

Sustain’s policy and guidance on safeguarding at work-related events: ensuring everyone’s safety, inclusion and enjoyment

Sustain runs work events during the year that include, for example, project and campaign-related events, networking events, conferences, the annual Away Day, summer gathering and site visits. These are often followed by social activities. We also host festive events, celebrations and parties. Sometimes we invite guests, who may be people we are hoping to get more involved in our work; stakeholders such as project partners, funders and policy-makers; or at social events they may be former colleagues, friends and family.

We want our events to be welcoming, inclusive, safe and enjoyable for everyone involved. Therefore, all of us at Sustain have responsibilities to make sure that we are mindful of our choices and behaviours, and take positive action to address the factors that can contribute to excluding, upsetting, unsafe or dangerous behaviours. Everyone will attend Sustain events at one time or another, so it is an expectation of working at Sustain that you read this guidance, uphold shared values and follow the advice that it contains.

Most of the guidance in this document relates to physical events where people attend in person. However, some of the principles also apply to events held online, and we also have a range of [guidance on inclusive events](#) on the Sustain intranet (CMS password access) that is helpful in this regard.

In all cases, if the event involves children or vulnerable adults, then we must undertake a safeguarding risk assessment and fully address any concerns. Examples could include a Children’s Food Campaign conference, or a community gardening event for people with physical or mental health conditions,

If you have ideas for how we can improve our approach over time, please share them with Abi Taylor abi@sustainweb.org and this guidance can be updated periodically. This document covers:

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Guidance created April/May 2024, following research, professional advice and full staff consultation. This will be updated periodically to ensure that risks and mitigation are kept up-to-date.

Statement on safeguarding

Sustain takes the safety and wellbeing of staff members seriously and has a duty to protect them. Sustain has a duty to investigate any reports or suspicious of misconduct at the earliest opportunity, and to protect staff from harassment, intimidation or mistreatment as a result of coming forward with concerns.

At Sustain, we all strive to uphold and promote values of diversity, equity, safety, respect and anti-racism. At work and social events, we must all behave in a way that upholds these values.

At time of writing, Sustain is developing a Code of Conduct for dignity and respect, for all colleagues, across all of our work. This document refers to the Code of Conduct specifically in relation to running events.

The guidance in this document sets out common safeguarding risk factors for events, how we must all take steps to reduce these risks with the aim of cultivating welcoming, inclusive, safe and enjoyable events.

All Sustain colleagues must avoid behaving in any way that is likely to cause offence or harm to other colleagues, attendees, guests, venue staff or any other third parties present. Sustain colleagues must also act to prevent this in others. This might include but is not limited to: excessive drunkenness, drug-taking, discrimination, inappropriate behaviour, sexual harassment or molestation; or acting in an aggressive, threatening, violent or harassing manner. It might also include using racist, sexist, homophobic (or otherwise discriminatory), abusive, profane or offensive language, gestures or other behaviour towards another person.

Colleagues with seniority at Sustain, whether from age, experience, connections, role or length of service, must not use that seniority to take advantage of colleagues, partners or guests, some of whom may be junior. Senior colleagues must recognise that there are power dynamics that may be an exacerbating factor in, for example, bullying, racism or sexual harassment. Senior colleagues at Sustain must recognise that they have enhanced responsibilities to behave appropriately at Sustain events, and hence also the possibility of enhanced sanctions for inappropriate behaviour. All senior colleagues have a duty to take action to prevent harm. They must be fully aware of their responsibilities, act accordingly and be accountable for their actions.

Improper conduct or other unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated. As well as being asked to leave an event, employees may be subject to disciplinary action. In the most serious cases this could include summary dismissal for gross misconduct and reporting to appropriate authorities such as the police.

Alcohol at events

Sustain prohibits employees from drinking alcohol at work, or before reporting to work, or whilst working at home. Employees must not attend work, or perform their work duties, under the influence of alcohol.

Sustain events may involve alcohol being served and consumed, including by Sustain colleagues. Typically, this might be a networking event; a reception; a celebration; a leaving do; or a trip to a restaurant or a pub following a meeting or conference. Alcohol may also be readily available at social events such as at parties.

As adults, Sustain employees are free to drink alcohol. However, when consuming alcohol at a Sustain event, you should take care not to allow yourself to exceed reasonable levels, become intoxicated or allow your judgement to become impaired. You must stop drinking alcohol when asked to by a colleague where that colleague reasonably believes that you are at risk of causing offence or harm to others, harm to yourself, reputational damage to the organisation and/or behaving in an unprofessional manner.

