



**You and  
your group  
are lost  
deep in the  
woods.**

**(pretending  
of course)**

**Ask  
yourself...**

# Are You Prepared for Winter Emergencies?

*by Jennifer Totten*

**Scenario:** Your Scout troop is heading out for a winter weekend camp. Four cars have left already; the last is fifteen minutes late. The snow starts falling as the final car, filled with Scouts, leaves the parking lot and tries to catch up to the others in the troop. With each passing minute the snow falls harder and the road gets more difficult to drive on.

It gets dark earlier than usual because of the falling snow, which starts to blow hard across the road. Camp is only 30 minutes away, so everyone agrees it will probably be all right to continue. Ten minutes later, away from the city and other traffic, the car skids off the road and into a ditch.

What do you do? All of the camping equipment, including sleeping bags and stoves, is in the other cars.

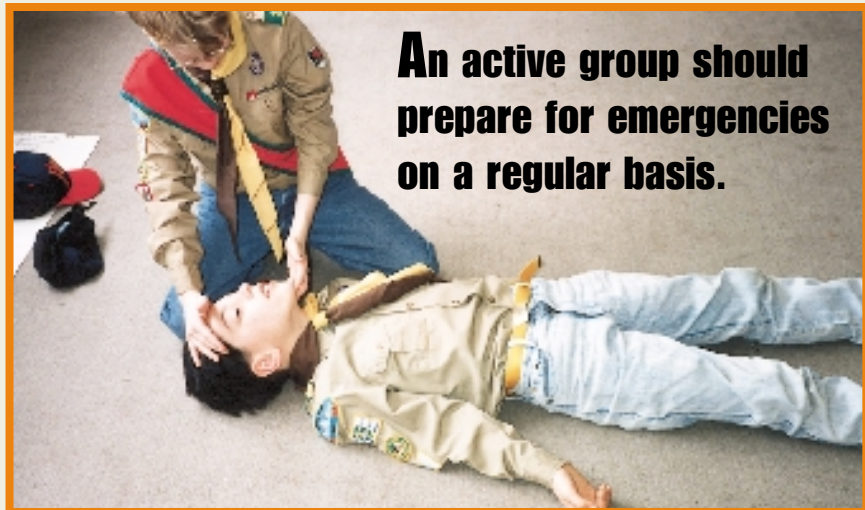
Emergencies such as this one are common in Canada because of our climate. The ever-present possibility of a similar drama provides many program opportunities.

Discuss with your Scouts what these people did right and wrong.

What steps could they have taken to either avoid the crisis or improve their survival chances? (Use this article with last month's "Cold Weather Survival" feature on p. 4, Dec. 1999.)

### **What Constitutes an Emergency?**

Winter emergencies can appear unexpectedly at any time: a Cub breaks an arm while skiing, a Ventur-



**An active group should  
prepare for emergencies  
on a regular basis.**

Photo: Doug Erickson

er gets burned when his stove explodes, or a Beaver gets lost on a day outing.

An emergency involves any dangerous occasion that calls for immediate action and quick thinking. When we think of emergencies, most people picture blood, pain and someone grabbing a first aid kit. But it might involve a youth falling into a shallow, partly open stream in spring, getting his entire pack wet, including his sleeping bag.

Emergencies can happen when you have youth members engaging in any sort of activity. They include:

- Burns
- Cuts
- Scrapes
- Broken arms or legs
- Sprained ankles
- Rashes
- Food allergies
- Asthma attacks.

Other emergencies cover wider issues; some of these aren't so easy to prepare for and may include:

- A Cub's cold turns to bronchitis or pneumonia during a weekend bicycle hike.
- Lost kids.
- A hole in the canoe three days before the end of a wilderness trip.
- Forgotten food or sleeping bags or clothes (such as rain gear).
- Wet kids and no dry firewood.
- Someone forgetting warm winter boots for winter camp.
- Medication left in Dad's car instead of the leader's hand.
- A racoon or bear destroying your full weekend's food supply at 2:00 a.m. Saturday morning.

### Emergency, Crisis or Difficulty?

It's relatively simple to prepare for some emergencies (e.g. a fire alarm going off at your meeting hall). Other difficulties are less easy to anticipate. For example, what should you do if a Scout has an appendicitis attack at camp? You've got to get them to a hospital and you can't hesitate for any reason.

Why not gather your leadership team together, and brainstorm together making a list of possible emergencies, and how to resolve them? After you have a list, turn it into a problem-solving program for your Cubs, Scouts or Venturers. If the problem deals with first aid, set up a

first aid relay race. If it involves rescue skills, tie it into a knot-tying and pioneering skills evening. Build an obstacle course and get older Scouts to teach younger ones the fine art of compass work.

Think up several interesting scenarios to make the emergency more realistic for everyone, then discuss what measures to take in sixes, patrols or as an entire company. Here's an example: "We're on our annual week-long Venturer canoe trip. There's thunder and lightning all around us. It starts pouring rain as we get caught in really bad rapids. The lead canoe dumps — the one with our only stove and matches — and we lose everything. What do we do?"

