



Outdoor Code of Practice

A guide for local authorities

ukactive, the representative body for the health and fitness sector, is committed to raising standards in the pursuit of a more active and healthier nation.

Group exercise classes and personal training sessions being conducted within parks have soared in popularity. Whilst the delivery of these classes continues to enjoy general public support, there is a need for them to be delivered responsibly with effective safeguards in place.

The ukactive Outdoor Code of Practice defines the minimum performance criteria for group exercise and personal training delivered in parks to ensure that customers are provided with a safe environment in which to engage with leisure activities.

The design of the Code of Practice complements licensing arrangements for parks, whereby local councils adopt the Code as a pre-requisite to use their parks and open spaces to deliver classes.

This guide provides local authorities with an overview of the Code and its benefits as well as the reasons they should ensure that exercise professionals use it in their areas.

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More people
More active
More often



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About this code

This code provides good practice advice and criteria for minimum standards for those with responsibility for, or operation of, outdoor exercise classes. It defines the minimum performance criteria for exercise professionals using parks to ensure that customers are provided with a safe environment in which to exercise.

Outdoor exercise operators and practitioners have been involved in the production of this code and we have taken into account their experiences and responses when developing the standards.

"Outdoor fitness has surged in popularity but operating in the outdoors requires different competencies and carries different risks to those that people might face when delivering workouts in a more traditional facility.

"The Code of Practice provides a strong framework to ensure that all outdoor fitness is safely delivered with all operators agreeing and committing to the necessary standards required. Constantly improving these standards can only be a good thing for all customers and provides peace of mind for authorities managing outdoor spaces whilst removing a huge administrative burden."

Rob Love, Managing Director, British Military Fitness

"ukactive's mission is to get more people, more active, more often. This can be achieved most effectively in an environment where local authorities and exercise professionals are governed by the standards that ensure customers are safe and well supported while taking part in exercise."

David Stalker, CEO, ukactive



What this code covers

The Code does not create a new law or act as a substitute for any existing regulations. It covers all group exercise classes that are conducted in parks and open spaces. The requirements fall into three categories:

- » Health & safety
- » Exercise professionals
- » Customer care

The following provides details of the code. The text **in orange** represents the requirement that the code places on group exercise providers and the **grey boxes** provide guidance of the evidence needed to prove commitment to the requirement.

1. Health and safety

1.1 Operational procedures

In organisations comprising of a number of instructors operational procedures are a way of ensuring that all instructors are aware of what is expected of them. An operational procedure should cover:

- » who can run sessions – reference should be made to what qualifications or ratification of competence is required of the person leading the session
- » what they are expected to do under normal conditions and circumstances
- » what they are expected to do in the event of an incident, accident or unusual group or event;
- » what site specific hazards may be encountered over and above the norm that may be expected for that activity

» A written operational procedure should be maintained for all activities.

1.2 Health and safety

Organisations must ensure that minimum legal requirements with regards to “Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974” (HASWA) and the “Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999” (MHSWR).

Organisations must have an up to date health & safety policy signed by a responsible director that supports the organisations aim to have a planned and systematic approach to the continuous improvement of its health and safety management system.

- » A copy of the Health and Safety Policy statement – signed by senior management or director
- » Health and Safety Law poster completed and displayed in staff areas where applicable
- » Employer Liability Insurance certificate displayed
- » Individual instructors must hold Public Liability and Professional Indemnity insurance
- » Instructors should know where these items are located

1.3 Risk assessment

A risk assessment is the record of balance between the hazards that may be encountered and the measures that are taken to safeguard against them. Much of a risk assessment will be influenced by the age and ability of the participants and the experience and competence of the instructors. Risk assessments can take many forms, a Health and Safety Executive ‘Plan, Do, Check, Act’ is one approach. Risk assessments may include:



- » site specific assessment – risks associated with exercising in a particular stretch of park, taking into account land ownership and rights of way
- » activity specific assessment – risks associated with the specific activity, such as forms of resistance training
- » generic – the risks associated with all forms of exercise training, as with the above this will likely be covered within instructor training. This would include time and date specific risk assessments
- » operational – relating to the procedure for instance what is the instructor to participant ratio, or whether the instructor should always carry a mobile phone
- » environmental – assessing and minimising the risk of potential damage to the environment

It is not the risk assessment that drives safety but the outcome. What counts is how the operational procedures take account of the assessment of the risks involved in the activities.

Organisations must conduct a suitable and sufficient risk assessments in accordance with the Health and Safety Executive's 'Plan, Do, Check, Act'. The risk assessment must in turn be integral within the operational procedure and staff training. It will be desirable for separate risk assessments to be conducted for each activity and each significant venue.

