

Scotland's  
**Urban Past**  
YOUR TOWN YOUR STREET YOUR STORY



# INVESTIGATING BUILDINGS AND URBAN SPACES

## Personal Safety

This guide has been created by Scotland's Urban Past (SUP), a five-year community-engagement project from Historic Environment Scotland.

We support communities to record, research and celebrate the history on their doorsteps.

Through our free training and resources, people of all ages can discover and share the fascinating stories of Scotland's towns and cities.

[www.scotlandsurbanpast.org.uk](http://www.scotlandsurbanpast.org.uk)

# Personal Safety

This guide outlines some of the potential hazards you may encounter while visiting, surveying and recording buildings or sites in Scotland's towns and cities, and how you can best avoid them.

Please read it carefully, and produce a [Risk Assessment](#) before undertaking any activity.

## Potential hazards

### Weather and climate

Most visits and tours will take place, or at least begin, outdoors so you will be exposed to the weather. If you can, plan to carry out your building or site visits between April and October, but only in fair weather. Surveying and recording buildings or a site in the rain and wind is difficult. If you do not have protective clothing appropriate for the weather conditions, then wait for a more suitable day.

Surveying and recording a building or site is often quite a static activity and there may be few opportunities for shelter. Even in mild weather, you can become cold quickly if you are not moving around much; equally, ensure you are also equipped to deal with prolonged exposure to sunshine and warmer conditions (indoors and outdoors).

Dress appropriately by wearing layers, which can be removed or added as needed, and ensure your outermost layer is wind and waterproof. If you do not already own them, a pair of breathable weatherproof trousers is a worthwhile investment. Sun cream and hats to protect from both the sun and cold weather are important items to include in your kit. Carry plenty of warm and cold drinks, water and food. Dehydration can be a problem particularly in warmer weather.

## Terrain

Ensure you have footwear appropriate for the terrain and weather conditions, such as boots with a sturdy grip. It is very likely that your site, the surroundings of your building or your route may include potential underfoot hazards, such as:

- naturally uneven or boggy ground
- tree roots
- animal burrows
- streams or large puddles
- foundations of demolished buildings or loose, abandoned building materials
- uneven or loose footpath- or pavement-materials
- steep slopes or stairs
- surfaces which may become slippery due to changes in weather conditions

## Buildings

Many of the buildings you choose to research will be well-maintained and in use, but this does not mean that visiting them is not without risk. Stairs, floor surfaces (such as marble), entering cellars and attics, and accessing roofs and/or other structures outside may well form part of a building visit and can all pose significant risks. We advise against climbing ladders or entering confined spaces to survey and record your building.

Site or building visits or tours may bring you close to derelict buildings. These buildings can be unstable; there can be a risk of falling masonry or roof materials, or even that a building will collapse. Derelict buildings should not be approached closer than five metres and should never be entered, unless assessed as safe by a competent professional, such as a structural engineer.

Remember that high winds can damage both derelict and well-maintained buildings, making them unsafe to approach.

Please be aware that unless you have permission from the owner, ensure you view and photograph a site or building from the public street.

Please note: if you wish to view and record buildings which are used for the education, recreation or care of children, teenagers or vulnerable adults, ensure you contact the school or organisation before proceeding with any activities, particularly photography.

### Other risks in urban areas

It is likely that your site or building visits or your tour route will bring you into contact with 'everyday' urban hazards. Some of these may become more significant when working with or in a group. It may be advisable for group members to wear high-visibility vests. These risks might include:

- working adjacent to a busy road, cycle path, canal or river
- crossing a busy road or cycle path
- obstructing a site, garage or other entrance or exit during your work
- street cleaning vehicles and other traffic on pavements

### Preserving personal safety

During site visits and tours you are responsible for your own safety and, if you are a group leader, the safety of any group members. Avoid putting yourself or others in a potentially dangerous situation by being aware of the dangers. Even if you know an area well, do not be complacent about potential hazards. To preserve personal safety and wellbeing on site visits and tours:

- be aware of fitness levels as fatigue can often cause accidents
- inform someone in your group if you have an illness or disability that may affect your participation in the site visit; as a group leader, ensure that you have gathered this information from group members
- inform the rest of your group what to do in an emergency if you are receiving or carrying any vital medication, have any allergies or medical conditions; as a group leader, ensure that you or a designated first aider, have gathered this information from group members
- move around as much as possible when doing surveying and recording work to keep warm
- tell other members of your group if you start to feel really cold and return to a vehicle, base or home or with at least one other person
- avoid working alone if possible, but if you must:
  - ensure someone has details of your itinerary, planned location(s), departure and return times, and mobile phone number
  - ensure your mobile phone is fully charged
  - carry a first aid kit, know its contents and how to use them
  - carry a torch or head torch in case you get caught out by fading light
  - or if you
    - become trapped in a building
    - ensure you are appropriately dressed and equipped

## Personal Preservation Equipment (PPE)

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is essential when working in or visiting a potentially hazardous environment. Each person who is required to use PPE should be properly trained and instructed in its application, correct use and maintenance, where appropriate.

Appropriate PPE can protect against a vast range of hazards that can cause physical harm, from falling items, sharp or abrasive objects and surfaces, dust and chemicals. PPE not only protects individuals from physical injury, it can also prevent serious or even fatal health problems. For example, respiratory equipment, such as face masks, can stop harmful substances (including asbestos fibres, rubble dust and mould spores) from being inhaled or ingested. However, while PPE is clearly advantageous in providing safeguards, control measures should be put in place beforehand to remove or reduce the need for PPE, wherever practical. A wide variety of different PPE is available. This guide gives examples of the most common types likely to be used in the course of recording the built environment.

### Risk assessment

Before choosing or issuing any type of PPE, you should carry out a careful [Risk Assessment](#) to select the most appropriate PPE for the location. Factors to take into account include:

- what the potential hazard is and the length of exposure to it
- the circumstances and the demands the potential hazard places on the wearer
- the physical environment and surrounding conditions (if working outside, the weather)
- the individual person (their physical size, relevant health issues, etc)
- suitability, compatibility and correct size of the equipment issued

### Safety helmets

The most common and recognisable form of PPE is the safety helmet or 'hard hat', which protects the head against falling objects and overhead obstacles, such as low entrances and projecting masonry. While hard hats are one of the simplest forms of PPE, ensure that the type of helmet selected is compatible with other PPE and is suitable for the task you are undertaking. For example, if a face mask needs to be worn at the same time as a hard hat, the design of the hat must allow the two pieces of equipment to be worn safely and comfortably.

Helmets can be fitted with chin straps if an activity involves working in windy conditions, repeated bending down or looking upwards. If you are working with optical instruments, such as cameras or surveying apparatus, a helmet with a short peak is advantageous. All helmets are issued with an 'expiry date' or working life (usually three to four years) after which they should be replaced. If a helmet is damaged under any circumstances it should be discarded and replaced.

### Gloves

Appropriate gloves should be worn if you anticipate the possibility of contact with abrasive materials, sharp or rough edges, hazardous substances or environmentally unfriendly materials. As well as shielding hands from hazards, gloves protect from cold. When equipping yourself with gloves consider what type(s) are best suited to your needs; if you are going to be writing or drawing in a cold environment, for example, you might find fingerless or thin thermal gloves are best.

### High visibility (hi-vis) clothing

High visibility (hi-vis) clothing should be worn if you anticipate being in the presence of machinery or where it is stipulated by the responsible parties. Hi-vis clothing is mandatory on all construction sites.

### Eye protection

Eye protection should be paramount when determining potential hazards. Eye protectors may be in the form of glasses, goggles, shields or visors supported by a headband, or a helmet. Typical hazards likely to be encountered are air-borne particles, larger flying debris, projections from buildings, and trees and shrubs. To be effective, safety eyewear must fit properly, be comfortable and designed specifically to protect against the potential hazard.

### Hearing protection

In a noisy environment hearing protection such as earplugs or ear defenders should be worn. Be aware that protectors which cut out too much noise should be avoided as this can cause isolation which in itself is potentially dangerous. Ideally a range of hearing protection should be provided so that individuals can choose the ones which them suit best.

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