

A how-to guide for orienteering event organisers

ROBIN UPPILL explores strategies and best practices that clubs can implement to create a safe and enjoyable environment for orienteers, visitors and volunteers.

Risk: “an uncertain event or set of events that will have an effect on the achievement of objectives”. In the case of orienteering – running a successful orienteering event.

In summary:

- A Risk Cause
- May result in a Risk Event
- Which may affect an Objective

A risk may present a Threat or an Opportunity, for example:

- Very heavy rain floods creeks so that part of map is inaccessible affecting some courses
- Entries above budget enables additional services to spectators and competitors

In orienteering the focus is most commonly on “threats”

When risks that justify attention are identified, there may be several means of addressing them, depending on the nature of the event. Common overarching approaches for managing orienteering event risks include:

- Use of an independent controller to review all aspects of event organisation and course planning – applicable particularly to major events or other events held in challenging terrain.
- Sensible programming of events to avoid high risk seasonal conditions (e.g. hot weather, bushfire hazard).
- Effective liaison with landholders or managers.

- Adequate event information for participants, plus additional briefing on the day with respect to exceptional conditions.
- Application of environmental best practice guidelines as developed by Orienteering Australia and adapted to the relevant event as appropriate

The risks identified are of four types:

1. Risks to officials in the planning of the event
2. Risks to competitors and officials participating in the event.
3. Risks to the successful conduct of the event itself including financial.
4. Risks to outside parties (e.g. landholders, the general public), affecting either person or property

In this article, the focus is on the first 2 categories. A Risk Management plan developed for the Australian Three Days covered all categories.

The risk management process involves risk identification, then assessment of likelihood and impact, and then defining a response to the identified risks.

This approach was taken for the Australian Three Day carnival, however this article discusses risk in a more general less formal way. When risks are identified the approach can be to:

- a. Accept the risk
- b. Mitigate the risk
- c. Remove or avoid the risk
- d. Have a contingency plan

At orienteering events, we generally accept that the sport, like many sports has risk to participants, and we ask people to accept these. However steps are often taken to reduce or mitigate the risk and in some cases remove the risk.

Risks in planning the event apply to mapping, course planning and controlling as injuries and accidents can happen to those involved. Hence officials in these various

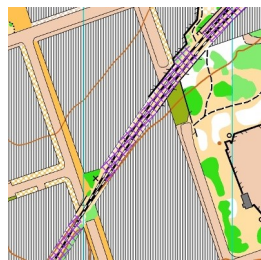
roles need to consider the following:

1. If working alone, all officials should notify a third person of their planned activities (location, timing etc)
2. If working with others, know where each other will be working, expected time to meet, etc
3. Be aware of the mobile phone coverage of the work area, and have the SA Emergency Plus App on your phone so emergency services can be contacted if needed
4. If the area has mobile coverage consider sharing your location on Google Maps for example with a third person
5. Undertake activities in a manner appropriate for the weather conditions

Course planners and controllers need to design courses to minimise various risks to participants.

1. Follow course planning guidelines, in particular

- a. Course are of the appropriate navigational standards
- b. Consider hazards that need to be avoided
 - i. Plan courses to avoid major hazards
 - ii. Hazards that must be avoided are marked on the map (see example section of the railway line at Port Elliot marked as Out of Bounds as going along these sections is dangerous when a train is present)
 - iii. Marking hazards in field as required
 - iv. Information about hazards is conveyed to the competitors in the event information and at the start

