

# Visitor Risk Management policy

## About this document

Disclaimer	This document has been written for Department of Conservation (DOC) staff. As a result, it includes DOC-specific terms and refers to internal documents that are only accessible to DOC staff. It is being made available to external groups and organisations to demonstrate departmental best practice. As these procedures have been prepared for the use of DOC staff other users may require authorisation or caveats may apply. Any use by members of the public is at their own risk and DOC disclaims all liability for any risk.
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Document Owner	Catherine Wilson, Director, Heritage and Visitors Unit
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# 1. Background

## 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the principles that guide Department of Conservation's (DOC) management of risk to visitors arising from recreational use of public conservation lands and waters.

## 1.2 Scope

### **In scope**

This policy applies to the management of risk to visitors from the recreational use of public conservation lands and waters.

### **Out of Scope**

This policy does not apply to:

- The management of risk to workers under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.
- The management of risk to visitors (other persons at workplaces) under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.
- The management of risk to visitors at Department of Conservation offices or visitor centres.
- The management of risk to visitors as clients of tourism operators/concessionaires.

## 1.3 Audience

The audience for the Visitor Risk Management Policy is all DOC leaders, managers and staff involved in decision making and managing risk to visitors that arises from recreational use of public conservation lands and waters.

## 1.4 Introduction/Context

Outdoor recreation is part of New Zealand's historic and cultural heritage and an important aspect of our national identity. Taking risks, challenging ourselves and proving our self-reliance are an integral part of the outdoor recreation experience.

Outdoor recreation is also a core part of New Zealand's tourism industry, with many recreation activities occurring on land and waters managed by DOC. As a result, DOC plays a key role in the tourism industry with its investments enabling the private sector to create value, through tourism operators (concessionaires) providing experiences and the businesses providing supporting services.

DOC is responsible for taking all reasonably practicable steps to ensure that risk is managed to an appropriate level for the predominant visitor group at visitor sites on public conservation lands and waters. Visitor safety is managed in accordance with legislation, statutory plans, policies, and management procedures.

The way DOC manages visitor safety must reflect a complex set of societal values and expectations. DOC enables the traditional 'nature on nature's terms' style of recreation where people are free to make their own decisions about the risks they take. For some visitors, a high degree of self-reliance and risk taking is essential to the quality of their experience, while for others the assurance that risk is being managed for them is critical.

The Visitor Risk Management Policy puts personal responsibility first. It then tailors the level of DOC intervention to the skill level of the visitors. What this means is that for experienced visitors we will

provide information to enable them to manage their own risk, and for less experienced visitors we will manage some risk (for example, by providing bridges and barriers).

## 1.5 Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Outline the guiding principles that apply to all work undertaken by DOC in relation to visitor risk management.
- Guide decision-makers to balance the positive aspects of risk, such as a sense of challenge and accomplishment against the negative aspects of risk.

This policy is based on the understanding that effective risk management in outdoor recreation is a joint undertaking of DOC and the visiting public, requiring each party to exercise separate but interdependent responsibilities.

## 1.6 Guiding principles

- 1) The range of outdoor recreation experiences available to visitors will be preserved wherever possible.
- 2) DOC is responsible for identifying and assessing the hazards at visitor sites on public conservation lands and waters, and for providing information to inform visitors of those hazards and the risk arising from them.
- 3) All reasonably practicable steps will be taken to ensure DOC facilities are appropriate for the predominant visitor group and/or activity and meet all statutory obligations.
- 4) The level of skill and competence required for visitors to manage risk will be accurately represented.
- 5) Visitors are responsible for their decisions about the risks they take and for any others under their care and responsibility.
- 6) Visitors are responsible for providing the skills, competence, and equipment they require to effectively manage hazards.
- 7) DOC will prioritise management at popular sites which have a high level of risk and a high volume of low skilled visitors.
- 8) DOC is responsible for working with partners to continually improve visitor risk management practices.

DOC will:

- Undertake visitor risk management in accordance with the eight principles outlined above and the relevant legislation, policies, plans and standards that govern it.

## 1.7 Mandate

The Department of Conservation has a statutory responsibility for visitor safety. The DOC [Conservation General Policy](#) sections 8 a/b/c/d/e, 9.3 a/b and 11.1 d outline a position for DOC to manage risk to visitors.