It is important for people to be aware that excessive alcohol consumption is a high-risk factor for disinhibited and inappropriate behaviour, including aggression and sexual harassment or abuse. As the alcohol charity Drink Aware emphasises, however, if you have been sexually assaulted or harassed, it's

important to remember that it was not your fault. Alcohol is not the cause of sexual assaults or harassment – the people that commit the offences are. But alcohol is a linked risk factor in many cases. For example:

- Almost one in 20 people in England say they experienced aggressive harm because of someone else's drinking in the past year. Amongst this group, around one in seven said they felt pressurised into something sexual.
- Almost three quarters (72%) of 18 to 24-year-olds who drink in bars, clubs or pubs said in a survey that they had seen sexual harassment on a night out.
- Just over a third of women (35%) and 9% of men have reported receiving unwanted sexual contact on a night out.

❖ **Spiking with alcohol or drugs**

Sustain has a zero-tolerance policy on spiking. Spiking is when someone puts alcohol or drugs into another person's drink or body without their consent or knowledge. Drinks spiked with alcohol or drugs can make a person very vulnerable. See further guidance on spiking in the section on drugs below.

❖ **Not assuming alcohol as the default**

A culture in which excessive alcohol consumption is celebrated, or where drinking establishments are the default venue for social occasions, can exclude people who need or want to avoid alcohol consumption or drinking establishments for a whole range of reasons. These may be personal, religious, cultural or medical. Sustain colleagues have developed guidance for inclusive events that provides suggestions on how to diversify our approach to social events so that there are more opportunities for people to feel welcome and included, including in relation to food and alcohol. We have a range of [guidance on inclusive events](#) on the Sustain intranet (CMS password access).

❖ **Don't drink (or take drugs) and drive**

When attending a Sustain event, do not drink alcohol and then drive or ride a vehicle (e.g. van, car, moped, motorbike, e-scooter) under any circumstances. The alcohol charity Drink Aware advises there are [strict alcohol limits for drivers](#) in all parts of the UK (with variations in Scotland than England, Wales and Northern Ireland). Limits are based on the amount of alcohol detected in someone's breath, blood or urine. It isn't possible to work out how many units of alcohol will put you over the limit, because it varies from person to person, depending on factors such as weight, age, sex, metabolism, the type of alcohol, what you've eaten recently and your stress levels. Remember that drinking alcohol can give you a false sense of confidence and impairs your judgement. It's safest to remember the well-worn motto: Don't drink and drive.

It is also advisable for cyclists not to drink and ride.

The same applies to illegal or recreational drug-taking: Don't take drugs and drive – though, as noted below, Sustain has a zero-tolerance policy on drugs.

❖ **Support for people with alcohol or drug problems**

If an employee comes forward voluntarily to seek help for an alcohol or drug problem, they will be given help and support by Sustain. Sustain will be sympathetic, treat the person with dignity, and ensure they get the help and support they need, which may include direction to external specialists. Any discussions or disclosures will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

All Sustain employees have access to a confidential counselling telephone service that can provide advice on personal health and legal matters, including alcohol and drug problems. This is an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). If you are a member of Sustain's staff team, to access the EAP all you need to do is call the fully confidential helpline on 0800 028 0199 and state that you work for 'Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming'. Full details of the EAP are available on the [Sustain intranet](#) (password access).

Illegal and recreational drugs

Sustain has a zero-tolerance policy on the use of illegal or recreational drugs during working hours, and at Sustain events. Do not come to work or attend Sustain events under the influence of drugs, and do not offer or sell illegal or recreational drugs to colleagues. Sustain reserves the right to ask you to leave work or an event if there is a suspicion of illegal or recreational drug taking, and to involve the police in the case of the most serious incidents or potentially criminal behaviour. Failure to comply with an instruction to desist, or to leave an event following suspicion of illegal or recreational drug-taking may be treated as gross misconduct.

❖ Spiking with alcohol or drugs

As noted above, Sustain has a zero-tolerance policy on spiking. Any proven incidence of spiking by a member of Sustain staff will be treated as gross misconduct, with police involvement in the case of serious incidents. Drinks spiked with alcohol or drugs can make a person very vulnerable. Spiking someone's drink is a serious crime and carries a maximum 10-year prison sentence in the UK.

