

Health & safety guidance for voluntary bat roost visitors: restricted spaces

What is a restricted space?

A restricted space is an area where access and / or egress are difficult or where there is restricted working space which presents a hazard.

Examples include:

- small loft spaces and attics;
- basements;
- undercrofts and crypts with low ceilings and difficult escape routes;
- church spires and bell towers.

Generally a restricted access space is one where there is a need to manage access for health and safety reasons and to have good communications between the space and others who can provide assistance in an emergency.

What are the hazards?

These can vary depending upon the restricted space. Common hazards might include:

- slips and trips;
- unstable and fragile flooring;
- overcome with heat or cold;
- stuffy atmosphere leading to respiration difficulties or feeling faint;
- head injuries from low beams;
- electricity and other utilities;
- dust leading to respiratory difficulties;
- poor lighting.

Managing the risks

If the visit involves going into a restricted space you should follow these rules for safe working:

- avoid working in a restricted space whenever possible, for example by carrying out inspections from outside the restricted space;
- follow a safe system of work if working inside; and
- make appropriate arrangements for help in an emergency.

Avoid working in restricted spaces

The first rule for preventing these accidents is always to aim to work without entering a restricted space. Consider if it is possible to complete the inspection from looking at the exterior of the roost - perhaps using binoculars or cameras / endoscopy to capture evidence from the ground.

Follow a safe system of work

If entry into a restricted space is unavoidable you must make sure you follow a safe system of work and emergency procedures. Here are some of the factors to consider but there may be others:

- Check with the building owner / occupier / caretaker about any known potential hazards & make an assessment of the risk.
- Competence: are you familiar with this type of space? Have you had guidance and training on what to do?
- Communication: is there clear communication between those inside the restricted space and those outside? In most situations normal speech will be adequate. You

Health & safety guidance for voluntary bat roost visitors: restricted spaces

should also take into account how to summon help in an emergency. Ask the owner / occupier / caretaker to stay close-by to summon help if necessary.

- Ventilation: restricted spaces should be ventilated while inspecting. It may be sufficient to leave hatches or doors open.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE): will PPE reduce the risk sufficiently to make it safe to work? Or might the PPE present an additional hazard? Ensure you have sturdy footwear and head protection.
- Might the work lead to a fall from height? Please ensure you are familiar with the Natural England '[Working at height and use of ladders](#)' Technical Information Note.
- Entry and exit: openings should be large enough to allow unobstructed access by people, including rescuers, wearing protective clothing and equipment such as breathing apparatus. If access is by means of ladders ensure they are in good condition and you are able to use them safely – see the [Natural England 'Working at height and use of ladders' Technical Information Note for guidance](#).
- Time & planning: ensure you are in good health prior to entering the space. Spend as little time as possible in the restricted space. Make notes outside once you have observed any evidence. If you feel yourself becoming fatigued leave the space, take a good break and drink plenty of water. Arrange another visit if appropriate.
- Ensure you have adequate lighting.
- Take extra care with footing: identify suitable areas for stepping such as beams or suitable boarded areas. Check with the building owner / occupier / caretaker about what is covering any surface. Use crawler boards if available.
- Identify any potential electrical cabling or other utility. Never hold onto electrical cables or plumbing pipe work for support.
- Secure loose clothing which may snag or wear overalls.

Emergencies

You should make arrangements for emergency rescue before entering the restricted space. These arrangements will depend on the type of restricted space, the risks and the likely nature of an emergency. Emergencies may arise from slips and falls as well as the nature of the area. You need to consider the following:

- The number of people involved - it is rarely, if ever, appropriate for anyone to enter a restricted space without someone remaining outside to carry out the emergency arrangements.
- Communications - make sure someone outside the danger area will know if there is an emergency inside.

Reporting an incident

You must report any accident, near miss or incident which occurs whilst performing or travelling to / from a roost visit to Natural England as soon as possible:

- Contact the Natural England 'near miss and incident reporting line' at any time on 0300 060 0100.
- If the incident results in injury to another person or damage to property please also contact: Martin Rhodes 0300 060 2676 or Lucy Foster 0300 060 0666.

Feedback

If you have any feedback about this guidance or would like to see additions / amendments please get in touch by emailing:

batvolunteers@naturalengland.org.uk

Further information

Please see our website page and other VBRV health and safety leaflets at:

[Health and safety for voluntary bat roost visitors](#)

[Publications for voluntary bat roost visitors.](#)

Health & safety guidance for voluntary bat roost visitors: restricted spaces

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: www.naturalengland.org.uk.

For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

Copyright

This note is published by Natural England under the Open Government Licence for public sector

information. You are encouraged to use, and reuse, information subject to certain conditions.

For details of the licence visit www.naturalengland.org.uk/copyright/.

If any information such as maps or data cannot be used commercially this will be made clear within the note. © **Natural England 2013**

ISBN 978-1-78354-054-9