

Wilderness Camping

Anything can happen in the wild outdoors, and you should take measures designed to prevent accidents and injuries from occurring. Ask the question: "What would happen if _____ occurred?" Once you have identified possible problems, devise a plan to minimize the risks and to manage a crisis if one occurs. Involve the entire crew in this process so that everyone becomes aware of potential dangers and how to avoid them.

Obviously, the best way to stay safe in the wilderness is to not get into trouble in the first place. This requires planning, leadership, and good judgment. To help be prepared for the challenges of a wilderness trek and camping experience, read *Passport to High Adventure*, No. 4310.

Trail Safety

Alertness and care in all that is done on the trail and performing within the group's known capabilities are among the best preventive measures against accidents. Most common outdoor injuries are blisters, cuts, sprains, strains, bruises, and fractures. Hikers also may become lost or get caught in storms, and they often panic as a result. Avoidable tragedies may occur if campers and leaders lack the skills and knowledge to deal with the problems encountered. Leaders must alert youth members to the dangers of an unusual environment with proper instructions on fire safety, orienteering, and safe travel.



Leaders must instruct those in their groups to stay together on well-established trails, avoid loose rocks (especially on descent), and avoid dangerous ledges, cliffs, and areas where a fall might occur. Accidents can occur when hikers kick and roll boulders down steep hills. Wilderness trails have no caution signs for loose rocks, nor do they have guardrails on cliffs.

It is strongly recommended that at least one person in the group be currently certified in first aid through the American Red Cross or any recognized agency.

Trail safety is a matter of common sense. The response of individual members of a group in doing the right thing is important. When they understand the reason for rules of safety, they obey them more willingly.

The Boy Scouts of America has an abundance of literature related to proper procedures and guidelines for a group on a trail.

References: □ Boy Scout Handbook; Backpacking, Camping, and Hiking merit badge pamphlets; Cub Scout Leader Book; Scoutmaster Handbook; Fieldbook

Trek Safely

Each of the following elements plays an important role in the overall Trek Safely procedure. Fun and safe overnight trekking activities require compliance with Trek Safely by both adult and youth leaders.

1. Qualified Supervision

All backcountry treks must be supervised by a mature, conscientious adult at least 21 years of age who understands the potential risks associated with the trek. This person knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth in his or her care. This adult supervisor is trained in and committed to compliance with the seven points of the BSA's Trek Safely procedure. One additional adult who is at least 18 years of age must also accompany the unit.

The lead adult is responsible for ensuring that someone in the group is currently trained in first aid appropriate to the type of trek and the environment. American Red Cross Wilderness First Aid Basic (a 16-hour course) and CPR are recommended. A signed parental informed consent form for each participant under 18 years of age may be used for adventurous activities such as whitewater, climbing, and horse packing treks.

2. Keep Fit

Require evidence of fitness with a current BSA Personal Health and Medical Record—Class III form, No. 34412A. A regular fitness regimen is recommended for trek participants. They are urged to start slowly, gradually increasing the duration and intensity of their exercise. The adult leader should adjust supervision, protection, and planning to anticipate potential risks associated with individual health conditions. Neither youth nor adults should participate in a trek or activity for which they are not physically prepared. See Passport to High Adventure, No. 4310.

3. Plan Ahead

Planning a trek includes filing a tour permit application with the local council service center at least a month before the departure date. If travel of more than 500 miles is planned, submit the National Tour Permit Application, No. 4419B. For activities off the local council property and within 500 miles of home base, submit the Local Tour Permit Application, No. 34426B.

The trek should match the maturity, skill level, and fitness of unit members. A youth or adult leader must secure land-use permits to use public land or written permission from the owner to cross or use private land. It is also crucial to learn about any requirements and recommendations from the local land manager. Find out about the terrain, elevation ranges, trails, wildlife, campsites, typical weather conditions, and environmental issues for the period of the trek.

Training in Leave No Trace using the Principles of Leave No Trace, No. 21-105, and the Leave No Trace Training Outline, No. 20-113, is crucial. Units should anticipate a range of weather conditions and temperatures and develop an alternate itinerary in the event that adverse conditions develop.

4. Gear Up

Procure topographic maps, as well as current trail maps, for the area of the trek. Take equipment and clothing that is appropriate for the weather and unit skill level, is in good condition, and is properly sized for each participant. A qualified youth or adult leader ensures that participants are trained in the proper use of specialized equipment, particularly items with which they are not familiar, such as climbing ropes, ice axes, crampons, watercraft, bridles, saddles, and cross-country skis and poles. A shakedown must be conducted to be sure each person has the right equipment without taking too much.

Crew equipment includes a first-aid kit stocked with current medications and supplies. The leader reminds youth and adults to bring and take prescribed medications. Every crew must have the means to treat water for drinking by boiling it, treating it with chemicals, or using an approved water filter. When ultraviolet light (sunlight) is prevalent, it is critical that participants have adequate sun protection, including broad-brimmed hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen.