- » Health and Safety standard outlining the procedures for risk assessment
- » Copies of the most recent risk assessments
- » Evidence of a formal risk assessment review within the time frames stated in the above standard (within the last 3 years or following any significant change)
- » Safe systems or work/procedural guidelines



1.4 Staff

All staff must be competent in all health and safety aspects of their work relating to safety policy, safe working procedures and action to be taken in the event of an emergency situation.

- » There should be a documented induction process that includes specific health and safety training for all staff
- » Health and Safety training records for all staff in Normal Operating Procedures and Emergency Action Plans
- » Ensure that the risk assessment process is formally reviewed on annual basis to ensure the safety of classes is improving
- » Interviews with staff to confirm all aspects of health and safety.

1.5 Incident, accident and emergency procedures

These written procedures should not be seen as a substitute for training, but as an accompaniment, or induction check list.

One approach is to have a broad approach that addresses both serious and minor risks:

- » Provide guidance for those minor situations which are comparatively common and therefore quite likely to occur, such as transport failing to arrive (or breaking down) or what to do if someone sprains or twists an ankle
- » Provide guidance for the more serious or worst case scenario such as a serious or fatal accident

Some of these solutions will be applicable anywhere; others will be very site specific.

Furthermore, organisations should have a meaningful system of recording incidents. Reviewing significant 'incidents' as well as accidents is an important way of trying to make sure it doesn't happen again. Trends identified as part of this regular review should be acted upon and risk assessments and working practices amended as a result.

Once there has been a serious accident or a particularly 'dangerous' occurrence, there are legal requirements to report it to the appropriate Health and Safety Executive or Local Authority Environmental Health Department ('enforcement agencies').

Reporting requirements are more stringent in the area where a member of the public (and this includes activity participants) as opposed to an 'employee' is injured. There is a useful leaflet about the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) available from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE Books) on (01787).881165.

Organisations must have proper documentation in place advising on action to be taken in the event of an emergency situation. Significant incidents and accidents are reported internally and all 'RIDDOR' incidents are reported to the appropriate Health and Safety Executive or local authority office.

- » Emergency operating plan
- » Record keeping process

1.6 Modification of activity or venue

Outdoor exercise is subject to a range of factors including the weather which may mean that it would be ill-advised to allow an event to take place or to allow one that has started to continue.

Organisers need to consider 'worst case scenarios' in the early stages of planning. In particular, procedures need to be in place for responding to adverse weather, or an equally disruptive occurrence.

In particular, the problems of communicating changes of plan to participants at the last minute, or during the event, need to be identified in the risk assessment stage and appropriate safety measures instituted.

Organisations must have procedures for cancelling events, including fixed points during the planning process for the cancellation of events and notifying participants.

- » Cancellation/change of venue procedure

1.7 First aid

In the event of an accident, a good supply of basic first aid equipment should be readily (within a minute or so) available. For off-site activities, leaders will need to carry first aid kits. This will also be necessary 'on-site' where base resources are more than a quick sprint away. Who supplies the equipment, and on what basis, should be defined within operational procedures.

Organisations should comply with the "Health and Safety Regulations Act 1981" to provide first aid provision at all times taking into account staff and users needs, type, quantity and location of equipment and number of qualified first aiders.



- » Adequate first aid equipment available for use
- » Procedures to ensure that there are enough competent persons at all times to cover for temporary and exceptional absences of trained first aiders
- » Copies of staff first aid training recorded and certificates retained
- » Minimum requirement HSE approved first aid person per site throughout the operating hours will be required according to risk assessment
- » Accident and RIDDOR reporting procedures in place
- » Evidence that there are an appropriate number of staff qualified in First Aid
- » Method of communicating the need for further medical assistance

1.8 Use of equipment

If equipment is provided, it should be serviceable. Furthermore, there should be sufficient quantities and range of equipment to supply the maximum potential number of participants, with some spare in case of damage or defect. Otherwise, arrangements will have to be made to split groups into smaller units which can be accommodated with existing supplies.

If organisations or individuals hire equipment, as opposed to owning it, it does not change the responsibility which the organisation has, of ensuring that it is safe, functional and in good order.

Instructors check equipment before setting out. Organisations identify and assess risks arising from the use of machinery or equipment. If fitness equipment is used the organisation must maintain the equipment in accordance with manufacturers' service schedules and conduct checks of equipment as per the manufacturers' guidelines.

- » Copies of statutory certificates and records
- » Fitness equipment inspections checks recorded in accordance with operations manual/manufacturers' maintenance schedule
- » Evidence of routine maintenance checks and records

1.9 System audit and review

External audits of performance in all areas of operational procedure are essential in order to guarantee that organisations continue to progress.

