

Safety Checklist for NYFOA Chapter Events

At the June, 2007, meeting of the NYFOA Board of Directors, Ed Wright of the W.J. Cox insurance agency spoke about safety at chapter activities, such as woodswalks, mill visits, etc., and addressed questions about what can be done to decrease chapter liability for injury at these events and – most important – to protect participants and treat them in the event of injury or illness.

Among the possible minor problems that could arise are cuts and bruises from falls, sprained ankles, insect bites and bee stings. The last can be life threatening to an allergic person. People can also suffer dislocations, fractures and eye injuries, as from whipping branches. In addition, Ed raised the need for equipment such as hard hats, safety glasses and ear protection in certain cases.

After some discussion, the board asked the safety committee (Rene Germaine, Neil Walker, Dan Gilmore, Dick Patton, Chris Tcimpidis, John Sullivan) to consider the preparations, precautions and supplies that would help meet the needs that Ed outlined in his talk. The board felt that this might be most useful in checklist form.

Below are some guidelines you can use in developing your chapter's safety policies and practices, followed by a checklist which you can use as-is or modify to suit the circumstances of your activities. Not all items on the checklist will apply to all events. Hearing protection, for example, would be useful on a sawmill visit, but not on a woodswalk. Other items – proper footwear, for example – might be considered mandatory.

We have also provided a sample of what you might include in a safety briefing for a woodswalk. This one takes 1-½ minutes to give. While a briefing is strongly recommended, consider this a suggestion, or a starting point for one you might use, to be adapted to the circumstances.

Safety issues are extremely rare at NYFOA events, perhaps because most members are reasonably woods-wise and less likely than the average person to do something careless or foolish. But we try to attract new people – non members – to our events so that they might become members, become woods-wise, etc. The least we can do is protect them, if not from the woods, then from themselves (has anyone ever showed up for a woodswalk wearing flip-flops?).

NYFOA is considering creating a pool of safety equipment, such as hard hats, that could be made available to chapters. More probably, we will try to make this equipment available to chapters at an attractive price so that each chapter can have its own equipment. An idea: if NYFOA is able to provide hard hats imprinted with our logo at a good price, consider charging a small fee that will allow each participant to go home with a hat.

The bumper sticker is right. Stuff happens. This is an attempt to adhere to the old Scouting admonition to “Be Prepared” when it does.

NYFOA ACTIVITY SAFETY GUIDELINES

Here are some issues to consider in developing your chapter's safety policies and plans.

Chapter Safety Officer. Consider designating one person who will worry about the matters discussed here and keep and maintain any chapter-owned safety equipment.

Event Safety Officer. Put one person in charge of safety issues at each event. That will be the person to summon if there's a problem, and who will assign tasks if necessary. Ideally, this person will be trained in CPR and/or First Aid.

Liability insurance coverage. NYFOA carries insurance that protects the organization, including chapters, from liability at events. However, a host should carry coverage for his or her own well-being. Most homeowner policies include this coverage – if the owner's home is at the woodlot. A policy may or may not include a woodlot that does not include the host's home, so it is a good idea to ask..

An evacuation plan. Take a few minutes before each event to plan how you will move one or more members of the group to a safe place. This usually amounts to knowing the shortest/quickest/driest/ route out of a woodlot from various points in it. It might be something as simple as, "Leave over entry route and gather at roadside," or "Follow 345 degree heading to road approx ½ mile." Can an ATV, tractor or truck be used if needed?

Have a Chapter First Aid kit. There are many on the market, including a number available from Forestry Suppliers and Ben Meadows. At the least, a kit should permit treatment of cuts and bruises, stabilization of a sprained knee or ankle and a means to apply pressure to stop bleeding. A "space blanket" to keep an injured person warm is also helpful.

Add an "Epi-pen" to the First Aid kit. This is a spring-loaded syringe that will deliver the proper dose of epinephrine to someone in anaphylactic shock. This is most commonly caused by an allergic reaction to an insect sting, but can have other causes. The Epi-pen is a life-saver. You will have to obtain a doctor's prescription for one, unless you go to Canada, where it is available over the counter.

