

Gamekeeping and deer farming

A guide to safe working



Introduction

This guidance is for employers and others whose work involves moorland and lowland gamekeeping (including deer stalking and the work of water bailiffs and ghillies) and deer farming. For simplicity, the term 'gamekeeping' is used to cover all gamekeeping activities.

For ease of use, this guidance is divided into advice, which is likely to be relevant to all of those involved in the activities covered by this publication, and topic specific guidance, covering the areas of gamekeeping and deer farming.

Employers should remember they may be responsible for the health and safety of someone who is self-employed for tax and National Insurance purposes, but who works under their control and direction.

If you are an employee you must co-operate with your employer on health and safety matters and take reasonable care, not just for your own health and safety but also for that of anyone else who may be put at risk by your work.

Providing information, instruction and training

Everyone who works in gamekeeping needs to know how to work safely and without risks to health. Employers must provide clear instructions, information and adequate training for employees on:

- the risks they may face;
- measures in place to control the risks;
- how to follow any emergency procedures.

It is particularly important to consider the training needs and supervision of:

- new recruits and trainees;
- young people who are particularly vulnerable to accidents;
- people changing jobs, or taking on new responsibilities;
- non English-speaking workers who will require information in a way they can easily understand;
- people required to use pesticides, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), chainsaws and firearms;
- health and safety representatives, who have particular laws relating to them.

More specific advice is in *Health and safety training: A brief guide*.¹ Suitable training courses are also available.

Work environment

Lone workers

Lone workers should not be put at more risk than other employees. Think about and deal with any health and safety risks before people work alone.

Consider:

- if you need to assess areas of risk including violence, manual handling, the medical suitability of the individual to work alone and any risks arising from the nature of the workplace itself;
- if there are any particular requirements for training and levels of experience needed;
- what systems might be needed to supervise and keep in touch with lone workers where a risk assessment shows this is necessary.

In particular, when working alone in isolated locations you will need a system for dealing with emergencies. As a minimum, at the end of each work period you should check to make sure the worker has returned safely. In the event of illness or injury, it will be vital to know where they are; provide mobile telephones or radios where appropriate. Have an emergency plan prepared and rehearsed. When it is not safe to carry out particular jobs alone, plan work so that an assistant is available.

For more guidance on lone workers, see *Working alone: Health and safety guidance on the risks of lone working*.²

Violence

Work-related violence is not just physical, it includes verbal abuse and threats. When physical violence is involved the injuries to those workers affected are obvious. However, those subjected to constant and repeated verbal abuse and threats may suffer stress, anxiety or depression.

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

For more guidance on workplace violence see *Violence at work: A guide for employers*.³

Weather protection

You should provide clothing to protect your employees against adverse weather. The clothing design should be compatible with safety in other areas, eg the safe use of guns. When they are working on moorland and similar terrain you should provide emergency survival equipment, eg blankets or thermal bags.

Guns

For detailed advice and guidance see *Safe use of guns*.⁴

First aid

As an employer you are responsible for making sure that your employees receive immediate attention if taken ill or injured at work. Your arrangements will depend on the particular circumstances in your workplace and you need to assess what your first-aid needs are.

As a minimum, you must have:

- a suitably stocked first-aid box;
- a travelling first-aid kit for those working in remote locations;
- an appointed person to take charge of first-aid arrangements;
- information for all employees giving details of first-aid arrangements.

You might decide that you need a first-aider, ie someone trained by an approved organisation who holds a qualification in first aid at work or emergency first aid at work. Gamekeepers are recommended to obtain emergency first-aid training.

More guidance on first aid at work can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/firstaid.

Risks to the public

You should 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 public access needs to be restricted or warnings given. Bear in mind that public access legislation may apply. If you are working with clients, or other members of the public are 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.

Harmful substances

Many materials or substances at work could harm your health. Harmful substances can be present in anything from veterinary medicines and pesticides to cleaning products.

