Winter Safety Awareness

**by George Tkach**

Preparing for a safe and successful ski outing requires the proper equipment.  Bring proper consumables (water, trail snacks, sun screen, wax, handkerchief, and toilet tissue) and appropriate equipment related to the event, temperatures, and.  Use the following as a checklist to remind yourself. Carrying a charged cell phone( if in coverage area) may be a good idea.

* **Minimally prepared skier on county trails or in mild conditions:**
  + Skis, Bindings, Boots, and Poles
  + Wax and Cork or Maxi-glide
  + Wool outer Sox and poly inner Sox
  + Light Ski Gloves with leather palms
  + Layered Clothing
  + Cap, Ear Gaiter or Ear Muffs
  + One filled Water Bottle
  + Sunglasses and Sun Screen
  + Whistle on a cord
  + Scraper to remove clumped snow.
* **Nicely prepared skier on state trails or in moderate conditions:**
  + All of the above
  + Fanny Pack or Backpack
  + Second Water Bottle
  + Nourishing Trail Snacks
  + Map and Compass (eyeglasses?)
  + Knife (Swiss army is best)
  + Matches (in waterproof container)
  + First Aid Kit (Ibuprofen)
  + Small Flashlight
  + Heavy Ski Gloves
  + Glove Liners
  + Face Mask or Vaseline
  + Polar Fleece Ski Jacket
  + Polypropylene Underwear
  + Ski Pants
  + Neck Gaiter
  + Wind Breaker
  + Hand/Foot Warmers
  + Space Blanket
  + Red Wax to help you walk out.
* **Fully Prepared Skier on national trails or possibly severe conditions:**
  + All of the above
  + Third Water Bottle
  + Hood for Polar Fleece Ski Jacket or
  + Down Parka
  + Heavy Ski Mittens
  + Leg Gaiters
  + Splint for skis or poles
  + Duct tape and Wire
  + Extra Batteries for flashlight
  + Fire Starter and Cup
  + Tent or large Plastic Bag

It is very important that you warm up your leg muscles to get blood flowing prior to heavy activity to remove lactic acid and preclude cramps.  Stretch your leg and shoulder tendons immediately before any strenuous exercise and use Ibuprofen before starting and after completion to reduce cramping. A serious leg cramp in the field can disable you and as a minimum will slow your group.

Carrying water bottles and skiing or hiking items in the field is a breeze with a roomy fanny pack or a light daypack or both.  Store frequently used items like wax and snacks in external zippered pockets (carry your keys in an internal zippered pocket because they will surely be lost otherwise) and larger items internally. Fill cleaned water bottles with fresh water or power drink (if you react adversely to extremely high iron or mineral content found in local water, bring your own bottled spring water). Carry jackets in outer buckled straps when not worn. Don’t forget your sunglasses!

