



GETTING STARTED

BACKCOUNTRY READY

Proper preparation?
Your life depends on it

BY DAVID WEBB
WITH ADVENTURE SMART

Canada's search and rescue organizations are overworked—particularly in British Columbia, where the amount of SAR calls is greater than the rest of the country combined. That's why Adventure Smart started in the West. Now national, with representation in every province and territory, Adventure Smart's goal is to reduce the number and severity of search and rescue calls through education, training and information.

Sandra Riches, BC Adventure Smart coordinator, has been there since foundation 14 years ago.

"We want people to think before they go. To think about how to deal with issues as they arise and be consistent no matter what season or sport," she says. Riches explains the three T's: Trip Planning (study your route and weather; leave behind a note), Training (Do I have the skills? The fitness? Can I use my equipment properly?) and Taking the essentials ("So many people go out with just some water and their phone," says Riches). Once those aspects are covered, Riches explains there are more commonalities to many SAR calls. "People often don't take certain things into consideration as much as they should... like the time of day they head out—when will the sun set? And then there's just the idea that 'it won't happen to me.'"

The latter has been lately fuelled by social media posts—sanitized images of seemingly unprepared people atop mountain summits, encouraging a next wave of unprepared hikers. Hence, one of Adventure Smart's newest initiatives is working with social media influencers to include safety messaging alongside their outdoorsy snaps.

Riches has even reached out to people post-rescue to offer advice and resources to help them get outdoors again—with confidence and skills. "Some have even become ambassadors for us," she says.

Trip Planning

Proper preparation consists of four elements: plan your travel route, know your terrain and conditions, check the weather (including sunrise/sunset) and finally, always fill-out and leave behind a trip plan—in case your adventure goes sideways. "Leaving a trip plan is critical. This gives the SAR somewhere to start and reduces the severity of a call," explains Riches. "It could be a glorified post-it left on your fridge. Or even an Instagram selfie at the trailhead, with your trip details below."

The best trip plans include the names and ages of all members of your party, along with any relevant medical conditions. Further, include the activity details (canoeing, hiking, biking, etc.) along with your destination and planned route. Also include your planned trip duration, with departure and return

PRE-TRIP CHECKLIST

- Travel route planned
- Knowledge of terrain/conditions/daylight
- Weather conditions verified
- Training acquired
- Trip plan completed

ESSENTIAL GEAR CHECKLIST

- Flashlight/headlamp
- Fire-starting kit (waterproof matches/fire steel and tinder)
- Signalling device (horn/whistle)
- Extra food and water/water filter
- Extra weather-protective clothing
- Navigation and communication devices
- First-aid kit
- Emergency blanket/shelter
- Knife
- Sun and bug protection
- Equipment specific to your activity



THE LOW DOWN

dates, as well as the method of travel and planned overall distance as well as details about the colour/make of your tent(s), your vehicle(s) and watercraft(s), if relevant. Finally, include emergency contact details—cellphone, satellite communication device info and/or VHF.

Seem like a lot to remember? Download a Trip Plan card from AdventureSmart.ca and make it easy.

In Case of Emergency

Adventure Smart suggests these five actions if your situation goes sour. Don't Panic: Try to keep a calm, positive mindset. STOP: A simple acronym for Sit, Think, Observe and Plan. Seek Shelter: Keeping warm and dry is vital. Stay Put: If you're

lost or have called for help, staying put is the best practice for a speedy recovery by SAR. Think Big, Think Contrast, Think in Threes: Need to signal sans satellite device or cellphone service? Think big/contrast—create a ground-to-air signal by building the letter "V" or "SOS" in rocks or sticks, at least three metres in size. And think in threes—three whistle blasts, three mirror flashes, three horn blasts, three rock piles or three signal fires all indicate distress. X

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

If you have cell service, the phone number is the same whether you're in trouble on-pavement or off: 911. They'll redirect to SAR if required.