

# *Staying safe while orienteering*

## **General:**

Orienteering normally takes place in natural, undeveloped areas. This is why we love it! But it means there may be some unavoidable hazards – cliffs, wild animals, ‘pokey’ vegetation, mud, slippery surfaces, inclement weather etc.

As organizers we do what we can to make our events as safe as possible, but as participants out in the terrain alone or in small groups, you also have an important role to play to ensure your own (and your group’s) safety.

## **What we do as organizers:**

We try to make the maps as accurate as possible, and to keep them up to date. However, the perfect map probably does not exist. This means there may be unmarked features such as small cliffs or rocky ground, bits of broken fence, etc. There also may be new, unmarked features that may cause confusion or pose safety hazards – such as new trails or fences.

Each spring we have a training session with key organizers to review safety procedures and the safety binder.

For each event we establish a “Safety Bearing”; and print this on your course map, as part of the control description.

We establish a “Course Closing Time” at which all participants are expected to return to the assembly area even if they have not finished their course. At our Wednesday night meets this is normally 8:30.

For courses over 5 km (straight line distance) we put water out at one of the controls.

For each event, we post the main organizer’s cell phone number at the registration table.

We have a first aid kit on site at all events.

We maintain a list of experienced volunteers who would be willing to return to an event site to help with a search if necessary.

## **What you can do as a participant:**

Fill in your membership form neatly and accurately, especially with respect to email address and phone numbers, in case we have to try to contact you to confirm you are home safe.

Have patience with us at the registration table as we confirm names, who is going with who when there are groups, & etc. as this kind of information is used to confirm who has finished their course and who is still in the forest.

If you return from the forest without finishing your course, advise the organizers, don't just head for home without letting us know, or we may think you are still in the woods.

Know your physical and mental limits (in terms of which course you choose).

Don't register/start too late. Depending on the location of the event, the length of the courses, and the time of year; we normally suggest that people should not start after 7:30. Respect the Course Closing Time of 8:30, and return to the assembly area by that time, even if you have to 'abandon' (not finish) your course.

Carry a whistle. Whistles are mandatory; this is an Orienteering Canada rule.

Carry a cell phone; and jot down or input the cell number of the main organizer.

Consider carrying water, and some small food – granola bar, gel, etc.

If you are on a longer course that has water provided at a control, take a drink, to stay hydrated. Food and water can help you to think clearly, if you are disoriented or starting to lose energy.

If you're with a group, stay together, and be particularly mindful of where you are; when socializing/talking, it can be easy to lose track of trail junctions, and significant features.

## **If you get lost:**

Try to stay calm! Know how to use your compass to follow a 'safety bearing' to a large obvious feature such as a main trail, road or powerline.

If you are on a trail, but disoriented and unsure which way to go to get back to the assembly area, stay where you are. Someone will eventually come for you!

If you are off a trail, in the woods, find your way to the nearest trail and stay there. Whether you should try to 'go back' or in some other direction to find a trail, will depend on the circumstances. For example did you leave a trail only a few hundred metres before; or have you been off trail for quite a long time? If you decide to keep going, try to proceed in a 'logical' manner – for example by following one of the cardinal compass bearings to a trail that should be to the north of you, rather than just bumbling around in the general direction that you think might be correct.