5. Communicate Clearly and Completely

Communication is one of the keys to a safe outdoor adventure, and staying in touch with home base is the first step. A youth or adult leader should complete a trip plan and share these details of the trek—including time of departure, overnight stops, the time of expected return, the trailhead (where vehicles will be parked) and the itinerary and alternate itinerary—with a contact person in the home area. At any time the itinerary changes, one of the leaders relays the changes to the contact person, who in turn relays them to the Scouts' parents. A plan for communicating with each parent is developed before the trek.

A means of electronic communication—with backup power—may be helpful should an emergency occur. The leader should carry the telephone numbers or contact information of medical and emergency services in the area of the trek. Before calling for emergency assistance, the exact location and nature of the patient's injury or illness should be determined.

Youth and adult leaders are responsible for making sure that everyone knows what to expect and what is expected of them. Leaders should communicate with each other, as well as with the entire crew, to avoid unpleasant surprises.

6. Monitor Conditions

The leaders are responsible for making good decisions during the trek, conservatively estimating the capabilities and stamina of the group. If adverse conditions develop, the group is prepared to stop or turn back. The unit is responsible for monitoring weather conditions and forecasts before and during the trek—a small National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) radio is helpful for learning current weather forecasts. Leaders continually assess conditions, including weather, terrain, group morale, food and water supplies, group physical condition, and other factors to determine the difference between what is difficult and what is dangerous. Dangerous conditions are avoided.

7. Discipline

Each participant knows, understands, and respects the rules and procedures for safe trekking and has been oriented in Trek Safely. Applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing and should be reviewed with participants before the trek begins. When participants know the reasons for rules and procedures, they are more likely to follow them. Adult and youth leaders must be strict and fair, showing no favoritism.

Beware of Lightning

The summits of mountains, crests of ridges, slopes above timberline, and large meadows are extremely hazardous places to be during lightning storms. If you are caught in such an exposed place, quickly descend to a lower elevation, away from the direction of the approaching storm, and squat down, keeping your head low. A dense forest located in a depression provides the best protection. Avoid taking shelter under isolated trees or trees much taller than adjacent trees. Stay away from water, metal objects, and other substances that will conduct electricity long distances.

By squatting with your feet close together, you have minimal contact with the ground, thus reducing danger from ground currents. If the threat of lightning strikes is great, your group should not huddle together but spread out at least 15 feet apart. If one member of your group is jolted, the rest of you can tend to him. Whenever lightning is nearby, take off backpacks with either external or internal metal frames. In tents, stay at least a few inches from metal tent poles.

Lightning Safety Rules

- Stay away from open doors and windows, fireplaces, radiators, stoves, metal pipes, sinks, and plug-in electrical appliances.
- Don't use hair dryers, electric toothbrushes, or electric razors.
- Don't use the telephone; lightning may strike telephone wires outside.
- Don't take laundry off the clothesline.
- Don't work on fences, telephone lines, power lines, pipelines, or structural steel fabrications.
- Don't handle flammable materials in open containers.
- Don't use metal objects, such as fishing rods and golf clubs. Golfers wearing cleated shoes are particularly good lightning rods.
- Stop tractor work, especially when the tractor is pulling metal equipment, and dismount. Tractors and other implements in metallic contact with the ground are often struck by lightning.
- Get out of the water and off small boats.
- Stay in the car if you are traveling. Automobiles offer excellent lightning protection.
- When no shelter is available, avoid the highest object in the area. If only isolated trees are nearby, the best protection is to crouch in the open, keeping twice as far away from isolated trees as the trees are high.
- Avoid hilltops, open spaces, wire fences, metal clotheslines, exposed sheds, and any electrically conducted elevated objects.

Pure Drinking Water

A constant supply of pure drinking water is essential. Serious illness can result from drinking unpurified water. Protect your health. Don't take a chance on using water that you are not sure of. Thermos jugs, plastic water containers, and canteens are all satisfactory for carrying water. Be sure water is dispensed into each person's own drinking cup.

Treatment of Questionable Water

In addition to having a bad odor or taste, water from questionable sources may be contaminated by microorganisms, such as *Giardia*, that can cause a variety of diseases. All water of uncertain purity should be purified before use. Don't take a chance on using water that you are not sure of. To purify water, follow these steps:

1. Filter the water to remove as many solids as possible.
2. Bring it to a rolling boil and boil it for a full minute.
3. Let it cool at least 30 minutes.
4. Add eight drops of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of cool water. (Use common household bleach; 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite should be the only active ingredient; there should not be any added soap or fragrances). Water must be cool or chlorine will dissipate and be rendered useless.
5. Let the water stand 30 minutes.
6. If it smells of chlorine, you can use it. If it does not smell of chlorine, add eight more drops of bleach and let it stand another 30 minutes. Smell it again. You can use it if it smells of chlorine. If it doesn't, discard it and find another water source.