Some events involve social activities where there may be a higher risk of spiking, for example colleagues going to a public drinking establishment after an event. The alcohol charity [Drink Aware](#) advises that, especially in public places where drinks are served, we can keep each other safe through the following:

- Never leave your drink unattended, nor try an unattended drink, whether it's alcoholic or not.
- Don't accept a drink from someone you don't know.
- Throw your drink away if it tastes strange or different (although this isn't a reliable method to detect all the ways drinks can be tampered with, so don't rely on this).
- Avoid drinking too much by sticking to the UK [low-risk drinking guidelines](#).
- Stick together with friends, and look out for each other.
- If you think your drink has been spiked, seek help from a friend or the venue manager. Ensure you're accompanied home.
- Report it to the police as soon as possible – they may order urine and blood tests to detect if there are drugs in your system.

Travel to and from events

For many events, especially those within London or organised elsewhere for participants in other places, the normal expectation is that people will be able to travel by walking, cycling or public transport. If the venue is inconvenient to get to by walking, cycling or public transport, colleagues can discuss in advance how best to arrange travel, e.g. people arranging to share a taxi.

If you need to carry larger items such as displays or equipment, you can use a taxi and claim for the cost if you keep the receipt. Please ensure that if you are moving heavy items that you follow [health and safety guidelines](#) (this links to Health & Safety Executive advice) and/ or get help.

If for any reason you find travel by public transport difficult, talk to your line manager about your travel options and we will do our best to help you travel safely and comfortably.

❖ Travelling late or under the influence of alcohol

Safety first: If the event finishes late, and/or there is alcohol at the event, we advise everyone to consider carefully how to ensure that your journey home will be safe. You should consider in advance how you will travel home and perhaps arrange to walk to the bus stop or station and wait for the bus or train with one or more colleague. Ensure that friends or colleagues know where you are, make sure your mobile phone is charged, share phone numbers, and have a suitable payment method with you to get a taxi if necessary. If you need to ask for help from a colleague or to call the police, please do so, without hesitation. If you get

stuck and need to get a taxi to ensure your safety, or because you feel unsafe, but are hesitant due to the cost, take a taxi and claim the cost from Sustain as part of your expenses.

If you think that a colleague may struggle to get home, for example if they are showing the signs of having consumed drugs or excessive alcohol, work with others to help them get to their transport safely. This could be colleagues or venue staff, for example.

Look out for each other: Avoid being the last person to leave and ending up on your own. And don't leave others on their own. It is safer for three or more people to finish up when leaving an event or venue. This also applies to people working at the Sustain office, where lone-working at night is discouraged.

Sustain has signed up to the Mayor of London's [Women's Night Safety Charter](#). We choose to call this the 'Night Safety Charter' because harassment can be experienced by anyone. This means that we:

- Demonstrate to colleagues that we take people's safety at night seriously, for example through sharing information and by actively promoting safety through how we work and how we run events.
- Remind colleagues that London (and other places) are generally safe, but also share advice on what to do if they experience harassment when working, going out or travelling. [The Metropolitan Police](#) publish a range of good advice on keeping yourself protected from crime – from pickpocketing and personal robbery to harassment and dealing with violent situations.
- Encourage reporting by victims and bystanders. See the 'Make sure they are OK' box below.
- Ensure colleagues know how to receive, believe, record and respond to reports. Advice on [reporting wrongdoing or misconduct](#) is shared on the Sustain intranet.
- Manage our events, activities and workplace to make them safer for people, including at night.

<i>Together, we can stop sexual harassment on public transport</i>	Make sure they're OK
<p>If you see someone you suspect is being sexually harassed on public transport, a recent campaign from CrimeStoppers says: "Make sure they are OK". The campaign says:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following an incident of sexual harassment, your support can help the person targeted feel less isolated and more confident in reporting it. Only do so if you feel safe. • Always report by texting British Transport Police on 61016, or by using the Railway Guardian app. Call 999 in an emergency. • Want to remain anonymous? Call CrimeStoppers on 0800 783 0137. 	<p>"Are you OK?"</p> <p>"What happened isn't OK."</p> <p>"I'll report it too."</p>
<p>Campaign supported by: Mayor of London, CrimeStoppers, British Transport Police, Transport for London</p>	

Overnight stays

Sustain sometimes runs events that require one or more overnight stay, or colleagues may attend events organised by others that require an overnight stay. This may involve hotel-style accommodation or a shared rental house or flat, for example booked via Airbnb or another accommodation service. The normal expectation is that you will have an individual room, and this will be the usual requirement. If your accommodation is in a shared house or flat, you do not have to agree to share with people who make you feel uncomfortable, for whatever reason. For example, you may have a personal or religious need or preference for not sharing accommodation with a person or people of a different gender.