**A safe and enjoyable skiing outing requires knowledge and planning of the following:**

* **Skier Level-** Understand what level of skier you are and don’t take chances just to follow the leader or the group.  Walk around the obstacle as extraction of an injured skier can spoil everyone’s day, not just your own.
* **Activity Training-** Obtain maximum training practicable and take refresher training. Several sources for instruction in skiing, waxing, and stride technique are available through North Stars, Hennepin Parks, etc.
* **Equipment Quality-** Obtain the best equipment that you can afford and more importantly maintain that equipment so that it continues to perform as designed for years to come. Glide waxing, cleaning skis and boots, storing skis in a cool place, lubricating bindings, washing clothing, buying moisture wicking clothing to help keep you warm, using your head as your thermal valve, and checking your gear for wear replacement.
* **Knowledge of Activity and Area-** Be well informed about skiing in general and event requirements in specific. Research the general area and specific ski locations prior to arrival.  Are there any shelters on the trails selected?  Are maps available?  Is a pass required?  Help your trip leader do research before departing.
* **Buddy System-** Keeping track of one another can save a life and it may be yours.
* **Knowledge of Activity and Area-** Be well informed about skiing in general and event requirements in specific. Research the general area and specific ski locations prior to arrival.  Are there any shelters on the trails selected?  Are maps available?  Is a pass required?  Help your trip leader do research before departing.
* **Equipment in the field-** Carry items in a roomy fanny pack or a light daypack or both.  Store frequently used items like wax and snacks in external zippered pockets (carry your keys in an internal zippered pocket because they will be lost otherwise) and larger items internally. Fill cleaned water bottles with hot, tasted water and carry tightly closed bottles upside down so the neck freezes last. Insulated pouches really do work. Carry jackets in outer buckled straps when not worn. Share extra clothing and consumables to help needy members.
* **Consumables –** Determine how much water and fuel you require for each hour of heavy activity to continue safe participation.  Water requirement means water!  Would you put orange juice in your car battery?  Other liquids like Gatorade and fruit juices should be treated as fuel inputs to supplement your water intake. Some snack foods may not be helpful for quick energy, but chocolate, gorp, and dried fruits are excellent sources in the field.  Drink water and eat snacks in small amounts about three times more frequently than you think you should and always before needed. If tired, ask the group leader to take a rest stop to restore fuel and water.
* **Knowledge of Field Safety-** Be able to visually diagnose early symptoms in your self as well as your friends.  Know how to treat hypothermia by covering, hypoglycemia with sucrose, blisters with band aides, exhaustion by rest and return, etc.  Ski in groups of three or more. Communicate to others when making a potty stop and as you leave the trail, mark the direction the group is going so you will not get lost when you come back out.
* **Physical Condition-** Be in your best physical condition for the level of activity that you are planning. Anything less is short-changing your self and your fellow trip members. Inform your leader through the waiver form of any medical conditions. Start slowly on day one and then really go later on.  Word to the Wise – Exercise!
* **Sufficient Rest-** Sufficient sleep prior to and during the trip will help you enjoy your outing and that of your fellow club members as well.  A rested mind will help with decision making in difficult situations and in coping with extreme weather conditions. Sleep helps ward off altitude sickness. Don’t keep other members awake when they want to sleep. NSSTC Rule 24 about being asleep by 1030 really means lights out and quiet hours if requested by other members.  If you wish more conducive sleeping conditions, ask your roommates to turn off lights and to be quiet.  If they will not comply, they must leave the room or cabin, not you.  Get your rest!
* **Satisfactory Health-** If you are suffering from serious cold or flu symptoms, you probably should elect to not participate in the trip. One contagious person on a trip can pass their malady on to several other unsuspecting and unprepared members. Medical assistance may be hard to locate in a strange area and lack of same may lead to potentially dangerous complications. If you become seriously ill on a trip, try to quarantine yourself from all other members including your roommate. If you are still a well person when a trip member is seriously ill, isolate yourself from the infected member to the best of your ability.  Politeness does not count here!

**Winter Dangers**

Now that winter is here, we musat be aware of Frostbite and Hypothermia as they are serious yet easily prevented. The best prevention is of course to remain warm with sufficient food, liquids, exercise, and warm clothing.  The best treatment of frostbite is to gently re-warm the affected body part by placing it, if possible, against a warm body part (e.g., placing hands under arms), by warming with lukewarm water, or with warmed blankets.  He or she should then be treated by a doctor if skin is weeping.  The most important treatment of hypothermia is to make a person warm and dry by moving the person to a warmer location and wrapping them in a warm blanket to stop further heat loss. You can also use your own body heat to keep the person warm by gently lying beside  the victim or offer warm liquids.  He or she must be  treated by a doctor in a well-equipped emergency room as soon as possible.

**Your Responsibilities in the Field in winter include:**

* Having received proper training prior to the event(NSSTC conditioning and ski training courses) and brushing up with refresher training, books, and tapes.  Start slow and then really go.
* Bringing appropriate equipment related to the event, temperatures, and extent(check trip requirements list)
* Having it at home does not count except in the game "The man who dies with the most toys wins".
* Bringing proper consumables (water, trail snacks, sun screen, wax, handkerchief, and toilet tissue, etc.).
* Realizing your own limitations (relate to trip leader so that splinter groups may be organized proactively).
* Following Club guidelines such as skiing in groups of three or more or wearing a helmet when cycling, etc.
* Keeping leaders aware of where you are going and when you are coming back especially in cold weather.
* Knowing that ultimately you are the only one responsible for "you"(check your current energy level, ability, water and food supply, and map before blindly following the group).  Discretion works when safety is at stake!

**Remember, Safety Awareness is not a process, it is a state of mind!**