good stability and braking. Brakes fitted to the trailed equipment will help prevent jack-knifing when braking or travelling downhill. Stability is improved if a ball hitch is used with a swivel mechanism on the drawbar and if the load is arranged so that some weight is transferred to the drawbar. Make sure the trailed weight is not excessive for the ATV. (Further advice is in HSE's agricultural information sheet AIS33, *Safe use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in agriculture and forestry.*)

## **Use of guns**

Anyone using a gun should fully understand all the relevant safety procedures. Gamekeepers may also have to liaise with local police and neighbours and ensure that shooting events are organised safely. (See HSE leaflet AS7 *Guns.*)

## **Chainsaws**

Anyone using a chainsaw at work should have received relevant training. Suitable protective clothing should be provided and worn. (See HSE leaflet INDG317 *Chainsaws at work.*)

## **Overhead power lines**

Electricity can arc across from overhead power lines onto carbon fibre fishing rods or the poles used for drey poking as part of squirrel control. Carefully survey any

area you are going to work in to make sure a minimum distance of 15 m can be maintained between the lines and any equipment you will be using.

## **General health hazards**

### ***Weil's disease (Leptospirosis)***

Water in ditches, slow moving rivers and ponds may contain rat urine capable of causing this life-threatening disease. Grain and proprietary foodstuffs in feed hoppers, traps and food stores can also become contaminated. Infection arises through cuts, abrasions and through the eyes and the lining of the nose and mouth. Always wash your hands before eating, drinking or smoking. Cover cuts and broken skin with waterproof plasters. If you are working with parts of your body immersed in water wear waterproof protective clothing. Never touch dead rodents with bare hands.

Weil's disease starts as a feverish illness with a high temperature and headache. At this stage it can easily be controlled with antibiotics, so contact your GP straight away. Carry a leptospirosis medical contact card to alert others to the possible nature of your illness.

### ***Lyme disease***

This disease is spread by bites from infected ticks. The earliest sign may be a faint ring-shaped rash. Often you may not notice this and only become aware of the illness when you start to experience intermittent flu-like symptoms. At this stage the infection responds well to antibiotics but if left untreated may result in serious illness.

The best defence is to keep your skin covered – especially your legs. Check your skin and clothing frequently. Carefully remove any ticks and place a small dressing over the bite. The sooner the ticks are removed the less likely you will be infected. If you are worried about possible infection contact your GP.

### ***Dust***

Dust from grain and animal feeds can cause harmful respiratory conditions. Try to avoid creating airborne dust and wear a suitable respirator where this is not possible (see Bird Breeder's Lung section).

### ***Tetanus***

The organism causing tetanus is widespread and can enter your body through cuts, abrasions or puncture wounds made by splinters and thorns. It is potentially fatal and immunisation before infection is the only certain way of dealing with the disease. Check with your doctor how often you need a booster.

## **Burning moorland vegetation**

Burning moorland vegetation needs to be properly planned and controlled to minimise risks. The Muirburn Code published by Scottish Natural Heritage gives useful guidance.

Wear a face shield complying with BS EN 166 to protect against sparks and smuts. Also wear clothing which has low flammability and won't melt – preferably a sparkproof overall. Carry a disposable respirator suitable for filtering out smoke particles and use it whenever needed.

Adequate rest breaks are needed so that operators do not suffer heat stress.

## **Pheasant rearing**

### ***Bird Breeder's Lung***

Work in enclosed rearing houses can make you allergic to dust from the droppings and feathers. Short-term symptoms are headaches, chest tightness and breathlessness. However long-term conditions may develop, such as chronic asthma, bronchitis and Bird Breeder's Lung. These are potentially life-threatening conditions. (See HSE leaflet AS5 *Farmer's Lung*.) Avoid creating more dust than necessary and wear a comfortable well fitting respirator that complies with BS EN 149 type FFP2.

### ***Gas brooders***

Make sure gas brooders are correctly adjusted. Poor maintenance can result in poisonous gases building up in the area where the brooders are in use. Flame failure devices prevent the release of unburnt gas which could cause suffocation or explosion.

### ***Steam cleaners***

When using poorly maintained electrical equipment in wet conditions there is a high risk of electrocution. Steam cleaners and pressure washers should be used with a circulating current earth monitoring device, or a residual current device (RCD) sometimes called an ELCB. These devices should be fitted at the mains supply point, protected by a waterproof cover. Make regular visual checks to ensure the power cable and connectors are undamaged and watertight, and that the outer sheath is securely attached at the supply plug and the machine.

### ***Electrical safety***

Make sure electrical equipment is suitable for the environment in which it is to be used, eg in wet or dusty conditions, and that equipment with metal parts is properly earthed via a 3 core cable supply. Suspend heating lamps by using chain or similar heat-resistant material. Keep a regular visual check on the cables and connections of portable equipment and make sure arrangements have been made for routine testing of all equipment wherever this is needed.