To begin to control exposure to hazardous materials you need to do a risk assessment. This involves identifying the harmful substance (using product labels and safety data sheets) and thinking about:

- the route into the body (ie breathed in, skin contact or swallowed);
- how often people work with the substance and for how long;
- the task being done;
- anyone else who could be exposed (eg maintenance workers, the public);
- people who could be exposed accidentally;
- where necessary, whether to provide appropriate health surveillance.

To control exposure to hazardous materials, you should consider avoiding use of the substance/process altogether. However, if that is not possible, use the risk assessment process to make sure measures are in place to control the risks.

Control measures include:

- changing the process to reduce risks;
- controlling exposure at source by enclosing the process or activity to minimise escape or release;
- providing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE);
- planning the storage and disposal of materials;
- making sure the workplace is easily cleaned;
- providing washing and changing facilities.

You must check and review your control measures regularly to make sure they are effective. This should include making sure:

- systems of work are being followed;
- PPE is suitable, properly fitted and maintained;
- information, instruction and training are provided;
- any plant and equipment are maintained (particularly ventilation equipment).

More information is available at: www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/index.htm.

Control of pesticides

Most animal poisons, rodenticides and timber treatment products are covered by either the Control of Pesticides Regulations or the Biocidal Products Regulations (the product label will identify which legislation applies).

Pesticides classed as approved for agricultural use, such as insecticides and herbicides, are covered by both the Plant Protection Products Regulations and the Plant Protection Products (Sustainable Use) Regulations.

All these regulations require that people using pesticides are competent and have received instruction in safe use; in the case of plant protection products, users will also need to hold a certificate of competence.

Gassing compounds require special care when being transported, used and stored. For more information on gassing compounds see *Gassing of rabbits and vertebrate pests*.⁵

Veterinary products

Many veterinary products can be harmful to your health. Users, such as deer farmers, must carry out an assessment to evaluate the health risks associated with these products. If the risks to health from exposure to a particular substance are high, the assessment will need to justify that it is not reasonably practicable to prevent the risk, either by stopping use of the substance or substituting it with a substance that is safer.

Risks from disease

Lyme disease

This disease is spread by bites from infected ticks. Deer are also known to carry this disease. The earliest sign may be a faint ring-shaped rash at the point where a bite has occurred. 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. If bitten, carefully remove any ticks and place a small dressing over the bite. The sooner the ticks are removed the less likely you are to be infected. If you are worried about possible infection contact your GP.

Where there is an infection problem within a farmed deer herd, carry out routine treatment of all deer for external parasites.

Weil's disease (leptospirosis)

This is a serious and sometimes fatal infection that is transmitted to humans by contact with urine from infected rats. Water in ditches, slow-moving rivers and ponds may contain rat urine capable of causing this 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.

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.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis may be present in deer herds, so handlers should be encouraged to take the appropriate inoculation.

General infection

When handling deer entrails or any infected tissue, wear disposable protective gloves. Consult the local vet for a safe way of submitting samples for analysis.

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 motorcycle or quad bike ATV. Helmets should be manufactured and tested to the current relevant EN/BS standard.

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 jackknifing 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 and do not exceed manufacturer's recommended towing weights.

More information can be found in *Safe use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in agriculture and forestry*.⁶

Chainsaws

Anyone using a chainsaw at work should have received relevant training. Suitable protective clothing should be provided and worn (see *Chainsaws at work*⁷).

Overhead power lines

Electricity can jump gaps when equipment or machinery gets close enough – you do not need to contact overhead power lines to be injured. Carefully survey any area you are going to work in to make sure you can maintain a minimum horizontal distance of 10 m between the lines and any equipment used when:

- working with long conducting equipment, eg ladders, carbon fishing rods and poles used for drey-poking as part of squirrel control;
- using tipping trailers or lorries;
- operating materials handlers;
- carrying out tree work.

