

TerranearPMC Safety Share

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Week of June 18, 2018 – Summer First Aid and Hiking Safety

With summer weather so many of us are ready for taking advantage of hiking and having picnics in the outdoors. National Parks and other hiking trails are populated with both experienced and inexperienced hikers and campers. And, while these are great activities during our leisure – whether that's the weekend or vacation days, many of us that perform work in the field are also traversing the wild. And while first aid kits are mandatory for work at DoD and DOE sites, summertime requires some additional precautions including specific medications; both over-the-counter AND prescription.

Knowing basic hiking first aid allows you to treat anything from a small blister to a serious fall or severe dehydration. Each wilderness location has its unique risks, and therefore, it is always best to be aware and prepared in the event of an outdoor emergency on rugged, unfamiliar terrain. You should be prepared to not only provide temporary first aid, but also find the most efficient way to contact additional assistance in case of a more serious injury.

The most basic and often forgotten protocol is the buddy system. It is important that at least two persons are trained in basic first aid, as if only one person is trained, the team is at risk should an injury/illness occur to the first aid trained individual. A “hands-on” first aid CPR course can be much more effective than online varieties. Also, keep in mind, DoD and DOE typically do not recognize online courses that offer NO hands-on or practical application And according to the Army Corps of Engineers Safety and Health Requirements Manual (EM 385-1-1), first aid and CPR courses must be through the American Red Cross or the American Heart Association (other courses are recognized – see Section .03 D.02 of EM 385-1-1).

It is important to always wear bright colors, so in the event of an accident you are easy to see and identify if further care is necessary. Generally, it is smart to dress in loose layers to regulate your body temperature, as this increases *clothing breathability*, and cover more of your skin from potential bug bites. Hiking in the summer is different than the fall due to the heat, so dressing in layers can be difficult. However, the heat is not an excuse to not wear proper hiking footwear. Boots, preferably previously broken-in, are your most important hiking tool that can make the difference between a serious fall and a sure step. While most workplace activities require safety shoes per OSHA (29 CFR 1910.136) requirements, if there is no risk due to contact with heavy equipment or other, similar scenario, a good pair of over-the-ankle hiking boots would be appropriate.

Regardless of your wilderness expertise, it is important to carry an Emergency Wilderness Kit or build your own with essential hiking safety items. Typical items should be: bandages, gauze, tape, an ice pack, and antibacterials. These tools can help in treatment of small injuries and can aid in temporary treatment of more serious injuries while awaiting further assistance. First aid supplies should also include over-the-counter skin cleaners for removing urushiol, the active ingredient in poison oak, poison ivy, and poison sumac. One OTC medication to help counter the itchy symptoms is Tecnu® (made from deodorized mineral spirits, water, propylene glycol, octylphenoxy-polythoxethanol, mixed fatty acid soap, and fragrance). **Calamine lotion**, should also be readily available as it is a medication used to treat mild itchiness. This includes sunburn, insect bites, poison oak, or other mild skin conditions. It may also help dry out skin irritation. It



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is applied on the skin as a cream or lotion. Administering calamine lotion or skin cleansing materials for removal of urushiol is considered as first aid treatment and therefore, would NOT constitute an OSHA recordable event.

And for persons susceptible to severe reactions from bee or other insect stings, it is important to have a prescription for an epipen – that is, a self-injection device that administers a subcutaneous dose of epinephrine (adrenaline). Persons working in the wilderness need to know if they are susceptible to an allergic reaction to bees and insects and therefore, ensure that they have an epi pin with them at all times. An epi pin is not an OTC medication and therefore, consultation with a medical professional is mandatory. This device needs to be with you at all times as well as informing work partners that you have an epi pin in case you need to have someone else administer your injection. This means that you may have to instruct team members of the proper way to administer this medication. Unlike the OTC medications of Technu® and calamine lotion, administering epinephrine (or epi pin) would be considered an OSHA recordable. Nevertheless, the most important thing is to provide proper treatment so that such medical events are stabilized.

Many hiking aficionados insist that a whistle can be a valuable tool in the wilderness. In the event of a severe injury, a whistle is easier to hear than a yell, and catches more attention. 3 short whistle blasts is the universal distress call and will let anyone who hears know that you are in trouble and need assistance.

Of course it is important to stay hydrated. So that means **NEVER FORGET WATER!** Cold water is most effective for hydration, while using an insulated water bottle can boost hydration levels. Alternating water with a sports drink like Gatorade® boosts your body electrolytes and aid in your body's utilization of the water. But don't drink these products of your sole hydration source as they contain LOTS of calories; meanwhile water has been shown to be an adequate source for fluid hydration.

A flashlight can be used for much more than a night or evening hike. In the event of an emergency, a flashlight and a mirror (or on its own if it has a strong enough beam) can be used to create an impromptu distress signal. Using a mirror to reflect the sun can also create a distress signal.

Insect Repellent is indispensable in the summer when you have more skin exposed. Bugs are attracted to densely wooded areas in the summer due to the shade and dampness. When hiking in a wooded area, having an insect repellent with DEET (the most common and effective insect repelling ingredient) will prevent a lot of itching and irritation later on.

While this is no such thing as over-preparation, you can over-pack. Know your trail, directions and destination prior to starting out. Boggging yourself down with gear can result in fast exhaustion. Make sure you have only what you absolutely need.

Your body is not a temple, it's an amusement park. Enjoy the ride.

Anthony Bourdain,