The visitor risk management Policy (this document), the visitor risk management [Standard Operating Procedure](#) (doc-7555122) and hazard management [Guideline](#) (doc-7462131) set the context and provide specific guidance for visitor risk management.

Additionally, the following standards/legislation govern the management of visitor safety:

- National Parks Act (1980)
- Conservation Act (1987)
- Reserves Act (1977)
- General Policy National Parks Act (2005)
- Building Act (2004)
- Health Act (1956)
- Occupiers Liability Act (1962)
- Land Transport Act (1998)
- Walking Access Act (2008)

## 1.8 Terms and definitions

Term	Definition
Hazard	A source of potential harm or a situation with a potential to cause loss.
Monitor	To check, supervise, observe critically or record the progress of an activity, action or system on a regular basis in order to identify change.
Risk	The chance of a hazard(s) causing harm to a visitor(s). Risk is measured in terms of likelihood and consequence.
Risk identification	The process of determining the likelihood and consequence of a hazard(s) causing harm to a visitor(s), and the overall amount of risk at a visitor site.
Risk management	The culture, processes and structures directed towards reducing risk to the appropriate level for the predominant visitor group at a visitor site.
Risk management process	The systematic application of management policies, procedures, and practices to the tasks of establishing the context for, identifying, analysing, evaluating, treating, monitoring, and communicating risk.
Risk treatment	Selection and implementation of appropriate management actions for dealing with risk.
Stakeholders	Those people and organisations who may affect, be affected by, or perceive themselves to be affected by, a decision or activity.
Visitor Site	A place on PCL&W that facilitates non-commercial recreation.  The specific visitor site definitions and boundaries used for risk management are shaped through the Site Control Plan process.
Visitor Group	Term used internally within DOC to broadly define the characteristics of the users of facilities, services and places on land managed by DOC.

Term	Definition
	In the context of this document, it is the predominant visitor group.
Predominant Visitor Group	The visitor group with the highest numbers using the site.

## 2. Roles and responsibilities

**All staff members involved in managing risk to visitors** must be familiar with the visitor risk management principles and apply them to their day-to-day work.

### **Managers and team leaders**

In addition to their responsibilities as staff members:

- Are responsible for ensuring that visitor risk is managed to an appropriate level for the predominant visitor group.
- Must ensure their staff are familiar with the visitor risk management principles and apply them to their day-to-day work.
- Will provide support and guidance to assist staff to follow the Visitor Risk Management Policy.

### **Deputy Director-General Biodiversity, Heritage and Visitors**

- Accountable owner for the coordination and strategy of visitor risk management within the Department.
- Promotes compliance with the Visitor Risk Management Policy, Standard Operating Procedure, and Guideline.

### **Director, Heritage and Visitors**

- Business Owner. Responsible for the implementation of visitor risk management practices including the oversight of appropriate documentation, training, testing, monitoring, and reviewing of visitor risk management.

### 3. Policy statement detail

- 1) The range of outdoor recreation experiences available to visitors will be preserved wherever possible.
  - Each destination will have a predominant visitor group and activity identified for visitor risk management.
  - Recreation opportunities and activities will be managed for visitor groups according to their preferred outdoor recreation experience.
  - Risk management actions at each destination will actively preserve positive aspects of risk (such as sense of challenge) according to the preferences of the predominant visitor group and/or activity.
  - Risk management actions at each destination will also consider the needs of all visitors using the destination.
  - Visitor use at each destination will be periodically monitored, and the predominant visitor group and/or activity may be amended according to the findings.
  
- 2) DOC is responsible for identifying and assessing the hazards at visitor sites on public conservation lands and waters, and for providing information to inform visitors of those hazards and the risk arising from them.
  - All reasonably practicable steps will be taken to identify, and document hazards and associated risks at visitor sites and to mitigate risk to an appropriate level for the predominant visitor group.
  - Hazard and risk information will be communicated in a consistent manner via the DOC website, publications, visitor centres, signs and other communication channels.
  - A visitor alerts system on the DOC website will, as far as is reasonably practicable, provide information about any new or temporary hazards at visitor sites.
  - Monitoring will be periodically undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of hazard and risk information services.
  - DOC is responsible for working with others to provide visitors with general information about hazards in the outdoors, and how to manage the risk presented by hazards.
  