Organisations must conduct periodic external audits to establish that management arrangements, adequate risk control systems and workplace precautions are in place. They must also conduct periodic reviews of health and safety performance and make decisions about improving performance based on information from 'measuring' and auditing' activities.

- » Documented periodic reviews of health and safety performance in place
- » Action plans in place to rectify corrective actions identified above.



2. Professionals

Outdoor exercise instructors could include instructors whose contractual arrangements might be described in one, several, or all of the following ways:

- » permanent/semi-permanent employee;
- » freelance, self employed instructor.

The instructor's role is to prepare exercise sessions in advance and manage the session to ensure that every client or group is able to exercise effectively and safely.

2.1 Staff qualifications

The competence and integrity of activity leaders is integral for assuring safety and good practice. Competence in this field is a mixture of experience, certification (qualifications) and the ability to work with people. Mere technical ability, though vitally important from a safety point of view, is not likely to be sufficient in itself. The people who run activity sessions will need to have the other necessary attributes as well as technical competence.

Must ensure that staff have the relevant level of nationally recognised qualification for the environment/terrain in which they teach and for the fitness/health levels of the participants of every session.

- » Copies of all fitness staff certificates and evidence of suitable continual professional development

2.2 Specialist staff

Ensure staff instructing in specialist areas hold an appropriate nationally recognised qualification for that discipline, such as pre/post natal or Exercising with Older Adults.

- » Copies of all fitness staff certificates and evidence of suitable continual professional development

3. Customer care

This section outlines the requirement to ensure that on joining the organisation or exercise session, customers are aware of the standard terms and conditions that apply to their taking part in activity and if applicable membership.

3.1 Terms and conditions

The purchasing arrangements for outdoor exercise may differ between organisations and in certain instances customers may be able to purchase single sessions. Should contracts be involved the customer must be aware of all terms and conditions.

Ensure that on joining the organisation or session customers are made aware of the standard terms and conditions that apply to their membership.

- » Membership terms and conditions documentation
- » View of sign-up process

3.2 Consultation agreement

Members must be made aware of any contractual arrangement they are signing.

- » Membership sales/process documentation



3.3 Consultation environment

The environment in which this dialogue takes place must be conducive to allowing free expression and questioning by the client.

- » Evidence of a conducive environment for membership consultation



3.4 Legal obligations

Ensure that any written contracts for members are in accordance with government legislation

- » Membership terms and conditions documentation



3.5 Medical pre-screening

Prior to administering any exercise, instructors must ensure that participants are suitably able to undertake such exercise. This is best done through a medical pre-screening method.

Organisations and instructors must ensure users complete a medical pre-screening document before undertaking physical activity.

- » Use of a medical pre-screening tool such as the PARQ or PARMEDex



3.6 Users

Ensure that a record of all users is kept.

- » Records for all users with contact details for next of kin for emergency situations

3.7 Induction

Ensure that all users understand the session, what is expected of them, and how to use any featured equipment.

- » Documented system in place
- » Evidence of a pre-activity screening process
- » Evidence of an induction process

3.8 Customer perception of operational performance

Ensure that customer complaints are acknowledged and direct communication is maintained with the customer while seeking to resolve the matter.

- » A complaints feedback procedure
- » Evidence of response and action

3.9 Equality

Demonstrate a commitment to the Equality Act 2010

- » Evidence of an action plan

Frequently asked questions

For local authority employees with responsibility for parks and urban spaces, as well as those responsible for licensing

I have responsibility for exercise professionals in parks in my area, why should I require them to adopt this code?

This code will give you the benefit of knowing that operators working within your park are professional and up to minimum performance criteria, to ensure that customers are provided with a safe environment in which to exercise.

Will signing up cause me more paperwork and bureaucracy?

No, The OCOP will make it easier for you. Our 3rd party verifiers will collect all of the paperwork, check it and attend a class to make sure that everything is ok. All you now need to do is to ask to see the OCOP certificate and you will know that they can operate in your park.

What counts as a park or open space and is therefore covered by the code?

The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 defines open space as "Land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground". However, this Code of Practice also takes into account other open space of public value, including not just parks but accessible countryside in urban fringe areas; and civic spaces, including civic and market squares, and other hard surfaced areas designed for pedestrians.

Who counts as an 'exercise professional'?

This code covers all those responsible for delivering physical activity classes, to any number of people, within the geographical areas as outlined above.

How often do operators have to have their standards checked to qualify as being OCOP certified?

The OCOP lasts for 2 years at which time, the operator will be asked to renew and go through another assessment.

Who carries out the inspections?

The assessments are carried out by a 3rd party company and all of the assessors have relevant qualifications and experience in Health and Safety and leisure.

For further information call 020 7420 8560 or email: cop@ukactive.org.uk

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