Further information in *Working safely near overhead electricity power lines*.⁸

Gamekeeping

Burning moorland vegetation

Burning moorland vegetation needs to be properly planned and controlled to minimise risks. Scottish Natural Heritage's *The Muirburn Code*⁹ gives useful guidance.

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, drugs, or if you have a problem with your heart or blood circulation.

Working in boats

Wear a lifejacket 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. Lifejackets using self-contained gas cylinders for inflation are best. Use types which automatically inflate on 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 lifejacket 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 Government 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.

Deer stalking

Handling of carcasses – manual handling risks

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 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

Carefully site high seats to give an unobstructed field of shooting and a solid backstop, preferably earth or some similar material which won't cause ricochets. Properly secure the rungs of wooden ladders and do not just support them with 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.

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. Avoid creating more dust than necessary and wear a comfortable well-fitting respirator that complies with BS EN 149:2001+A1:2009 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

There is a high risk of electrocution when using poorly maintained electrical equipment in wet conditions. 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 make sure 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 farming

Deer farming involves some techniques which are not normally used anywhere else. In particular, deer are temperamentally different from other farmed animals and need special handling. It is important that stock handlers are suitably instructed and specifically trained in deer husbandry.

Although this advice is mainly concerned with the farming of red deer, similar considerations will apply to farming fallow or other gregarious species of deer.

Deer handling

A well-designed system for herding and handling deer will enable you to carry out the task in a safe and efficient manner with minimal stress to the deer.

Deer will need to be collected into a handling area for certain husbandry tasks. During this operation there is a risk of stock handlers being injured – either by being kicked or gored – so you need to take precautions to avoid this. Such precautions will also generally be beneficial to efficient, low-stress animal handling.

Where possible, arrange paddocks to open on to a raceway system leading to the handling area. This will avoid the need to move the deer through a series of gates and paddocks.

Make sure the raceway is flanked by suitable fencing at least 1.8 m high. Mask this area with timber or similar material to give a solid appearance.

In the close confines of the handling area stock handlers risk being butted or kicked by stags and large hinds. Deer may also rear up and strike downwards with their front hooves in a scissor-type kick. Design the handling system so that large mature stags can move through without direct contact with the stock handlers. Provide body shields and safety helmets for the stock handlers when handling small stags and hinds known to be aggressive. Safety footwear with steel toecaps will also be required where there is a risk of injury to the feet.

Shields need to protect most of the body below the neck and be made from 12 mm plywood, polycarbonate or an equivalent material. Safety helmets made to BS EN 397 or BS 6658 are suitable.

The handling area can be a permanent facility or consist of portable equipment. In either case, design it carefully so that the animals are handled safely and efficiently. Make sure walls are solidly built, without projections.

Deer tend to move to higher ground when disturbed, so the handling area should be located to take advantage of this trait.

Where subdued lighting is used to calm deer, it needs to be sufficient to allow stock handlers to work safely.

Housed deer should be able to see animals in neighbouring pens. Failure to do this may result in unnecessary stress and handling difficulties.

Deer restraint

The collecting area will need to have a properly designed deer crush. Design the pen so that animals are easily encouraged to enter the crush. Both 'drop floor' crushes (see Figure 1) and 'squeeze crates' (with collapsing padded sides) are suitable. If possible, the crush facilities ought to be able to deal with all types of deer, including mature stags with full antlers.