## **Deer stalking**

### ***Handling of carcasses***

Try to avoid handling deer carcasses manually. It may be possible to use a small winch and portable ramp to load the carcass onto a transport vehicle. Mechanised handling systems in deer larders will reduce manual effort and allow efficient movement of carcasses within the larder and to and from vehicles.

If you cannot avoid manual handling reduce the risk of injury as far as reasonably practicable. Minimise the height of the lift and the distance the carcass has to be

dragged or carried. Avoid situations where you have to twist as you lift and make sure you have at least one assistant whenever possible.

### ***Treatment of carcasses***

Before working on any deer carcass make sure the animal is completely dead and cannot lash out with hooves or antlers. Use a sharp knife for removing entrails with a handle designed to prevent your hand sliding onto the blade. Always cut away from your body.

Wear disposable gloves when handling the entrails and maintain a good standard of personal hygiene. This will help avoid infection, particularly as some deer may carry the organism causing tuberculosis. Immunisation against tuberculosis is available – discuss with your GP whether you need extra protection.

### ***High seats***

High seats should be carefully sited to give an unobstructed field of shooting and a solid backstop – preferably earth or some similar material which won't cause ricochets. The rungs of wooden ladders should be properly secured and not just supported by nails or screws.

Wherever there is public access always detach the ladder after use or fit a cover to it to deter children from reaching the seats. Make sure rifles are completely unloaded before climbing up or down the ladder.

## **Work on inland waters**

### ***Personal fitness***

If you work on or in the water your life may depend on being able to stay afloat and avoid exposure. That ability can be severely reduced by fatigue, alcohol, or drugs or if you have a problem with your heart or blood circulation.

### ***Working in boats***

Wear a life-jacket and make sure your boat has built-in buoyancy if it is not constructed of naturally buoyant material. Check with your supplier that the jacket is capable of meeting the requirements of BS EN ISO 12402-5:2006. Life-jackets using self-contained gas cylinders for inflation are best. Use types which automatically inflate upon immersion. Make sure they are regularly maintained.

### ***Wading***

When wading, take account of the depth and flow of water, conditions underfoot and hazards downstream. Consider using a wading stick. A life-jacket needs to be worn in most cases. Types suitable for wading are those which are inflated by a rip cord or which have an automatic inflation device located in the neck/shoulder region. Shore teams and boats co-operating with people wading in deep water are advised to carry throwing lines.

Consider being roped to the shore if there are hazards downstream which could put you at risk, eg waterfalls, rapids.

### **Electric fishing**

You need a permit from the Environment Agency, Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department or one of the Salmon Fishery Boards to carry out electric fishing. Use purpose-built equipment which has been designed to a very high standard of reliability. Make sure it is checked regularly by a competent person.

Establish safe work procedures which minimise the likelihood of an operator receiving an electric shock. Everyone involved in the operation needs to be fully conversant with those procedures, the reasons for them, and the correct course of action in the event of an emergency. Make sure all team members are proficient in emergency resuscitation.

### **Further advice**

Useful advice is also available from the following organisations:

Lantra, National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth CV8 2LG  
[www.lantra.co.uk](http://www.lantra.co.uk)

British Association for Shooting and Conservation, Marford Mill, Rossett, Wrexham LL12 0HL [www.basc.org.uk](http://www.basc.org.uk)

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Fordingbridge, Hampshire SP6 1EF  
[www.gct.org.uk](http://www.gct.org.uk)

Scottish Natural Heritage, 12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 2AS [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)

Some agricultural colleges are also able to offer specialist training courses in gamekeeping activities.

### **Further reading**

AIS1 *Personal buoyancy equipment on inland and inshore waters*  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais1.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais1.pdf)

AIS22 *Gassing of rabbits and vertebrate pests* HSE Books 1997

AIS31 *Safe use of rodenticides on farms and holdings* HSE Books 1999

AIS33 *Safe use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in agriculture and forestry* HSE Books 2000

AS5 *Farmers lung* HSE Books 2006

AS7 *Guns* HSE Books 1994

INDG73 *Working alone in safety* HSE Books 1998

INDG84 *Leptospirosis carry card* HSE Books 1990

INDG317 *Chainsaws at work* HSE Books 2006

INDG347 *Basic advice on first aid at work* HSE Books 2006

## Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit [www.hse.gov.uk/](http://www.hse.gov.uk/). You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

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<http://shop.bsigroup.com> or by contacting BSI Customer Services for hard copies only Tel: 020 8996 9001 email: [cservices@bsigroup.com](mailto:cservices@bsigroup.com).

**This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.**

This leaflet can be found at: [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg177.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg177.pdf).

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