CPR Training. Identify who in your chapter has CPR or FirstAid training, and encourage members to take the training. Identify a trained individual at each event, if possible.

Proper dress. This will usually consist of a reminder in your advertising and public relations efforts that boots, sun protection and long trousers should be worn for a woodwalk. Be prepared to turn away someone who isn't properly clothed. Consider also noting anything out of the ordinary regarding the length or difficulty of a woods walk in your advance publicity.

Safety equipment. It may be a safe bet that no chapter has a supply of hard hats or other gear. Perhaps they should, and to that end NYFOA will try to find an economical source of items such as hard hats imprinted with our logo. These and other items such as ear plugs and safety glasses would not normally be required for a typical woodswalk, but should be used around an active logging operation, or a demonstration of a sawmill or other machinery. Commercial mills and factories usually supply visitors with the safety gear they deem necessary.

Emergency Responders. Dialing “911” is usually, but not always, the best way to summon help. Know before the start of an event. If cell coverage is available, have a phone available (duh!) and know where to find a phone if it isn’t. Don’t assume that the person calling 911 will know how to direct the responders. Make sure, and have a plan to meet responders at the trailhead or other appropriate place. Is an ATV or other vehicle likely to help? If so, know whether it can be used.

A large number of participants in an event increases the chance of someone having a problem; it also can expand the scale of an emergency. In such a case, emergency responders usually appreciate advance notice of an event so that they can be sure their plans are in order and staffing is available.

Safety briefing. This doesn’t have to be done like the oxygen-mask talk on the airplane, but why not take a minute before setting out to tell people what your emergency plan is and point out the person to notify in case of a problem. At the very least, most participants will be happy to hear that you know it’s important to keep everyone safe.

It Can Happen to You Department. Here’s a note from a member of the SAC chapter: “I have been on many woodswalks over many years and never have seen a problem -- until I hosted a walk a couple of years ago. A half-hour into the woods, my wife’s brand-new, replacement hip dislocated. This causes great pain and requires skilled medical attention; there is no first aid fix. We were not prepared for this or any other emergency (at least, I wasn’t). Fortunately, there were some very alert, savvy folks around who summoned help quickly. An ambulance (and some other equipment) arrived shortly, she was carried out of the woods on an ATV and taken to the hospital. Meanwhile, others continued the woodswalk as scheduled.”

The folks on this woodswalk were able to make up a “plan” on the spot. Don’t count on that happening every time – or even very often.

NYFOA EVENT CHECKLIST

Event Safety Person _____

CPR/First Aid-trained person (identify) _____

Emergency responder contact (number) _____

Advance notification? Y/N

Phone available (Where) _____

Directions to the site _____

Evacuation Plan (brief) _____

First Aid kit _____

Epi-pen _____

Proper dress for all participants _____

Safety equipment:

Hearing protection _____

Eye protection _____

Hard hats _____

Safety briefing complete? _____

Water available _____

EXAMPLE OF A SAFETY BRIEFING (1:30)

(After the greetings, thanks and acknowledgements)

Before we start, let's take a minute to talk about safety and comfort. Does everyone have good footwear -- please no sandals. If you think you need water, take a bottle from the box over there. Got a hat?

We hardly ever have a problem on these woods walks, but we like to be prepared. Bryan Clothier -- raise your hand, Bryan -- is today's safety person. If you have a problem, he's the guy to tell...right away. He has a first aid kit, and an Epi-pen if anyone is allergic to bee stings. He is trained in CPR and First Aid, so he knows what to do and how to do it if anyone has a serious problem. He also knows where to go for more help. If there's some issue that affects the group, look for Bryan and listen to his directions.

Two other things...

Kids, please stay with your parents and the group. Please don't go exploring on your own (because none of us here wants to do a search). And parents, please help out in that regard.

And finally, this is tick season. Take a minute when we come back in, and later when you get home, to check for them, especially around your legs and ankles.

Now let's enjoy ourselves.