

Using school ponds

Supplementary Risk Assessment (to meet the COSHH and/or Management Regulations)

(To supplement Model Risk Assessments in other CLEAPSS publications, such as *Hazcards*, the *Laboratory Handbook*, *Recipe Cards* and various guides and guidance leaflets. This will eventually be incorporated into one of these publications.)

General

Age, responsibility and maturity of pupils

Consider how pupils are likely to behave outdoors and when around the pond. This will help in determining the level of supervision they will require. Younger and more irresponsible children will need closer supervision and a higher ratio of teachers/helpers: pupils.

Hygiene

Consider arrangements for ensuring adequate washing of hands after practical activities. Provide paper towels rather than communal hand towels. If facilities are not close by, teachers/pupils will forget or not bother. Younger pupils should be *seen* to wash their hands.

Hazards

1. Falling in/ Drowning

Possibility of pupils falling into the water when stretching over to use nets, slipping on pond edge, etc. Possibility of accidents occurring when pupils are not supervised, eg, after school,

2. Disease

Transmission of disease; *Weil's disease*. Possibility of pond water (and surrounding vegetation) being contaminated with the *Leptospira* bacterium causing Weil's disease, if there is a resident rodent population. Pond-dipping activities may expose pupils to *Leptospira* (and other unknown) bacteria. Possibility of pupils eating sweets and snacks with dirty hands. Contamination of cuts and abrasions of the skin with water/soil. If cats and dogs have access to the site, there may be faeces around pond margins with possible contamination by parasites.

3. Poisoning

Remote possibility of development of **toxic** cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) in late summer, forming a scum on the surface. Possibility of some pond or marginal plants being poisonous.

4. Animal bites

Remote possibility of bites from a few pond animals such as the larvae of dragonflies, water boatmen, if fingers are brought close to the animals' mouthparts.

5. Pond-dipping equipment

Possibility of cuts from broken glass jars used to collect animals or injuries from (mis)use of pond nets (eg, handles poked accidentally into pupils' eyes), etc.

6. Slips and falls

Possibility of pupils slipping on wet ground at the edge of the pond and consequent injury.

7. Allergies

Possibility of exposure to plants that may provoke an allergic response. Consider also the general exposure to pollen, triggering reactions in asthmatics and pupils suffering from hay fever.

8. Sunburn

Possibility of sunburn on sunny days in the summer.

Control measures

1. Falling in/ Drowning

Careful design of the pond and attention to making the area secure from trespassers will minimise the risks; see Guide L221. Restrict access to the pond area by fencing and/or by not allowing activities unaccompanied by adult(s). Teach sensible and appropriate behaviour around the pond so that accidents are less likely to occur. Inspect edges of ponds, looking for unsafe, slippery etc surfaces and take remedial action as necessary.

2. Disease

Ensure hands are washed properly after all pond-dipping activities. Do not allow children to touch any parts of their faces with their hands before hands are washed. (See Guide L221 for discussion about the pros and cons of wearing gloves.) If the skin is cut during pond-dipping activities, wash the wound immediately and seek medical attention, explaining the circumstances of the injury. Discourage pupils from eating sweets etc during practical work. Provide suitable protection to cover wounds/abrasions, eg, waterproof dressings/gloves. Look for (and remove hygienically!) any animal faeces around the pond area.

3. Poisoning

Remove any algal scum that develops on the pond surface, avoiding any skin contact. Supervise pupils carefully so that they have no opportunity to eat any parts of the plants growing in or around the pond.

4. Animal bites

Warn children of the hazards and discourage any direct investigation of such animals with fingers. Handle animals carefully with suitable instruments.

5. Pond-dipping equipment

Avoid using any glass equipment if possible. Warn children of the dangers of net handles being inadvertently pushed into the eyes; teach responsible and careful behaviour in handling equipment.

6. Slips and falls

Look for unsafe surfaces around the pond and take remedial action as necessary.

7. Allergies

Be alert for the development of allergies and asthmatic attacks, which will be dealt with according to the school's normal policy.

8. Sunburn

Encourage pupils to wear appropriate clothing and hats which will cover their skin and apply sun screen to areas that cannot be covered. Restrict the length of time of exposure to direct sunlight when very hot.

See also SRA 08 for using school grounds.

This risk assessment was produced on 21st September 2006. You are advised to check for any update on the CLEAPSS web site.

Notes:

COSHH stands for *Control of Substances Hazardous to Health*. The regulations require that an assessment of risk must be made before substances hazardous to health are handled. The substances covered are the reactants, the products and any intermediate or side products that are very toxic, toxic, harmful, corrosive or irritant. Just because a substance carries no hazard label does not mean that it is completely safe.

The *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations* require a similar risk assessment for substances with other hazard classifications or activities involving hazardous procedures.