In hotel-style accommodation, your room will be lockable with your own key. In shared accommodation, the room might not be lockable, and if this is something that worries you then please ask for hotel-style accommodation. When accommodation is being booked, please feel free to express any preferences, needs or concerns you may have, and we will do our best to respect these. If you have any questions or concerns

about this, please talk to Abi Taylor: abi@sustainweb.org. Should any difficulty arise that makes you concerned for safeguarding, where it is not possible to discuss this with Sustain (e.g. last-minute), please arrange your own accommodation and the cost of this can be reimbursed by Sustain.

Occasionally you may be invited to attend an event that involves camping, shared bunk rooms or other types of accommodation, for example on farm visits or at festivals where Sustain has a presence. You should make a personal choice about whether or not you want to participate in this way, and investigate alternatives if this does not suit your needs. The event organiser may be able to help you with options and Sustain will do our best to accommodate reasonable alternatives.

For overnight stays, you may also prefer to arrange to stay with nearby friends or family.

Respecting people's privacy

Over and above legal privacy and GDPR rights and restrictions on photography, when we take photographs or videos, we should always ask if people are happy for pictures to be taken, say how they will be used, and give the opportunity for anyone to opt out from the images being used in Sustain communications. This can usually be managed by an announcement at the start of the event in combination with posters, a statement in the delegate pack, or in a pre-event email. These must include a clear indication of how to opt out (e.g. the person they should speak to or contact) and we must respect people's decision to opt out.

Before using (and, ideally, before taking) photographs or videos of anyone under 18 we must gain the permission of the person, as well as their parent, guardian, carer or other adult responsible for their welfare – such as a teacher. For children who are speaking or performing at an event, or participating in another way, this can usually be agreed in advance as part of the planning process, including gaining written consent. If there is any doubt about consent, avoid using or taking photographs of the child.

At social events, especially those involving alcohol, photos or videos may get taken of people behaving in disinhibited ways. This may be embarrassing or cause people difficulties for other reasons. This may also bring Sustain and/or our colleagues and guests, or the venue, into disrepute. We must all respect privacy and not post images of our colleagues, other attendees or third parties (e.g. guests, bystanders or venue staff), on the internet or social media. Posting images and comments publicly with the intention or effect of embarrassing, denigrating or defaming someone may constitute harassment.

Some photos may be shared on internal channels such as the Sustain group WhatsApp, and colleagues may be happy for these to be shared. We should all exercise care and good judgement on what is appropriate. If someone asks you not to share an image, please respect their choice. If they ask you to delete an image of them from a shared communication channel, or from your camera, please do so.

The exception is if you think this request is for the purpose of hiding evidence of wrongdoing, such as drug-taking, theft, violence or sexual abuse. If you believe you may hold evidence of such wrongdoing or illegal activities, then it is your duty as a witness to tell Sustain or to take it directly to the police.

Reporting your concerns

Sustain will always do our best to help people feel welcome, included and safe from harm. However, unfortunately, sometimes incidents do occur, or you may witness or suspect something that worries you. If this happens at a Sustain event, please tell a colleague as soon as possible about this so that immediate steps can be taken to prevent further harm, to protect the person experiencing inappropriate behaviour, to ask someone who is behaving inappropriately to desist or leave, or to call in security staff or the police.

Everyone should feel enabled to call out unsafe or inappropriate behaviour, or suspicions of unsafe or inappropriate behaviour. If senior staff from Sustain are present, they have a duty to listen and to take action to prevent harm and will have accountability for their actions.

Senior colleagues attending an event at which an incident has occurred, or been suspected, must expect to be required to report to Trustees and/or the appropriate authorities on the incident, the actions taken and the conduct of themselves and others in response. In the case of abusive, physical or dangerous behaviour, venue staff or security staff may also be able to help, and should be alerted as soon as possible.

Following an event at which an incident may have occurred, concerns should also be reported to Sustain so that we can take appropriate action. We encourage you to come forward with your concerns even if you are worried that they may seem 'not serious enough' or if you are worried that the people you report this to might not take action, or that there may be repercussions for you or someone else.

Anyone receiving a report of misconduct is duty bound to listen non-judgementally, take this seriously, offer you support, take appropriate action, let you know what they will do next and how they will maintain appropriate safety and confidentiality, and be accountable for doing so. You can raise concerns with – for example – your line manager, a senior manager, a colleague, or one of the Trustees named in the Sustain's safeguarding. Appropriate action by Sustain may range from requiring the person exhibiting inappropriate behaviour to desist, apologise, go on remedial training, take part in mediation with others, and/or adopt a personal code of conduct; conducting an in-house or independent investigation; sanctioning the person for their behaviours (including the possibility of disciplinary action); through to adopting practical and cultural ways that events can be improved in future, especially in relation to prevention and safeguarding.

