



Outdoor Recreational Safety Tips



With the longer days of spring and summer, many may take advantage of a run, a hike or paddle in the lake, or a weekend adventure into the backwoods. We rarely head out for an outdoor adventure with the expectation that something may go wrong. Most times things do go well however, being prepared for the unexpected can mean the difference between a successful outcome and becoming a statistic.

The following tips will help ensure you are prepared for safely enjoying your favourite outdoor activity.

Planning Your Activity

- Ensure you are familiar with the route or area you are planning your outdoor activity in. Know the terrain and conditions; be sure you have the knowledge and skills to safely enjoy the activity. Stay within your limits. Obey all posted safety signs and warnings.
- Wear appropriate clothing and safety equipment.
- Do not depend solely on technology - equipment failure and lack of reception are possible in the outdoors. Carry a map and compass as backup.
- Pack survival items in the event of an unplanned emergency. Survival items can include: a working flashlight, fire making kit, signaling device (whistle or mirror), large orange plastic bag, extra food or water, extra clothing, Mylar blanket, first aid kit, pocket knife, sun protection, bear repellent or pepper spray.

On the Water

- Lifejackets or personal flotation devices (PFDs) are the most effective piece of safety equipment you can use while on the water, ensure you are wearing a properly fitted lifejacket or PFD.
- Be aware of cold water risks, the immediate effects of cold water immersion can be life-threatening. If you end up in the water, do everything you can to save your energy and body heat - swim only if you can join others or reach safety, do not swim to keep warm.
- Whether in a motorized pleasure craft, paddling or surfing test your equipment to ensure it is in working order. Know the rules of the waterways for the size of the watercraft.
- All operators of motorized pleasure craft used for recreational purposes must carry proof of competency on board, typically the *Pleasure Craft Operator Card*.
- Be aware of surroundings and hazards such as strong currents, hidden rocks/reefs, debris, gusty/lofty/onshore wind, and boaters or other water users.
- Check the tide currents. Watch the weather, know the environment, and respect your abilities.

In the Backwoods

- If you choose to go out hiking alone, complete a trip plan and leave it with a friend – A trip plan explains your destination, the route being taken, who is in the group and a return time. If individuals do not return as planned, the friend left the trip plan with can give the information to the police to initiate a search.
- When enjoying off-road vehicles in the backwoods, ensure your vehicle is well maintained and pack the necessary tools and gear. Know your limits, ride within your abilities, in a controlled manner and with common sense. Wear a helmet and proper protective equipment. Respect the environment and other trail users – slow down your bike or ATV when you meet hikers, bikers or horses on the trail.
- Always set and stick to turnaround times. Adjust your plan when circumstances, such as changes in weather or lack of daylight.
- Always be alert and pay attention to your surroundings. This will assist you in recognizing signs of animals (such as bears or cougars) and assist you in retracing the route should you become lost or need to turnaround.
- If you encounter a wild animal (i.e. bear, cougar, wolf), stop, speak in a calm tone, stand tall. Back away slowly, preferably in the direction you came from. Walk, do not run, keep your eye on the animal, but do not make direct eye contact, to allow observation of how it is reacting. Wave your arms, open your jacket or wave branches to make yourself look bigger versus appearing like prey.

Know What to Do if You Get Lost or Stranded

- Do not panic, stay calm and remain where you are. Avoid heading downhill or down gullies, as this can lead to thicker bush and more dangerous terrain.
- Help searchers find you. Use signalling devices – whistle blasts (x 3), lighting a fire, display an orange garbage bag. Animals will not be attracted to your signals. The most important thing is making yourself and your location visible to searchers.
- During the daylight, stay in the open. At night, build or find shelter.

Additional safety tips for a variety of outdoor activities can be found at *Adventure Smart*, a national program dedicated to encouraging Canadians and visitors to Canada to “Get informed and go outdoors” www.adventuresmart.ca/index.php.