

Club-Wide Safety Committee Recommendations - 2006

HIGH PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are three areas of recommendations that the committee deems of highest priority. These concepts need to be communicated to each activity committee, each leader, and each participant. These involve:

- SNOW TRAVEL
 - Over-reliance on ability to self arrest versus self belay
 - Decision on when to take out an ice axe
 - Glissading – judgment on when to use
 - Training on use of snowshoes on steep slopes
 - Getting weak party member down a steep snow slope
- LOOSE ROCK
- GROUP DYNAMICS
 - Party separation and the risk it represents
 - Expectations of party members
 - Importance of conditioning
 - Dealing with unsafe behavior

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- Rock and scramble destination ratings
- Reduce graduation pressure on leaders
- Rescue rope on all scramble and alpine outings

HIGH PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

SNOW TRAVEL

Over-reliance on ability to self arrest versus self belay

The ability to effectively conduct a successful self arrest when conditions require one are less than desirable. Quote from Jim Nelson: *When many people think of safe travel on snow they think of the Ice Axe, and Self-Arrest. While practicing self-arrest is certainly valuable, I might have it near the bottom of my list of important considerations for safe efficient travel on snow. Having a false sense of confidence and belief in the self-arrest has led to many accidents I believe. Self-arrest and safe snow travel are probably words that shouldn't be used together very often. Two ideas that might go well together are self-arrest and, desperate last chance maneuver.*

- Think of 30 degree hard snow slope as 5th class rock
- Will pick up speed such that you cannot arrest
- And in general, self arrest is not 100% reliable

- Course instruction should place more emphasis on safe snow travel, proper footwork, proper self belay, wearing of crampons.
- Emphasize that self arrest is last ditch maneuver, and not highly reliable
- Use stories of experienced people
- Stress use of crampons
- Use anti-balling devices on crampons
- Avoid these steep snow slopes if no ice axe available
- Continue to evaluate every snow slope you travel, consider what the consequences of an un-checked slip would be
- Emphasize self belay or other techniques to stay attached to slope
- Discuss snowshoes and when to take them off
- On field trips, figure out a way for students to safely practice self belay on steep snow slopes
- Develop a clinic for instructors on snow travel and self arrest

Decision of when to take out an ice axe

Ice axes are required equipment for nearly all scramble and climb outings, yet many times they are still carried in the packs when they should be in use. Need to stress the importance ice axe use on appropriate terrain, even for short sections.

- Take out the ice axe before you need it
- Should break out the axe if any question
- Really understand the seriousness of these snowy terrain situations
- Take out for short sections
- Near end of climb folks get tired and need to be extra vigilant
- If you see danger, share concern with the others
- Stop and talk to team members about decision
- Stop and help each other pull out ice axe or other gear from packs
- Trekking poles are very popular and useful, but are not a substitute for the ice axe

Glissading – judgment on when to use

Stress the dangers of glissading in all courses. Glissading is generally done for fun and can save some time, but must only be done on moderate terrain where absolute control can be achieved.

- Ask yourself, what are the odds you could stop glissade and self arrest?
- Don't glissade where there is any chance of losing control
- Stress proper position of ice axe (don't stab the leg)
- Stress danger of glissade on all slopes without a clear safe run out
- One must be able to see the entire slope
- Never glissade while tied into each other
- Never glissade with crampons

Training on use of snowshoes on steep slopes

Scramble and basic students/graduates find themselves on trips in winter conditions where use of snowshoes is required. Need to make sure that our all of our courses teach the proper use of snowshoes. It can take some skill to know when and how to use

snowshoes in certain conditions that are likely to be found on winter scrambles or basic approaches during the winter months.

- Types of snowshoes appropriate for Cascade/Olympic conditions
- Use of snowshoes in icy conditions such as under trees or after thaw and freeze
- Traversing techniques
- Downclimbing and backing down slopes
- Proper kicking technique to avoid slippage
- Don't underestimate dangers of moderate terrain
- When not to use snowshoes
- Make sure this is covered in scramble and climbing courses
- Make sure that folks have this skill before going on a winter scramble

Getting weak party member down a steep snow slope where terrain is beyond the ability of the participant

- Back down the slope – two hands on the ice axe
- Short rope by leader
- Belay and lower
- Do not try to glissade in tandem, no such thing as controlled glissade with multiple persons tied together with weak party member
- Consider use of crampons

LOOSE ROCK

The Cascades and Olympics are notorious for areas of loose rock. This danger is present on scrambles, rock climbs, alpine climbs and glacier climbs. Really need to emphasize the dangers of loose rock present and rockfall potential on these outings.

