

Club-Wide Safety Committee Recommendations – 2007

Based upon review of submitted club-wide incident reports for 2007, the Safety Committee has grouped mountaineers trip incidents into four main categories upon which safety recommendations are based. These concepts and recommendations should be communicated to all activity committees and leaders and should be disseminated or made available for review by the Mountaineers community. The main categories are as follows:

- **GROUP DYNAMICS**
 - Party separation
 - Ability, conditioning, & fitness
 - Self evacuation
- **SLIPS & FALLS**
- **TECHNICAL ABILITY**
 - Rappel anchor placement
 - Placing protection
 - Running belays
 - Ice climbing
- **ONGOING LEADER TRAINING & EXPECTATIONS**

GROUP DYNAMICS

Expectations of party members, dealing with weak and strong team members in the same party, and the separation of party members, are areas that need continued focus.

Party Separation

- There is a tendency to split party up between strong and weak members
- Party separation reduces margin of safety, and increases the risk of the trip
- On the way out, it is inadvisable to let the stronger members leave weaker ones behind
 - If an incident occurs, strong members should be available to provide assistance
 - If stronger members wait for entire party to return to trailhead, no one is left behind
- Consider largest appropriate time & distance gap between any party member
 - Consider rule of thumb of no more than 15 minute separation between party members
 - Consider how long it could take to communicate with other team members and how long it could take for them to respond
- Stronger party members might take turns staying with slower members
- Avoid sending injured members back to camp/trailhead by themselves
- Leader needs to set expectations during sign-up, screen participants, insure compatible group, let members know their abilities, set expectations again at trailhead
- Ensure all members recognize goal of keeping party members together; even if a party member is slow from the start, party must accept requirement to stay together
- Set defined stopping points/breaks when members regroup
- Take turns staying with slower party members
- Radios are helpful for party communication if team gets spread out

- Radios give flexibility, if you must separate, can still communicate, but understand limitations – an intervening ridge can totally block signals

Ability, Conditioning, & Fitness

- Need continued emphasis on conditioning of participants
- Participants may deny their own lack of capabilities and become liabilities
 - Special attention may be warranted towards course graduates who have not been out in a few months/years since graduation
- Set up some structure where conditioning of participant is a requirement and known to leader
- Setting expectations of the trip by the leader is very important (easy/strenuous)
- Need clear direction and leadership from the activity committees on dealing with people with disabilities, health problems, or difficulties - can't leave this problem to unsuspecting leader
- The activity committees need to take action when participants are not fully aware of their limitations and become a liability to group
- The participant needs to be very aware of their own limitations and communicate such to leader.
- It is the leaders responsibility to vet the group of participants, to make sure everyone is clear on the objective, pace and expectations

Self evacuation

- Careful consideration is warranted before an injured party is expected to participate in a self evacuation
- Self evacuation may risk further damage to existing injuries
- It is appropriate to ask authorities for a proper evacuation

SLIPS & FALLS

There is a need to emphasize risk from slips and falls on terrain considered non technical. Everyone should be encouraged to keep their guard up.

- Emphasize dangers of slips and falls on non technical terrain (trails, boulders, hard snow)
- Emphasize how slips on low angle hard snow/glacier can be treacherous (even angles as low as 10 degrees)
 - People fail to realize the slipperiness of low angle snow and ice
 - Speed of a fall can increase quickly on very low angle hard snow/glacier
 - Emphasize use of anchors even on low angle hard snow/glacier
 - Students should not be relied upon to have experience and judgment to know when and where to build anchors
 - Anchor should be used when there is a high chance of a fall and slide per subject's experience
- Care should be taken with gear and slings dangling from a harness
 - Even slings tied up short can be a hazard and become entangled with crampons, such as during a down-climb or when in a squatting position; consider moving gear to alternative locations inaccessible to crampons

TECHNICAL ABILITY

Rappel anchor placement

- Rappels should generally be set up so that anchor is even with or higher than waist level when possible
- Students should not be allowed to walk off a rappel that is anchored at foot level
 - Places strain on rappel anchor if a fall occurs
 - Injury from fall can be superficial to serious

Placing protection

- Students should be encouraged to put the time in to gain the necessary experience and comfort level before attempting to lead 4th and 5th class rock
- Continued emphasis on placing solid protection in both ice and rock
 - Considering rock and ice quality
 - Considering actual placement
- Discourage long run-outs
- Emphasize placement of lots of protection

Running Belays

- Insure leaders know proper and appropriate use of a running belay
- Insure rope positions of strongest and weakest climbers are appropriate for the situation
- Consider renewed assessment of appropriate use of running belays for students and general use

Ice climbing

- Ice climbers should consider having at least one screw available at all times to tie off in case their belayer becomes disabled, even while top-roping
 - Gives ability to create temporary single screw anchor until other options are available

ONGOING LEADER TRAINING & EXPECTATIONS

- Standardize periodic leadership education expectations
- Provide structured approach to continued education
- Insure that leaders are not just left to fend for themselves
- Insure that leaders understand latest policies, procedures, techniques, expectations and resources
- Sustain continued communication with leaders regarding pertinent issues
- Request leaders report every incident and document all relevant information, even with incidents considered minor or insignificant, to enable club-wide learning and incident surveillance
 - Incidents which generated the potential for injury, lost party member, departing from safe route, or other hazards should be reported even if the party was fortunate enough to avoid hazard