

# Risk Assessment (RA)

## Scout Bushcraft – Axe Use and Safety Session

**Activity:** Scout Axe Use and Safety Lesson

**Duration:** 1 Hour

**Location:** Outdoor Bushcraft Area / Campsite

**Participants:** Scouts (10½+)

**Instructor Ratio:** Minimum 1:6 (1:4 recommended for beginners)

**Risk Level:** Medium (Controlled)

| Hazard                            | Who May Be Harmed     | Initial Risk | Control Measures                                                                                                                                         | Residual Risk |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Cuts from axe blade               | Participants, Leaders | High         | Only trained leaders supervise. Axes remain sheathed until instructed. Demonstrate safe handling before use. Use correct grip and technique.             | Low           |
| Being struck by an axe            | Participants, Leaders | High         | Establish a clearly marked chopping area. One person working at each chopping block. Maintain a minimum three axe-length safety circle around each user. | Low           |
| Flying wood chips                 | Participants, Leaders | Medium       | Everyone stands outside the safety circle. Eye protection may be worn where appropriate. Spectators remain behind the instructor.                        | Low           |
| Axe glancing off wood             | Participants          | High         | Use suitable chopping blocks. Demonstrate accurate chopping technique. Split only suitable timber. Do not overstrike.                                    | Low           |
| Axe striking the ground or stones | Participants          | Medium       | Use a chopping block or suitable support log. Never chop directly on the ground. Inspect work area before starting.                                      | Low           |
| Loose or damaged axe              | Participants          | High         | Inspect every axe before use. Check handle, head, wedges and sheath. Remove damaged tools from service immediately.                                      | Low           |
| Incorrect carrying of axe         | Participants          | Medium       | Carry axe with sheath fitted, blade facing down at your side. No running while carrying tools.                                                           | Low           |
| Passing an axe                    | Participants          | Medium       | Pass only with the sheath fitted or by placing the axe on the ground for the other person to pick up. Never throw or hand over an unsheathed axe.        | Low           |

| Hazard                           | Who May Be Harmed | Initial Risk | Control Measures                                                                                                                                                         | Residual Risk |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Slips, trips and falls           | Everyone          | Medium       | Keep working area tidy. Remove loose branches and trip hazards. Wear sturdy footwear with good grip.                                                                     | Low           |
| Poor weather                     | Everyone          | Medium       | Stop activity during thunderstorms or high winds. Suspend activity if conditions become unsafe.                                                                          | Low           |
| Fatigue or loss of concentration | Participants      | Medium       | Keep sessions short. Supervise continuously. Stop participants if they become tired or distracted.                                                                       | Low           |
| Improper lifting of logs         | Participants      | Low          | Use appropriately sized timber. Demonstrate safe lifting techniques. Leaders assist with heavy logs.                                                                     | Low           |
| Splinters                        | Participants      | Low          | Wear gloves if appropriate when handling rough timber. Remove splinters promptly using first aid kit.                                                                    | Low           |
| Infection from cuts              | Everyone          | Low          | Clean and cover minor cuts immediately. First aid kit available throughout session.                                                                                      | Low           |
| Emergency incident               | Everyone          | High         | Qualified first aider present. Emergency contact details available. Mobile phone or emergency communications accessible. Clear access for emergency services maintained. | Low           |

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## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Sturdy closed-toe footwear (mandatory)
  - Long trousers recommended
  - Gloves (optional for handling timber)
  - Safety glasses (recommended when splitting wood)
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## Safe Working Procedures

- Instructor gives a full safety briefing before any axe is unsheathed.
- Demonstrate correct carrying, passing and storing of axes.
- Inspect every axe before use.
- Clearly mark the chopping area using rope or cones.
- Maintain a three axe-length safety circle around each participant.
- One Scout working at a chopping block at any time.
- Use only sound timber and stable chopping blocks.
- Always cut away from the body.

- Keep both hands on the axe during use.
  - Replace the sheath immediately after use.
  - Clean and safely store tools at the end of the activity.
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## Instructor Checks

Before the session:

- ✓ Weather conditions suitable.
- ✓ First aid kit available.
- ✓ Emergency contact method available.
- ✓ Axes inspected and serviceable.
- ✓ Chopping blocks secure.
- ✓ Work area free from hazards.

During the session:

- ✓ Supervise continuously.
- ✓ Correct unsafe behaviour immediately.
- ✓ Ensure safety circles are maintained.
- ✓ Rotate participants to avoid fatigue.

After the session:

- ✓ Clean and inspect axes.
  - ✓ Return tools to secure storage.
  - ✓ Check site for discarded wood or equipment.
  - ✓ Review the activity with participants.
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## Emergency Procedures

- Stop all activity immediately.
  - Make all axes safe by fitting sheaths and placing them on the ground.
  - Administer first aid.
  - Contact emergency services (999) if required.
  - Record and report any incidents in accordance with Scout policy.
  - Inform parents or carers where appropriate.
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## References

This risk assessment should be read alongside:

- Your Group or District risk assessment procedures.
- The Scouts' *Using Axes and Saws Safely* guidance.
- The lesson plan for **Scout Axe Use and Safety**.
- Any site-specific risk assessments for the venue.

**Overall Residual Risk: Low**, provided the stated control measures are followed and the activity is supervised by competent adults.