

Risk Management Page: Keeping You Safe in the Outdoors

Thermal Exposures

The PVC Risk Management Committee provides periodic discussions in this newsletter of risk or safety related topics. Since we are presently in the teeth of winter, this is a good time to discuss thermal related exposures, the cold weather kind. These issues are discussed in some detail on pages 53 and 54 of the "Guide to Safe Scouting". This guide costs \$4.00 or is available "free" online in the Leader Resources area of www.pvcbsa.org.

Some highlights of what we need to remember during our winter camping or hiking activities:

1. Use the buddy system for winter outings.
2. Always allow ample time to make camp in winter.
3. Dress in layers. This will allow easy adjustment to changing temperatures and activity levels and avoid over heating during strenuous activity. Ideally the best layering scheme consists of:
 - ❑ Non-absorbent base layer that has wicking properties (polyester or other modern synthetic -- cotton is NOT a good choice)
 - ❑ One or more close-fitting insulating layers of a non-absorbent fabric that will keep you warm when damp (wool or synthetic (such as polyester fleeces) --- again, cotton is NOT a good choice)
 - ❑ A weather protection layer that's waterproof and windproof to protect against the elements, and also breathable to allow perspiration moisture to escape (for example, Gortex).
 - ❑ Appropriate gloves/mittens, footwear, hats and ear muffs are also required.
4. Remember that sun exposure precautions and proper hydration are as important in winter as in the summer.
5. Fatigue encourages accidents. The symptoms of fatigue are often less recognizable in cold weather. .
6. Snow is a terrific insulator. Snow shelters are much warmer than tents because they retain heat and keep out the cold wind.
7. Snow is the greatest thief in winter, swallowing up small dropped items. Tie or tape a piece of brightly colored cord to small items so they can be seen in snow.
8. Melting snow in a pot to get water may cause the pot to burn through or may scorch the snow, giving the water a disagreeable taste. Prevent this by adding a cup or two of water in the bottom of the pot before putting in the snow to melt.
9. Always test the thickness of ice before venturing any distance from the shore. Ice should be at least 3 inches thick for a small group; 4 inches of ice is safe for a crowd. Since ice thickness can vary considerably, it is best to stay near the shoreline of large lakes.
10. Use alkaline batteries in flashlights. Standard batteries deteriorate quickly in cold weather. Encourage everyone in your group to wear brightly colored outer clothing so that each person will be more visible, especially during severe weather.
11. Small liquid-fuel stoves are much better for cooking in winter than fires. Always use a funnel to refuel a stove so you won't frostbite your fingers by accidentally pouring fuel on them. Fuel evaporates at a high rate of speed and quickly removes heat from anything it touches.
12. Never light or use a stove inside a tent or snow shelter. A windscreen is essential for using a stove in the winter. Even a slight breeze will direct the heat away from its intended mark.

First-Aid Kits

Now that spring is here it is a good time to check the troop first aid kit and make sure it contains all the appropriate materials and is ready for spring and summer activities. A first-aid kit should be well stocked with the basic essentials. Choose one that is sturdy and lightweight, yet large enough to hold the contents so that they are readily visible and so that any one item may be taken out without unpacking the whole kit. Keep a list of contents readily available for easy refilling. Keep the kit in a convenient location. Make one person responsible for keeping the kit filled and available when needed. Quantities of suggested items for your first-aid kit depend on the size of your group and local conditions.

Suggested First-Aid Kit Contents

- Bar of soap
- 2-inch roller bandage
- 1-inch roller bandage
- 1-inch adhesive
- 3-by-3-inch sterile pads
- Triangular bandage
- Assorted gauze pads
- Adhesive strips
- Clinical oral thermometer
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Sunburn lotion
- Lip salve
- Poison-ivy lotion
- Small flashlight (with extra batteries and bulb)
- Absorbent cotton
- Water purification tablets (iodine)
- Safety pins
- Needles
- Paper cups
- Foot powder
- Instant ice packs

Because of the possibility of exposure to communicable diseases, first-aid kits should include **latex or vinyl gloves, plastic goggles or other eye protection**, and **antiseptic** to be used when giving first aid to bleeding victims, as protection against possible exposure. **Mouth barrier devices** should be available for use with CPR.