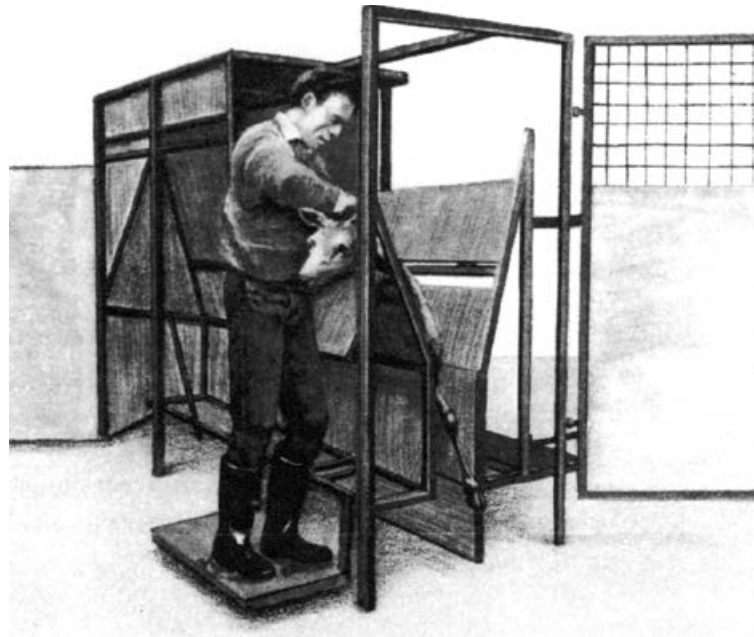


Figure 1 Deer restraint: drop floor crush

The deer crush needs to protect the stock handlers from being hurt and also allow good access to the deer. A simple form of head restraint is recommended.

Using tranquillisers

Tranquillisers containing the active ingredient etorphine hydrochloride are highly toxic to humans. Only use them in cases of genuine veterinary intervention and in situations where it is essential to safely transport stags. Do not use them for routine management purposes, eg moving stags from one part of a farm to another.

In special cases, where use of etorphine hydrochloride tranquillisers is justified, it should only be administered by properly trained staff who have been authorised by a qualified vet.

Make sure an assistant who is fully trained in administering the antidote is at hand. Deer farmers who want to use etorphine hydrochloride tranquillisers for other reasons will have to justify their use in accordance with regulation 7 of the COSHH Regulations.^{10,11}

This justification will need to take account of husbandry regimes which do not rely on sedation, and also on the existence of less hazardous drugs.

Administering drugs with hypodermic darts should only be carried out by individuals who hold the appropriate firearms certificate and Home Office permit for using a prohibited weapon. They will also need to be familiar with all aspects of using the equipment.

Removing antlers

As a general rule the antlers of every stag should be removed after the velvet has been shed. Antlers can be safely removed without using tranquillisers, providing the operation is carried out as soon as possible after the velvet has been shed and the antlers have hardened. The stags will be easier to handle at this stage. When removing antlers, use a deer crush with suitable head and antler restraint.

Once the stag's temperament has been affected by the onset of the rut, the above technique will not be safe without using a tranquilliser. This can be administered to the stag while it is restrained in the deer crush. Alternatively, the stag can be darted in the field. However, tranquillisers containing etorphine hydrochloride should only be used when such use can be properly justified.

Disbudding of male calves at a research institute shows that this is an effective and safe alternative to antler removal.

Managing stock stags

Stags become very aggressive during the rut so handling needs to be kept to a minimum. Only enter their paddocks when it is essential for feeding, examination by the vet, or if they must be moved to another group of hinds.

When stock handlers enter a paddock with a rutting stag inside, use a vehicle that will provide protection from an attack, eg a cabbed tractor. Two people should be on hand.

Outside the rut, stags generally become less aggressive. However, some can be unpredictably aggressive so stock handlers have to be vigilant at all times. Remember, hand-reared deer can be the most dangerous.

Managing hinds

Hinds can become aggressive at calving time and should be disturbed as little as possible. Any hinds with young, and which have become so tame as to permit close approach, should be regarded as possible sources of danger to anyone handling their calves. Take special care if you are going to tag calves at birth.

Use a vehicle which provides suitable protection when carrying out routine herd inspection at calving time. When leaving the vehicle to inspect or tag a calf, park the vehicle so that the hind cannot approach from behind.

