



HEALTH & SAFETY

Risk Assessment Guidance for Building and Repairing Cornish Hedges

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BUILDING AND REPAIRING CORNISH HEDGES RISK ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

(As discussed with HSE, in line with best practice)

There are many government regulations which give legal advice on health and safety. Some of this advice is compulsory, while some of it is voluntary and does not necessarily have to be followed, especially if it is unreasonable in the circumstances. The basis of health and safety law is the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974. Under this Act a hedger has to be able to prove, in court if necessary, that what he has done was “as far as is reasonably practicable”. The basic guidance given here has been compiled with this ruling in mind.

A small number of the compulsory Regulations apply directly to Cornish hedging, and the hedger needs to be familiar with these.

Clothing.

Safety boots and appropriate weather-proof clothing. Eye protection (usually safety goggles) is advised where stone is being split or dressed. Well-fitting work gloves if used.

Minor injuries.

Anti-tetanus cover has to be up to date. Always have a compact everyday first aid kit available.

Personal needs.

Toilet and changing facilities must be reasonably available. Having a mobile phone is advisable for hedgers working alone.

Tools.

The traditional long-handled Cornish shovel is used for hedging; when correctly employed, it reduces strain and avoids bending. Club and sledge hammers, long and short bars, and cold chisels, should be available. Other tools are needed if there is a lot of top-growth to be dealt with. Each tool must be in a condition fit for the use to be made of it. Particular care should be taken in handling edged tools and in the use of the hammer in relation to fingers when dressing stone.

Handling big stone.

A hedger can always handle stone reasonably practicably without strain by using the method most appropriate for the job.

Using a tractor or digger is best for transporting stone any distance and for moving large and heavy or awkward stones.

Rolling, skidding or walking a stone instead of carrying it. Many hedgers transport stone short distances on a barrow or sack truck.

Levering by bars, pick-axe or gently by shovel. Several types of bar are needed, from a small wrecking bar to a 2m heavy bar.

Pushing or lifting and dropping in place with tractor or digger bucket. Pulling by machine or hand winch.

Moving and dropping using a tripod and chain pulley (test certificate required) .

When a stone is suspended by chains from tractor bucket or pulley, it should not be approached while the chains are in tension. Stones should not be approached except by the person(s) actually handling them.

Lifting stones by hand (adapted from www.betterbacks:hse.gov.uk):-

The hedger is legally required to see that the most practicable method is used for each stone. Stones are often of awkward shapes, and learners have to be taught how to handle them safely. Your first step should always be to consider using a handling aid.

If you have to lift the stone yourself, start with a good posture. Resist stooping or squatting, it's better slightly to bend your back, hips and knees.

Adopt a stable position. Feet should be apart with one slightly forward to maintain balance.

Get a good hold. Hug the stone, ideally with the heaviest side next to your body.

Avoid twisting your back or leaning sideways, especially when your back is bent.

Look ahead. Once the stone is held securely, don't look down on it.

If you need to adjust your grip on the stone, put it down first.

Site.

A zone at the hedge bottom of at least 1m wide along the hedge must be kept clear of stones at all times. Keep stone tidily laid out ready for use, with proper access around it for your feet, not roughly heaped or scattered about as this raises the risk of walking or climbing on the loose stones, or accidentally stepping back on a stray stone. Avoid working in conditions where the ground is very slippery, especially when moving large stone is involved.

Roadside Hedges.

Special arrangements must be made to warn traffic of any obstructions. [See CHL "Advice for Working on Roadside Hedges"] High visibility clothing will be needed.

General.

On each site the hedger should mentally assess the risks involved before he starts work. Where conditions are potentially unusually hazardous, the hedger should, for his own legal protection, make a written risk assessment before work starts. Where there is other work in progress on the same site, the relevant Health & Safety precautions should be observed.

There are other health and safety aspects of living an ordinary life which are relevant to every worker. These should always be taken into consideration, and someone should always know where the hedger is working each day.

More information for working on Cornish hedges is available at
www.cornishhedges.co.uk / Cornish Hedges Library

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