

Some guidance on curtailing, postponing or cancelling an Orienteering event.

What circumstances might cause an Organiser to consider cancelling, postponing or curtailing an event?

Here are some situations that have occurred at events in the past, they mostly did not cause the event to be cancelled or postponed but each event is different and no inference can be taken from this.

Access to the car park

- Flooding
- Waterlogged car park
- Land slip
- Road closures
- Snow

Extreme weather conditions

- Hail, snow, ice
- Flooding
- Extreme heat or cold
- Thunder & lightening
- High winds

Unexpected people in or adjacent to the competition area

- Marches, parades, protesters
- The Hunt
- Motor bikers en masse
- Mountain bikers en masse
- Paintballers/war gamers
- Travellers
- Army on exercise with guns

Unforeseen hazards

- Fire in the competition area or immediately adjacent to it

Invasion by livestock/animals

- Pigs/boar
- Horses
- Cattle
- Sheep
- Llamas
- Deer

Environmental issues

- Foot and Mouth
- Tree disease
- Rare birds/nesting birds both tree and ground varieties
- Recently discovered rare/protected flora
- Tree damage due to high winds

Land access

- Previously unknown/un-contacted landowner refuses access immediately prior to the event or on the day
- Landowner requires higher fees, not budgeted for

Accident/incident during the event

- Removal of a casualty from the competition area via vehicles/helicopter
- Fatality

Think this through before the actual moment arises for real.

Have a team approach to the decision – involve the Safety Officer, Controller, Planner, First Aid team – whoever is best placed to give advice you value.

Do not be rushed into a decision by a crowd of orienteers pushing to go out into the terrain.

Make a decision you will be happy to live with afterwards. (and may have to defend in a court of law).

Decide whether it is:

- Curtailment – this might include allowing some courses out, courses to be shortened or turned into a 'score' type event, cutting off the affected area and limiting the time out.
- Postponement – keeping all the maps and not allowing anyone out and re running the event in the future.
- Cancellation – so not intending to run the event again, possibly handing out maps & refunds and making a decision on whether to ignore competitors going out for a run on the area with a map.

Consider the event as a whole and all the varied parts of the event.

- The Event officials in charge of the Start, Finish, Control collecting, search team etc
- The range of competitors – not just the fit and healthy M21 – 40 age group likely to run a course in under 75 mins. Those on the margins of height, weight, fitness, age and ability are more likely to run into trouble and need assistance.

- The hours of daylight available if the start is postponed.
- The clearing up and packing away of an event after the last competitors return.
- The safety issue of letting people out with a map but not timing them or noting who they are – this might be seen as even worse than staging the event in adverse conditions.
- The weather conditions to come during the course of the event – if more wind, rain, snow etc is forecast.
- The politics of pressing on with the event
- The practicalities of pressing on with the event
- The cost of pressing on with the event

Communicating the decision.

Post a warning on the website as soon as possible and in other places. If there are any doubts the night before, then a warning post on the website advising people that the event might be cancelled if conditions change will diffuse some of the frustration/anger on the day as people will be prepared for the disappointment.

The lack of clear detailed information is what leads to frustration and anger.

The ability to send out an SMS to all competitors is not that difficult, it just needs some forward thinking and planning. Most people have a mobile phone and carry it with them, so this is probably the best "last minute" chance to inform people of a problem.

Plan for this when setting up your online entries.

Email, websites and social media will work for those people with smartphones and tablets. Here you could be more detailed with your explanation and offer options.

The coverage of 3G networks is getting quite wide now and organisers need to check network signal availability in the assembly area, and if it's there make sure that you have a means of accessing it. The cost of dongles and PAYG sim cards is so low that there is not much excuse for not having the ability to connect to the WWW.

Make sure that the people on site can get access the club website, Facebook & Twitter accounts, to post last minute info on them if needed.

Decide on when a decision will be made and stick to this.

- Decide on what the outcome will be – postponement, cancellation or curtailment.

- Ensure all officials are notified of the decision and they abide by this as well, regardless of the outrage and hassle they may encounter from competitors.
- If alternatives are on offer ensure this is communicated to all present.
- Be generous with such things as free wayfarer runs, waive the car park fee or hand it back on the way out.
- Decide the policy on map handout, free runs, refunds etc.