7. The only accepted measurement of chlorine (or water treatment agents) is the drop. A drop is specifically measurable. Other measures such as "capful" or "scant teaspoon" are not uniformly measurable and should not be used.

In addition to common household bleach, several other types of chemical means to disinfect water are available, such as iodine tables, iodide crystals, and halazone tablets. All of these are acceptable, but some people have an allergic reaction to iodine products. Follow the instructions on the package for proper use.

To treat cold water you must lengthen the contact (sitting) time depending on the water temperature to destroy *Giardia* that may be present. Very cold water may take as long as four times the normal contact time.

Several types of water purification filters are available at camp stores. The Boy Scouts of America recommends that if you use a water filter, you also chemically treat and/or boil the water and carry extra filter cartridges and spare parts. Among the best water filters are PUR, MSR, Katadyn, First Need, and Sweet Water.

BSA Property Smart



Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Venturers are often privileged to use the land and property of others for hiking, camping, and other activities. This privilege carries important responsibilities regarding care, courtesy and cleanliness.

Carelessness is regrettable and must be avoided at all times. On the other hand, deliberate vandalism is a criminal act and is forbidden. Every Scout and Scouter has an obligation to do his or her best to care for and protect every property that he or she visits.

All youth and leaders should follow these guidelines:

1. Every group that plans to use a site must obtain permission from the owner before entering the land. The best plan is for one or two of the leaders to visit the owner several weeks before the trip to get permission; if this is not possible, the owner should be contacted by letter or telephone.
If there is any uncertainty about permission (for instance, permission has been granted in the past, but you received no response to your recent request), check in when you arrive for the trip. In this case, one or two members of the group should find the owner while other members wait. Don't assume that permission is automatic and begin unloading equipment. If you find that the owner is not available and you don't have prior permission, you must go elsewhere.
2. Many camp and activity sites, such as those found in state parks, national forests, and national parks, are owned by government entities or municipalities. Many of these have strict access policies and/or permits that need to be secured in advance. Be sure to follow the rules, which can be explained by a property official or ranger.
3. Ask where it will be convenient to park cars. Don't block traffic lanes and driveways.
4. Never write, mark, or paint on walls, ceilings, rocks, or structures. Occasionally, it may be necessary to mark a confusing trail or road. For this purpose, carry small signs with

arrows drawn on them. Place the markers in suitable locations as the group enters, and collect them on the way out. Don't cut live branches or trees.

5. You might need to cross someone's property to reach a campsite or activity area. Obtain permission to do so, and remember that a landowner's income might depend on his or her crops and livestock. Don't climb fences that might break under your weight. Always leave gates exactly as you found them. Open gates can result in extensive loss to the owner.
6. Don't tease or chase livestock. Take special care not to startle flocks of poultry. Disregard for the owner's animals can result in injury to you and/or the animals.
7. Be conscious of any actions that will disturb or inconvenience the owner. Keep noise to a minimum, especially late at night. Pick up trash, even that left by previous visitors. Don't build a fire except in cleared fire sites and with the owner's permission. It's best to use a backpacking stove. Fires must be completely out before you leave the area.
8. Don't leave behind any trace of your visit. Leave every natural thing and manmade structure exactly as it was before you entered, and remove everything you brought to the site. Put trash in suitable containers, such as plastic bags, and then take all trash home; never dump it on the ground.
9. If it is not too late at night, stop as you leave to tell the owner that you are leaving. If it is late, write a note. Remember that the owner's schedule might not be the same as yours. If the home is dark, regardless of the hour, don't disturb the owner. In either case, thank the owner when you leave. Send a follow-up letter that includes, if possible, pictures taken in the area.
10. When obtaining permission to enter a property, never underestimate the length of time you might spend there. If you specify an exit time to the owner, leave at that time. You can plan longer trips for the future. Missing an exit time could cause unnecessary concern or inconvenience for the owner.
11. When planning camps and activities, don't frequent the same well-known sites. Heavy traffic causes damage and puts a strain on owner relations (commercial or public sites excepted). In the backcountry, limit camping at one location to no more than three days to help preserve the natural environment.
12. All Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Venturers, and leaders should demonstrate their interest in the property of others and their appreciation by participating in or organizing an occasional cleanup to remove trash and repair damage left by thoughtless visitors, as well as to remove writing on walls and rocks. With the owner's permission, you might even carry out conservation projects such as erosion control or wildlife habitat improvement. This makes an excellent group project and teaches conservation of and respect for the natural environment and property of others.



Often, people forget that camps, trails, and activity sites belong to the landowner and that they must depend on his or her goodwill. In recent years, use of natural areas has increased tremendously. Owners of popular sites are besieged by people seeking entrance, and the result has been that many owners are becoming alienated. The rudeness and thoughtlessness of a few people can cause property owners to exclude everyone from a site.

The above rules boil down to a simple statement: Use common sense and treat the owner as you would like to be treated. If outdoor activity is to continue in this country, everyone must do all they can to make themselves welcome at each site they visit.