- 3) All reasonably practicable steps will be taken to ensure DOC facilities are appropriate for the predominant visitor group and/or activity and meet all statutory obligations.
  - Facilities will be provided at levels appropriate to the needs and preferences of different visitor groups and activities.
  - Facilities will be located, designed, constructed, and maintained in accordance with all relevant statutes, regulations, and national standards.
  - Facility management is based on DOC Service Standards, which encompass all relevant statutes, regulations and national standards that govern operation of these facilities.
  
- 4) The level of skill and competence required for visitors to manage risks will be accurately represented.
  - Hazard and risk information services will be provided at levels appropriate to the needs and preferences of different visitor groups and activities.
  
- 5) Visitors are responsible for their decisions about the risks they take and for any others under their care and responsibility.

- Visitors are expected to exercise due diligence prior to engaging in outdoor recreation activities, to ensure they make well-informed decisions.
  - Visitors are expected to choose recreational opportunities and destinations that are appropriate to the levels of skill, experience and equipment held by them and/or members of their group.
  - Visitors are expected to actively manage risk, both for themselves and others in their care.
- 6) Visitors are responsible for providing the skills, competence and equipment they require to effectively manage hazards.
- Visitors are responsible for ensuring they have the skills, competence, and equipment they require to identify hazards and manage the risks they present.
  - Visitors are expected to acquire, either for themselves or from others, the skills, competencies and equipment they require to identify hazards and manage the associated risks.
  - Visitors are expected to evaluate their skills, competencies and equipment and plan their chosen activity according to their competency level.
- 7) DOC will prioritise management at popular sites which have a high level of risk and a high volume of low skilled visitors.
- A significant effort will go into site design and providing information in a way that will help visitors make informed decisions.
  - When risk cannot be managed to a level appropriate for the predominant visitor group, DOC will close the visitor site or parts of it as appropriate.
  - Strong governance will be applied to these sites including regular monitoring and audit of the management procedures and their application.
  - Stakeholders (at all levels) will be consulted about how risks are being mitigated.
  - Ongoing efforts will be made to understand the site-specific hazards and risks and how visitors are behaving.
  - Appropriate risk thresholds for the type of visitor will be used for making management decisions.
- 8) DOC is responsible for working with partners to continually improve visitor risk management practices.
- DOC is responsible for working in partnership with other enterprises, agencies, organisations and community groups to share data to increase understanding of the drivers of incidents and accidents in outdoor recreation.
  - DOC is responsible for working with partners on visitor risk management initiatives, such as ensuring consistent messaging and best practices.

## 4. Related documents

For more information and related documents see the [Policies, Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines page on the DOC Intranet](#). Key related documents:

### **Policies**

- [Risk management policy](#) (doc-2224884)



## Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

- [Visitor risk management \(at visitor sites on PCL&W\) SOP](#) (doc-7555122)
- [Visitor safety closures SOP](#) (doc-7362830)

## Guidelines

- [Hazard management guideline for visitor sites on PCL&W](#) (doc-7462131)

# 5. Document history

## Coordinator

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## Owner

Catherine Wilson, Director – Heritage and Visitors Unit


## Approved for use

Stephanie Rowe, Deputy Director-General – Biodiversity, Heritage and Visitors

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## Amendments

Amendment Date	Amendment details	docCM version	Amended by
1.0	Alignment to final external review recommendations	1562377 version 35	[REDACTED]
1.1	Alignment to High Use, High Risk project findings, Principle 4 added	1562377, version 42	[REDACTED]
01/06/2017	Approved by Lou Sanson	1562377, version 48	[REDACTED]
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6/11/2019	Replacing the old RTH Unit with the new Heritage & Visitors structure	1562377, version 60	[REDACTED]
18/12/2020	Migration to the new Policy Template	1562377, version 62	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
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28/02/2024	Visitor site definition updated, and visitor group definition added to terms and definitions table, to align with new visitor risk management SOP.  SOP and Guideline document links updated. Intranet links updated to link to the new intranet.	1562377, version 74	
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