

Overview

This document is intended to be a guide and resource for organizers and participants in the sport of orienteering in the Yukon. There are inherent risks associated with orienteering. By better informing meet organizers and participants of these risks, the Yukon Orienteering Association (YOA) will reduce risk at YOA sanctioned events.

Orienteering sites in the Yukon are concentrated in the Whitehorse area, and most are a short drive from emergency medical facilities. Alternate medical facilities are highlighted in this document for the four maps found outside of the Whitehorse area. Due to the nature of the sport, emergencies on any map can become wilderness emergencies. Road access is usually not an option if a participant is injured and cannot walk. Wilderness first aid protocols should be followed in case an emergency occurs away from a road.

The best safety precaution for orienteering is experience. Beginner orienteers should participate in groups on easy courses. Participants who want to try more difficult courses should first try them with a more experienced orienteer. Taking lessons is another good way to improve orienteering skills.

Universal risks, mitigation and emergency procedures

Lost

Overview

- Participant does not know where they are AND does not know how to relocate to a familiar place
- Novice orienteers are most likely to become lost
- Intermediate and advanced orienteers can become lost if a mistake is made where they run off the map or if their map is lost. Organizers are encouraged to scrutinize participants carefully as to their ability; aim for successful completion of course by encouraging participants to choose course within their ability level
- If lost for long enough, exposure can become a serious concern

Mitigation

- Print safety bearings on meet maps
- Print course closure time (usually 8:30 pm for regular Wednesday evening meets) on meet maps
- Communicate to participants the visible landmarks that correspond with safety bearings (e.g. Grey Mountain, Haeckel Hill, Mt. MacIntyre etc.)

- Encourage novice orienteers to carry a cell phone in a plastic bag. Post a cell phone number on the meet map that participants can use to contact meet organizers where there is cell service
- Ensure all participants carry a whistle. If lost, the participant should remain in place and use three blasts of their whistle intermittently to communicate their emergency
- Ensure each participant checks in once they return to the finish, regardless of whether they successfully complete their course and is carrying a timepiece

Emergency Procedures

1. Before meet starts: establish time cutoff when a search will begin (will depend on location and style of course; e.g. 30 minutes after the expected finish time of the last starter for a long course)
2. If a participant is reported missing by family/friends or there is reason to believe someone is lost/injured, start a search as soon as possible
3. Do not collect course controls before all participants have finished. Flags may allow participants to relocate; removing them may increase confusion
4. At least one meet organizer should remain at the start/finish location to act as search coordinator
5. If a search is initiated, it is the responsibility of the meet organizer to recruit people for a search party
6. Ask all participants who have remained at the site to help
7. Ensure each group or individual searching has a cell phone with them and has the number of the meet organizer in their phone
8. Determine what course the missing participant(s) registered for
9. Ensure all people searching have a description of the lost individual including name, age, sex, clothing and appearance
10. Distribute maps of the applicable course(s) to search party
11. Send one searcher to sweep the course forward and another to sweep the course backward, calling the name of the individual as they go
12. Divide the trail network proximate to the course into different search areas and send searchers to sweep each area, calling the name of the individual as they go
13. If more people are needed to help with the search, the meet organizer should contact people on the “List of experienced orienteers willing to search” list found in the hard copy safety binder – kept with the event equipment.

14. Instruct searchers to phone the meet organizer if the lost individual is found. The meet organizer is responsible for contacting all members of the search party once the individual is found

15. Set a time and place to reconvene (e.g. 1 hour from the start of the search) in case there are communication problems

16. Establish a second cutoff where emergency personnel are contacted (e.g. 6 hours after the lost individual was last seen; this cutoff should be shorter depending on location and weather conditions)

Injury

Overview

- Injuries can be sustained by any participant at any orienteering event
- Common injuries include sprains, cuts and bruises
- Less common injuries include punctures, broken/fractured bones and head injuries
- It is up to the participant to decide whether or not an injury is serious enough to abandon their course and return to the start

Mitigation

- Communicate to participants areas on the course that have a higher probability of injury (e.g. water crossings, cliffs, deadfall, steep slopes, road crossings)
- Ensure first aid kit contains necessary items
- Keep a list of members who have up-to date first aid or other medical certifications

Emergency Procedures

- Injuries can be categorized by whether or not self-rescue is possible
- An injured individual with the capacity to self-rescue should return to the start as quickly as possible
- An injured individual who cannot perform a self-rescue should remain in place and, if possible, blow their whistle and try to make their presence known to others in the area
- Search for the individual as outlined in the “Lost” emergency procedure. Whenever searching be prepared to deal with an injured participant