# Emergency Communication Devices

Today, it is industry standard for outdoor education organizations and professional guide services to carry emergency communication devices on trips outside cell phone range. In case of an accident resulting in a law suit, The Mountaineers would be held to this industry standard. It is irrelevant that we are an all-volunteer organization – we would be held to the same standard. This does not automatically mean that we have to follow the industry standard. Activity committees need to be aware of what the industry standards are for their activity, and consciously make decisions whether or not to follow these industry standards.

The Seattle Climbing Committee believes that Seattle climb leaders should carry an emergency communication device on all trips outside of cell phone range. While we teach self-reliance to the degree possible, it would be difficult to justify the lack of an emergency communication device if an accident could have been prevented or if the consequences of an accident could have been mitigated by an emergency communication device. Being able to call for help can mean the difference between life or death in case of an accident.

## Definitions

* Phones
  + Cell phones – very unreliable in the mountains
  + SAT phones – coverage is variable and expensive
  + Satellite hotspots – coverage is variable and expensive
* Personal Locator Beacon (PLB)
  + Relay SOS message and location
  + Use government satellite system (more reliable than private systems)
  + Economical
  + Transmission 3 – 12 times stronger than SEND devices
* SEND Devices
  + Allow GPS tracking and send SOS message
  + SPOT - Weak transmission and SAT network less reliable
  + DeLorme InReach - Stronger transmission and more reliable network

For the purposes of this document the term “emergency communication devices” (ECDs) will refer to both PLBs and SEND devices but not to phones.

## Objectives

The overall objective is to minimize The Mountaineers’ legal exposure by implementing a new policy that strongly encourages Seattle climb leaders to carry an emergency communication device on all trips outside of cell phone range. This new policy is to be implemented gradually with the goal to have at least one ECD on Seattle sponsored climbs by the end of fiscal year 2017.

* Incentivize climb leaders to lead more climbs by reimbursing all or part of the purchase cost of an ECD based on the number of climbs they lead
* Achieve 99% coverage of Seattle Mountaineers’ climbs with at least one ECD by the end of fiscal year 2017
* Provide ECDs to climb leaders who are not covered by the incentive program (new climb leaders, climb leaders who lead less than three climbs etc.)

## Proposal

* **Incentive Program.** The Climbing Committee will incentivize climb leaders to lead more climbs for the Seattle Climbing Program and encourage climb leaders to own an ECD of their choice. This includes both PLBs which are subscription free, and SEND devices which require a subscription fee. The Mountaineers will NOT be pay for the subscription fee.
  + Climb leaders who lead 3 or more climbs (climbs which qualify for student credit) in a given climbing season qualify for reimbursement of $100 for the purchase of an ECD.
  + Climb leaders who lead 6 or more climbs (climbs which qualify for student credit) in a given climbing season qualify for reimbursement of the entire cost of an ECD up to $350.
  + Course leaders, (sub-)committee chairs and course administrators (any of the Seattle Climbing Courses) qualify for reimbursement of the entire cost for an ECD up to $350.
  + Climb leaders have to purchase the device first and then can request reimbursement with receipt and proof of the climbs they led. Course leaders can request reimbursement after their course is completed. Requests have to be approved by the climbing chair or the climbing committee treasurer.
* **Device Lending Program.** The Climbing committee will purchase 10 PLBs (NOT SEND Devices) that climb leaders can borrow on an as needed basis. This is to ensure that climb leaders who do not qualify for the incentive program still have access to an ECD.
  + The PLBs are stored in a lock box with a changeable code in the basement of The Mountaineers building.
  + A volunteer is responsible for managing the lock box, keeping track of devices and changing the code.
  + Climb leaders who want to borrow a device need to fill out an online form and email it to the volunteer who gives out the code to the climb leaders and a device identification number. The code should not be given more than three days before the climb.
  + Climb leaders are responsible for returning the device promptly (no later than three days after the climb). They need to email the volunteer when they return the device.
  + The volunteer needs to regularly verify that all devices have been returned. During peak season this should be once a week.
  + The volunteer needs to change the code for the lock box frequently, at least once a month.
  + The volunteer is rewarded with an ECD of their choice at the end of the climbing season.
  + Climb leaders who fail to return their borrowed device promptly more than three times will be removed from the climbing roster. Not returning the device at all is considered stealing and will be reported to the police.

## Financial Impact

* Fiscal Year 2016: The purchase of 10 PLBs is roughly $2400.
* Fiscal Year 2017
  + Stats for 2015
    - 219 climb leaders total
    - 64 led climbs in 2015: 24 led 1-2 climbs, 21 led 3+ climbs, 19 led 6+ climbs
  + Assumptions for 2016
    - 40 will lead 3+ climbs
    - 30 will lead 6+ climbs
    - 20 course leaders and subcommittee chairs
    - Assume full cost of a device at $350 (this is conservative)
    - 40% already have a ECD
  + Calculations based on above assumptions
    - 3+ climbs: 24 x $100 = $2400
    - 6+ climbs: 18 x $350 = $6300
    - Course Leaders: 12 x $350 = $4200
    - Total: $12900
* Beyond 2017
  + Assume ~15 new climb leaders each year
  + Assume 10 of them lead 3+ climbs and 5 of them lead 6+ climbs
  + Assume 30% already own an ECD by the time they become climb leader
  + Long-term annual cost: ~ $2000

## Open Issues

* Can staff manage the lock box?
* Tax implications?

## Next Steps

* Discuss with Leann Arend and John Jecker (branch treasurer)