Outside the calving season most hinds are reasonably docile if handled properly. However, some individuals, especially hand-reared animals, can show aggression. Make sure stock handlers are aware of these hinds and take special precautions as appropriate. If possible, cull these animals at the earliest opportunity.

Slaughter

Only permit trained marksmen/women who are proficient in the use of firearms and who hold an appropriate firearms certificate to carry out field slaughter with rifles.

Shoot deer when they are quiet so that the marksman/woman can take careful aim and is not likely to be startled by sudden movements of non-target animals.

The choice of area and timing of the slaughter is important. Make sure the slaughter happens when members of the public are least likely to be in the area. Thoroughly inspect the site to make sure that all is clear before shooting.

The use of firearms inside buildings is potentially very dangerous and should only be carried out after taking specialist advice. The general presumption is that slaughter other than that in the field should be carried out by a competent person who uses a captive bolt pistol.

See the 'Gamekeeping' section for advice on the handling and treatment of carcasses.

Risks to the public

Individual male deer of any species known to have lost their fear of humans, and which are readily approachable, should always be regarded as potentially hazardous once they have cleaned the velvet from their antlers.

Regardless of age, once they are in hard antler these animals should not be kept in fields with a public right of way or which are known to be used by children, the elderly or disabled.

In other situations when public access may reasonably be expected, display safety signs at access points to the fields. These signs need to be in accordance with BS 5378 and carry a supplementary text, eg 'Warning – Stags in Field'.

Similarly, deer farmers should avoid pasturing hinds which have recently calved, or are about to calve in these fields. If this is not possible, choose the stocking rate so that hinds can easily occupy positions where they will not feel threatened. In addition, display safety signs to BS ISO 7010:2011 at access points bearing a suitable supplementary text, eg 'Calving Deer – Keep to Path'.

References

- 1 *Health and safety training: A brief guide* Leaflet INDG345(rev1) HSE Books 2013 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.htm
- 2 *Working alone: Health and safety guidance on the risks of lone working* Leaflet INDG73(rev3) HSE Books 2013 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.htm
- 3 *Violence at work: A guide for employers* Leaflet INDG69(rev) HSE Books 1996 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.htm
- 4 *Safe use of guns* Leaflet AIS43 HSE Books 2013 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais43.htm
- 5 *Gassing of rabbits and vertebrate pests* Leaflet AIS22(rev1) HSE Books 2012 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais22.htm
- 6 *Safe use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in agriculture and forestry* Leaflet AIS33(rev1) HSE Books 2013 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais33.htm
- 7 *Chainsaws at work* Leaflet INDG317(rev2) HSE Books 2013 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg317.htm
- 8 *Working safely near overhead electricity power lines* Leaflet AIS8(rev3) HSE Books 2012 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais8.htm
- 9 *The Muirburn Code* Scottish Natural Heritage 2011 www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/355582/0120117.pdf
- 10 *Control of substances hazardous to health. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended). Approved Code of Practice and guidance* L5 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/L5.htm
- 11 *Working with substances hazardous to health: A brief guide to COSHH* Leaflet INDG136(rev5) HSE Books 2012 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg136.htm

Find out more

Veterinary medicines: Safe use by farmers and other animal handlers Leaflet AS31(rev2) HSE Books 2012 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/as31.htm

Leptospirosis: Are you at risk? Pocket card INDG84(rev1) HSE Books 2011 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg84.htm

Basic advice on first aid at work Leaflet INDG347(rev2) HSE Books 2011 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg347.htm

Useful advice is also available from:

Lantra, National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth CV8 2LG
www.lantra.co.uk

British Association for Shooting and Conservation, Marford Mill, Rossett,
Wrexham LL12 0HL www.basc.org.uk

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Fordingbridge, Hampshire SP6 1EF
www.gct.org.uk

Scottish Natural Heritage, 12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 2AS www.snh.org.uk

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

Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit 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.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory, unless specifically stated, and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance.

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