



## THE LAW AND THE SJA VOLUNTEER

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**DID YOU KNOW** that the law provides rules of conduct that apply to all people and volunteers are no exception?

The legal definition of a volunteer *is a person who gives his or her services without any express or implied promise of being paid or receiving goods or services in exchange for his or her duties.* The law requires that everyone, including volunteers, is responsible for their own behaviour and when carrying out volunteer duties for an organization. In other words, a person cannot do anything without thinking about the consequences of their actions.

To act within the law and avoid liability, volunteers must have a basic understanding of their legal duties and responsibilities and the situations in which they could become liable for another person's injury or loss. Understanding some basic duties – such as the duty to take reasonable care – is crucial for every volunteer.

The following prevention checklist will help volunteers learn more about liabilities and duties in particular circumstances.

1. Know your job – All volunteers should have a current job description and be knowledgeable of the organization's applicable policies and procedures. Know your direct supervisor who you can approach if you have a concern, need help, or are uncertain about an activity.
2. Protect confidentiality – Do not discuss clients (those you provide service to) outside of your job as a volunteer and do not repeat confidential information unless you are legally required to do so (inform the client in advance).
3. Outdoor and adventure recreation - If you have any doubts about an activity, report this immediately and discuss your concerns. Anticipate and prevent accidents by ensuring you have sufficient assistance and identify and eliminate risks before starting any activity. Learn related safe practices. Clearly describe risks and required skills to screen participants. Ensure organizationally approved waivers are fully understood before they are signed. Understand the applicable insurance by checking with your Branch or Council office. Insurance information is also available on the SJA intranet. If uncertain, ask for clarification.
4. Print Matters – Get permission before reproducing published materials. Do not publish confidential information or libelous comments and consider printing a disclaimer.
5. Special Events and Fundraisers – If alcohol is served, ensure the appropriate license has been obtained and take reasonable care with the handling and storage of food. For evening events, ensure that volunteers and participants can return home safely. For large events, check local bylaws and consider special events insurance.
6. A building safety check might ensure that: (a) first aid supplies are adequate and easily located; (b) fire extinguishers are visible and tested regularly; (c) exit doors are not blocked; (d) adequate lighting exists in all areas, including stairways; (e) electrical circuits are not overloaded; (f) extension cords are removed or taped down; (g) carpets, treads and tiles are secure; (h) handrails and exterior guardrails are in good repair, and (i) water leaks are quickly fixed.
7. Driving – Before venturing out conduct a safety check of the vehicle. If you have safety concerns, do not proceed. Ensure all passengers use seatbelts and take extra care for passengers with special needs, such as children, seniors or passengers with disabilities.  
*Drive Safely*

Information for this article was taken from "Volunteers & the Law" published by "The People's Law School, "The Law Foundations of British Columbia" and "Volunteer Vancouver". Copies of this book can be downloaded free of charge from [www.publiclegaled.bc.ca](http://www.publiclegaled.bc.ca) and [www.volunteervancouver.ca](http://www.volunteervancouver.ca)

# DID YOU KNOW?

AN INFORMATION SHEET FOR ST. JOHN AMBULANCE