



# Guidelines for Hut Managers

No. 5 February 2015\*



## Maintenance

### Scope and context

This guideline covers a number of topics. The two most important are the building structure and the building services. The interior of the hut, its fittings, equipment and furnishings are normally repaired or replaced when they break or wear out.

### The structure of the building

All buildings need maintenance to prevent their slow decline into dereliction. The most important aspect of this is to ensure that the external elements of the building are capable of resisting water penetration.

It is good practice to have an annual survey of all the external building elements carried out by someone who understands building maintenance. The purpose of this survey is to report items needing urgent attention and to identify longer-term jobs that will need to be done. Failure to remedy faults listed as needing urgent attention could lead to major expenditure that could have been avoided.

With the benefit of a survey it is possible to create a programme of proposed jobs that lists them in order of priority. If this programme identifies all future works, even though some fall beyond the end of the current financial year and it is updated when every annual survey is done, then this will provide a rolling programme of work, which is a very useful tool for forward planning.

### The building services

#### Electricity

Modern cables, distribution boards etc. last for many years without maintenance. It is only by testing that weaknesses are located before they cause a failure.

The entire electrical installation should be tested every five years and any faults rectified. If the original installation is over thirty years old it is probably about time to consider completely rewiring the circuits.

Legislation pertaining to electrical safety in England and Wales differs from that in Scotland. In England and Wales there is no requirement to notify the local authority's Building Control department before proceeding with electrical work to non-domestic premises. Climbing club premises are classified as non-domestic.

#### Scottish regulations

The regulations governing electrical work in Scotland are more stringent than those south of the border. There is comparatively little you can now do as regards electrical work without first notifying the Building Control department of your local authority. Mountaineering huts do not fall within the definition of a domestic building as defined in the Building (Scotland) Regulations 2004 but come under the categories 'non-domestic building' and 'residential building' the latter meaning a building, other than a domestic building, having sleeping accommodation.

Annex 1 of a publication issued by the Scottish Government information service entitled

\*See notes in the information box on page 3 re. the currency (version no.) of this guideline

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*Guidance on electrical installations not certified by an Approved Certifier*, available from [www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/217736/0092252.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/217736/0092252.pdf), indicates what work requires a building warrant. A building warrant is not required for rewiring where it is a repair or replacement work to a level equal to the installation (or part thereof) being repaired or replaced. See also –

[www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Building/Building-standards](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Building/Building-standards)

Before embarking on any electrical work in Scotland, therefore, you are advised to consult the Building Control office of your local authority.

Other points to consider –

- All electrical work carried out anywhere in the UK should comply with the IEE regulations and to ensure this it is advisable that the work should be undertaken by a NICEIC registered electrical contractor. The electrical contractor should issue you with a test certificate and a report after completion of any work or testing.
- There is a tendency for hut managers or club members to carry out small modifications and repairs to the wiring themselves rather than get it done by an electrician. This will invalidate any test certificate and also any warranty.
- All portable electrical appliances should be tested annually by a qualified electrician.

**Note:** *Electrical safety must form part of any fire safety risk assessment – see guidelines no. 3.1 (England & Wales) and no. 3.2 (Scotland) Fire Safety.*

## Water

A mains water supply will require virtually no maintenance apart from occasionally changing a tap washer. However, the usual precautions against pipe bursts due to freezing weather, such as pipe insulation and turning off the stopcock when the hut is empty, should be adopted. A thermostatted low wattage heater to prevent the hut temperature falling too low, or heating cable in contact with pipes (trace heating) may be employed.

Statutory regulations regarding private water supplies apply in England and Wales Scotland has its own regulations – see guidelines nos. 10.1 (England & Wales) and 10.2 (Scotland) *Private Water Supplies*. Drinking water from a private supply must be sterilized by an appropriate method.

## Gas

Natural gas supplied via the mains is virtually maintenance free. With liquid petroleum gas (LPG) the only regular maintenance needed is to change the gas bottle when it runs out.

Alterations and repairs to all gas installations, including fitting replacement appliances, *must* be done by a registered gas fitter – see [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

The gas installation should be tested annually; remember that you have a *duty of care* towards others, especially if the hut is let out to other clubs. The test must be carried out by a registered gas fitter, who will insist that the gas installation complies with current regulations before a test certificate can be issued.

**Note:** *Gas safety must form part of any fire safety risk assessment – see guidelines nos. 3.1 (England & Wales) and 3.2 (Scotland) Fire Safety.*

## Drains

Mains drainage needs very little maintenance. Septic tanks need regular inspections to see that they are working properly.

Septic tanks have two chambers. If the chamber nearest the outlet has a crust on top of the liquid, or if the chamber nearest the inlet has a crust deeper than 450mm, both chambers should be pumped out. Some septic tanks need pumping out every year while others go for 20 years without trouble. The local authority can usually provide an emptying

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service provided that the tank is situated near enough to vehicular access.

Where a septic tank is used there should be a prominent notice in the hut indicating that large amounts of biocides, such as bleach and other disinfectants or solvents, should not be flushed down the drains or toilets. See also hut guidelines 16.1 (England & Wales) & 16.2 (Scotland) regarding the regulations relating to small sewage discharges.

## Letting Contracts

The appropriate committee should issue guidelines, or adopt a by-law, on how contracts for repair work or improvements must be placed. This is normally done on the basis of total cost, i.e. –

1. Below a set figure: Entirely at the managers' discretion.
2. Above the previous figure and up to another set figure: A lump sum tender, from a reputable builder, based on an outline specification and possibly sketches. The contract should be placed after approval by the committee.
3. Above the previous higher figure: Two or three detailed itemised tenders, to be obtained from reputable builders, based on a detailed specification and drawings. The contract to be placed after approval by the committee.

These guidelines should be reviewed on a regular basis, approved formally by the committee and published so that all parties are aware of any limitations they impose.

**Note:** *It is often very difficult to obtain competitive tenders from local builders for small or difficult jobs. If a working relationship has been established with a builder over a period of time it is often appropriate to get just one tender or estimate.*

An important aspect of letting the contract is to agree a start and completion date and to ensure that the contractor can have access to do the work. If the hut is to remain open during the work it is essential to agree how this is to be achieved. If the hut is to be closed all members must be advised well in advance.

Supervision of a contract can be very time consuming but can pay handsome dividends. It is very difficult to operate effective quality and cost controls without regular visits to the hut while the work is in progress.

It is also important to check that any contractor working on the hut has adequate contractors' liability insurance.

**Note:** *For in-depth coverage regarding letting of contracts see guideline no.13 Planning & Managing a Major Building Project.*

**Note:** *If viewing this .pdf while online then clicking on any URL will take you to that website.*

## Hut Guidelines

These guidelines have been produced by the Huts Group of the British Mountaineering Council and the Huts Advisory Group of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland to assist those operating mountain huts in Britain.

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**URLs:** If any of the URLs (web addresses) given on the preceding pages are found to be 'dead links' please notify [huts@mcofs.org.uk](mailto:huts@mcofs.org.uk)

**Disclaimer:** These guidelines were revised on the date shown below and the information herein is believed to be accurate at the time of writing. No responsibility can be accepted for any loss of benefit or entitlement arising through use of these guidelines – they are not intended to be definitive.

**Version no. 4 – February 2015 [minor revns.]**

These guidelines are updated periodically; to check on the currency of this version go to one of the websites above where the latest version will always be displayed.