- Emphasize problems of loose rock at lectures
- Demonstrate technique of checking for loose rock at field trips
- Pushing down on rock instead of pulling out
- Expand sections on this topic in Freedom 8
- Emphasize keeping people close together
- Good communication with, and location awareness between all climbers (in your party and other parties)
- Wear helmets
- Limit party size
- Limit climbing above each other as much as possible
- Develop awareness
- Share stories about near misses and accidents

GROUP DYNAMICS

Party separation and the risk it represents

Renewed emphasis with all leaders and participants that party separation where one person is left alone is not acceptable. Every member of a party should make sure that party separation does not occur. Party separation means lack of communication, risk of members getting lost, and inability of leader to monitor condition of all members in the group.

- Set up a buddy system so no one is ever left alone
- Everyone should be within voice contact of someone else
- Do not allow isolation of slowest & weakest member
- Leader or strong assistant should be next to struggling or slower party
- Have strong person as designated sweep or have strong person in trail lead and leader stay in the back
- Stay with the group

Expectations of party members

Putting together and pulling off a successful outing with a wide variety of abilities and skill levels is a challenge both for the leader and the participants. Leaders have primary responsibility for the success of the group, but each individual also has the obligation to contribute to the success of the outing.

Expectation of leaders:

- In the end, leaders must get everyone safely back to the trailhead
- Clearly set out expectations for potential participants
- Screen participants if appropriate (strenuous trip, fast pace, etc.)
- Develop a party that is compatible (speed, temperament)
- Recognize that party speed and ability will be that of the weakest member
- Once a party is organized and on the outing, leader must deal with the situation
- Be a teacher, set a good example
- Find out which party members don't have experience
- Don't allow party separation (use buddy system)
- Might have to turn around sooner than planned

Expectation of participants:

- Clearly understand your abilities and speed
- Make sure your abilities match up to leader expectations
- Take yourself off outings that are not within your ability
- Recognize your actions affect all other party members
- Don't allow party separation (use buddy system)

Deal with problem individuals

- Develop and enforce a system to remove individuals from the activity or membership that violate these expectations

Importance of conditioning

Conditioning of party members is one of the largest contributors of party success. This is a real safety issue. Need to develop and enforce strict criteria for conditioning expectations for the various types of outings. There are trips that are appropriate for those with less than desirable conditioning, but those outings are limited and should be clearly designated as such.

- Proposal that person should be able to carry 35 pound pack and make it up Mt. Si to the benches in under 2 hours, with 2.5 hours maximum cutoff (or equivalent).
- Consider periodic conditioning evaluation, could be from trip leaders on recent climb or actual conditioning test if haven't been out in some time.
- All activities need to have a conditioning component to graduation requirements.
- Students should have clear communication as to what their conditioning is and what types of trips are appropriate for them as they work on getting in better shape.
- Develop and provide outings that are appropriate for folks working on conditioning (use Cascade Bicycle ratings as a model).

Dealing with unsafe behavior

Need to develop objective and clear criteria for dealing with participants that exhibit unsafe behavior

- Document the criteria used to evaluate behavior
- Must deal with difficult situations early, don't let them fester or pass them on to others
- Unsafe behavior should not be tolerated
- Drop people that exhibit this behavior from the club

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Rock and scramble destination ratings

Put a team together to analyze and develop sub-ratings for rock climbs and winter scrambles. For example, there may be rock routes that are not appropriate for new leaders and less experienced parties due to objective hazards such as loose rock. As an example, the basic route of Chair Peak has a reputation for loose rock, but many new leaders may not know this. If there was a loose rock rating or designation, new leaders could better discern which routes are appropriate for them. With winter scrambles, routes vary greatly by objective hazard, avalanche terrain and exposure. For example, Red Mountain (Snoqualmie Pass) is quite steep and prone to avalanches during the winter, and is not an appropriate destination for some new leaders or new students. A rating system that differentiates these outings would help new leaders and participants so they can choose destinations that are appropriate for their skill and experience level. Other considerations:

- The rating could consider time of year
- Consider loose rock component/rating
- Consider equipment needed
- Appropriate for beginner versus experienced leaders or members

Reduce graduation pressure on leaders

Leaders doing the good thing trying to get people graduated, this puts pressure on getting folks through the climb and pressure to have large party size.

- Choose less serious routes for tentative students.

- Limit party size on rock climbs
- Lower the Mountaineers footprint on these high visibility rock routes
- Mountaineers need to be leaders in setting the right example

Rescue rope on scramble and alpine outings

A small rescue rope, size 8mm x 30 m or 7mm x 75', can make a big difference on the successful outcome of a scramble or alpine party. These ropes are very light, don't take up much room and can give the party many options when needed. Scrambles by design do not require technical equipment such as a rope, but many scrambles are seldom done or done in an exploratory fashion and route finding is a significant challenge and being off-route is a common occurrence. Also, route conditions can change dramatically with the weather.

- Used for hand rappels when needed
- Helpful when getting off-route and extraction is required
- Helpful getting out of a jam such as wet and mossy slopes
- Can be lowered to a party stranded on an exposed situation
- Provide a measure of security to the climbing party
- Be standard equipment of every scramble or alpine leader