The situation may unfortunately arise where you suspect, witness or personally experience wrongdoing or misconduct by a Sustain colleague, or by someone attending one of our events, or by someone associated with our work. This could include, for example:

- Bullying, harassment or assault (including sexual harassment or sexual assault)
- Misconduct affecting a child or vulnerable adult
- Theft, fraud or financial impropriety

We recognise that reporting experiences or suspicion of misconduct is a big step and people may feel anxious about coming forward. Sustain has published guidance to offer reassurance, options for how you can bring such matters to our attention, and a form that can help you report your concerns in a way that can enable investigation. This can be submitted by you, or via an intermediary to protect your identity. This information is provided on the [Sustain intranet](#) (CMS password access). There are also links on these pages to helplines, advice lines and to Sustain's employee assistance programme.

All of the senior people available to receive such reports (names and contact details are published on the intranet) commit to treat any such a report or complaint seriously, confidentially, compassionately, non-judgmentally and to take appropriate action as a result. They are duty bound to do so, and will be accountable for their actions.

If it is a senior member of staff that is exhibiting or suspected of the inappropriate behaviour, other senior colleagues have enhanced responsibilities and duty to take action to prevent harm (and hence also enhanced possible sanctions for failure to prevent harm), and will have accountability for their actions, as senior employees, and to Trustees and the appropriate regulatory authorities.

Prohibition of retaliation

Threats, intimidation or any other retaliation against a person making a complaint, or a person providing information in support of a complaint, are prohibited. Sustain will treat retaliation as harassment and/or misconduct, and take appropriate action to prevent and respond to retaliation.

Guidance created April 2024, following research, professional advice and full staff consultation

Code of conduct for safeguarding at events

Welcome to this event, which is run or supported by Sustain. We want our events to be respectful, supportive and inclusive for all participants. We must also prevent harassment, including racism or sexual harassment, at our events, set out in this Code of Conduct (based on [World Health Organisation](#) guidelines).

Prohibited conduct

Harassment is any behaviour that is directed at another person and has the effect of offending, humiliating or intimidating that person; and the person engaging in the behaviour knows or reasonably ought to know would offend, humiliate or intimidate that other person. Harassment in any form because of gender, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion or belief, nationality, ethnic or social origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, language or any other reason is prohibited at Sustain events.

Sexual harassment is a specific type of prohibited conduct. Sexual harassment is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or perceived to cause offence or humiliation. Sexual harassment may involve any conduct of a verbal, nonverbal or physical nature, include written and electronic communications, and may occur between persons of the same or different genders.

Examples of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:			
Making derogatory or demeaning comments about someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity	Name-calling or using slurs with a gender/sexual connotation	Making sexual comments about appearance, clothing or body parts	Making comments about or rating a person’s attractiveness
Asking for sexual favours or repeatedly asking a person for dates	Staring in a sexually suggestive manner	Unwelcome touching, including pinching, patting, rubbing or purposefully brushing up against a person	Making inappropriate sexual gestures, such as pelvic thrusts
Sharing sexual or lewd anecdotes or jokes	Sending sexually suggestive communications in any format	Sharing or displaying sexually inappropriate images or videos in any format	Attempted or actual sexual assault, including rape

Complaint process

A colleague or participant who feels that they have been harassed at a Sustain event may report the matter to the organiser or a relevant authority. A colleague or participant who witnesses or suspects harassment should make such a report. The organiser of the Sustain event will be expected to take appropriate action.

Examples of appropriate action may include, but are not limited to:			
Requesting the offender to immediately stop the offending behaviour	Requiring the offender to leave the event, and/or refusing registration at future Sustain events	Conveying the complaint to any investigative or disciplinary authority with jurisdiction over the person accused of harassment	Conveying a report to the employer or entity with jurisdiction over the person accused of harassment for follow-up action
The person experiencing the harassment may also seek help from other relevant authorities, such as the police (call 999), or from confidential helplines such as Victim Support (call 08 08 16 89 111).			

Prohibition of retaliation

Threats, intimidation or any other retaliation against a person making a complaint or providing information are prohibited. Sustain will take appropriate action to prevent and respond to retaliation.