

Wildlife Ponds Safety Guidance for Schools

Adding a pond to any environment is the best way to attract wildlife of all kinds. A school pond can be so beneficial to children enabling them to study wildlife up close



and learn about the different habitats around them. A wildlife pond created with proper thought can go on giving pleasure to many generations of school children to come. When planning any changes to playgrounds or school sites it is important to risk assess what impact those changes may have. In this case the introduction of a school pond. When assessing the issues with ponds, it is important to consider not only pupils but young children, particularly under fives the elderly and children with special needs. Also teenagers as peer pressure often

leads to risk taking. If Toddlers and very young children can access the area the risk of drowning is highest from this age group if they can wander into the area. Consider location in relation to where these youngest may be, e.g. is it near where the parents meet to collect the children from school, proximity to surrounding houses, etc.

You should always fence off the pond area as a control measure, but consider carefully the construction, you will need to consider how this is going to be maintained and checked as an ongoing issue.

Although the risks to a child in the care of a school is small, it is necessary for the school to consider possible problems, record its assessment of the risk and introduce any special precautions considered necessary. There are a number of factors to consider

LOCATION

If possible the pond should be located so that it is visible from nearby school buildings. This will ensure that anybody who has had an accident will be more likely to be seen or heard.

Make sure that any trees of large shrubs do not obscure the view of the pond area.

A pond that is sited within school grounds that are largely open or adjacent to public access is more susceptible to vandalism and children falling in. The location should be away from regularly used paths and consideration given to the likelihood of trespassers during evenings, weekends and school holidays.

DESIGN

The design of the pond is important for safety so ensure that the edges of the pond are shallow by creating a marginal shelf. The deepest part of the pond should be no more than 1-metre-deep and the area surrounding the pond should be flat or gently sloping and the edges should be clearly visible. A decked area made from non-slip timbers is a good idea.

Where a pond is provided with a soft edge in part, for the easy access of wildlife, this edge must be inaccessible to people. A suitable and safe means of access must be provided.

Access to ponds in Primary schools should be supervised and the pond should be closed by means of a lockable gate when not in use. Fencing must be a minimum of a metre high. Alternatively, steel mesh can be fixed over the pond and be padlocked in place. If the pond fencing has slats, they must be vertical, not horizontal, with no gaps to stop children squeezing through.

Where necessary appropriate warning signs should be highly visible and clearly warn of the presence of a pond with clear details regarding safe use. These should be used in conjunction with the other safety measures.

MANAGEMENT

The school should carry out a risk assessment with regards to the pond and its activities.

All relevant information (i.e. the findings of the assessment and the control measures)

Should be relayed to staff and others that may make use of the pond.

Groups using the pond should be supervised at all times and the ratio of staff to pupils must allow full control.

The pond must be regularly maintained so it does not deteriorate and become obscured.

The school should develop an emergency plan for incidents associated with the pond and at the very least this should cover how to rescue a person who has fallen in, resuscitation, first aid and what to do with other pupils in an emergency situation.

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