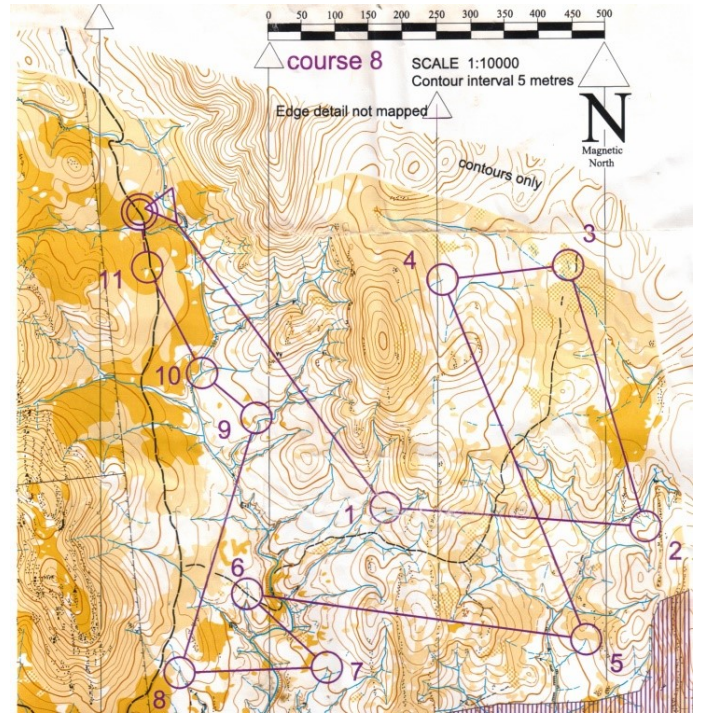


c. Consider map accuracy, extents/boundaries especially for junior courses (refer to example, top right, moderate course from Paradise where controls on a moderate course were near a vague edge of the map).

- i. Maps are accurate and where possible have distinct boundaries.
- ii. Where possible course planners should avoid situations where a competitor could stray off a map, have no way of knowing they are off the map and encounter difficulties in returning to

the assembly area.

d. Age and ability of competitors



- i. Courses are planned appropriately for the expected age groups and/or level of experience i.e. navigational and physical difficulty
- ii. Discourage or do not permit inexperienced participants to undertake a course that is navigationally significantly greater than their level of experience

2. General Safety Information

- a. Course closing time advised to all competitors, and course closure means being back at the finish by that time even if they have not completed their course
- b. Safety directions (bearing or description) advised to all competitors.
- c. Competitors are told they must report to the finish even if they have not completed their course
- d. Display map symbols that indicate safety related map features e.g. out of bounds/hazardous areas or features
- e. Where applicable follow normal traffic rules e.g. crossing roads, especially at urban events
- f. Any particular map/course information e.g. roads and other features that cannot be crossed

- g. Any other relevant information – e.g. if the course covers mountain bike tracks so be aware of bike riders

3. Events are appropriate for the expected weather conditions

- a. Refer to OSA Policies and Guidelines manuals – Safety Guidelines and Event Cancellation in Adverse Weather
- b. Hot weather
 - i. Event scheduled to avoid hottest periods of day.
 - ii. Competitors are advised before the event about water requirements e.g. that they must provide their own water before and after completing their course i.e. in the assembly area
 - iii. Organiser and course planner are aware of foot orienteering guidelines in providing water on courses, and advise participants of the arrangement for their event
 - iv. Warnings issued to competitors (verbal/ written) about the weather conditions
 - v. Event cancelled if hot weather likely to affect many competitors
 - vi. Participants are encouraged to carry their own water on courses.
- C. Cold weather
 - i. Avoid conducting events in areas subject to extreme cold during winter period.
 - ii. Locate start area in sheltered location or erect shelter for competitors.
 - iii. Warnings issued to competitors (verbal/ written).
 - iv. Cancel event in extreme situations

4. Managing injuries at events - Injuries or incidents affecting event participants may occur in the assembly area or on the orienteering course.

- a. Response depends on the nature of the injury e.g. minor abrasions or sprains and competitor has returned to the Finish, or a significant injury

requiring retrieval of a participant from the event area

- b. At major events, 3rd party providers are engaged to provide first aid services
- c. At local events the organizing club must be prepared to provide this service
- d. To prepare for the case where a participant has to be retrieved, event organisers need to have
 - i. Arrangements available for emergency access to course area (e.g. keys to locked gate, maps showing access routes).
 - ii. Suitable vehicles available to convey retrieval teams as close as possible to the injured competitor

5. Lost/Overdue Competitors and Search and Rescue

- a. Organiser refers to OSA Safety Guidelines before the event
- b. Processes in place to record all competitors who started a course and when, and competitors monitored to identify those taking excessive time on a course (even before the course closure time), in particular younger juniors
- c. Event organiser nominates a Search and Rescue Coordinator and refers to OSA Search and Rescue Plan when a search is required
- d. Maps available of all courses and controls, area surrounding competition area, including information on vehicular access at the Finish area for use in a search
- e. Search plan developed, including recall arrangements, before any major search commences (see Safety Guidelines for further details).
- f. Ensure sufficient personnel remain in the event area until all competitors are accounted for
- g. Adequate number of fit persons available to assist with search at end of event if required.
- h. Telephone number for emergency services available at assembly area, together with mobile phone or alternative communication arrangements.
- i. Liaise with landowners and other groups prior to event as required. ##