Choose several managerial emergencies that might challenge members of a Sixers' Council or Court of Honour. Here's an example: A fist fight breaks out in a patrol or six on the Friday night of a long weekend camp. The group is really torn apart. What should you do? Go home? How can you resolve the crisis? (Ask for 10 solutions.)

If someone suggests heading off future difficulties by planning a communications theme meeting filled with team-building exercises that foster better communication, fantastic!

### Keep Calm and Quiet

An excited voice and panicked appearance will send a shockwave through a group of already-scared Scouts. But you can help your Scouts prepare for life-threatening emergen-

cies even if one person is screaming hysterically.

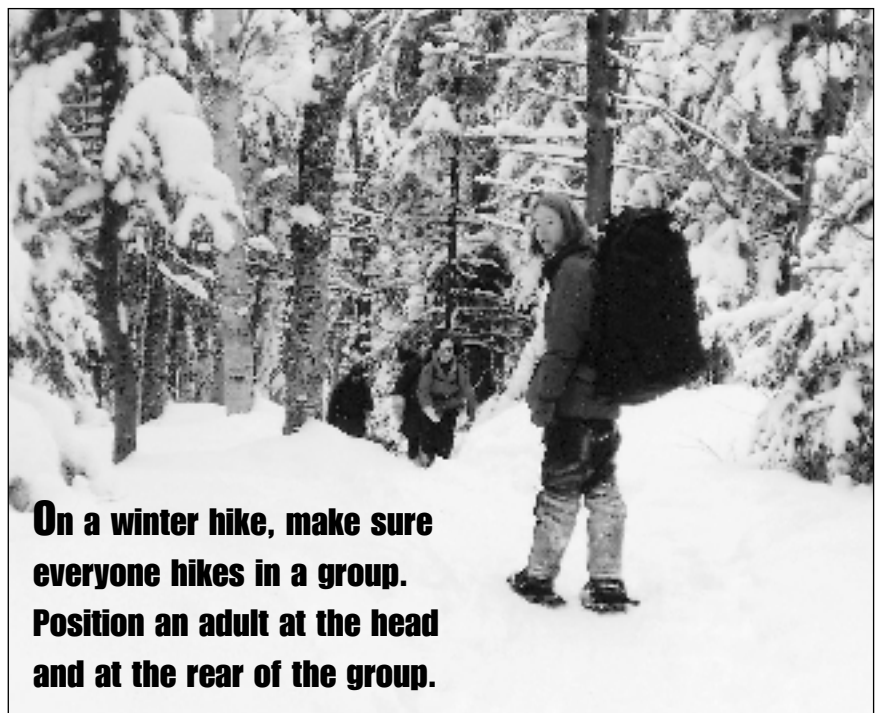
How? Speak in a calm voice, and do something constructive. If only one person acts cool, calm and composed, it will affect everyone else.

Here's a related activity. Set up a first aid relay race with a victim on the ground (an older youth or adult), and a youth who must bandage his arm. The victim is allowed to yell and scream and wave only his uninjured arm around, while a rescuer bandages the injured arm. The victim must try to get the rescuer as flustered as possible. If a rescuer stays calm, speaks slowly and bandages the arm without getting overly excited, he runs back to his team for the next person to run down and have his turn. If a rescuer starts reacting to the victim's panicked yells, his team loses a point.

### Be Prepared: What It Means

Any preparation will make youth and leaders better able to handle a crisis, even if it's completely unexpected. Being prepared means:

- Filing "outing plans" with parents and group committee chairs so they can always find you in an emergency.
- Thinking ahead, so one leader has a few extra pairs of dry socks that can be loaned to someone with wet feet.
- Knowing the location of the nearest medical facility, and the quickest route there.



**On a winter hike, make sure everyone hikes in a group. Position an adult at the head and at the rear of the group.**

Photo: 10th Kingston Venturers

- ❑ Teaching youth members the proper way to care for and use stoves, lanterns, saws, axes, knives and canoes.
- ❑ Sitting down as a team and thinking about the dangerous possibilities for all activities.
- ❑ Taking as much training as possible (e.g. outdoor skills workshops, first aid courses, boating safety courses and winter camping courses).

### Program Opportunities

Being prepared opens up a wide range of program activities for your pack, troop or company. You can start off by building first aid kits, stretchers from coats, and snowshoes (see Swap Shop, p. 18); then you can run a relay race that involves carrying a first aid victim across a snow field while everyone wears their snowshoes.

You can make snow shelters and spend a night outside living in it at camp. You can practise ice rescues or make improvised sleeping bags or fire-starters.

### Questions to Consider

Do you have multiple first aid kits on hand? Does everyone know where

they are? Do you have evacuation practice drills once or twice a year to make sure everyone knows what to do if your meeting hall catches fire? Do you periodically update your first aid kit depending on activities?

## When you encounter emergencies, don't panic.

### A few extra seconds of clear thinking can save many outings from disaster.

(Beavers on picnics might need more bandages, while a wilderness hike with Rovers demands a different set of requirements.)

Do as many leaders and parent-volunteers as possible have basic first aid training? Do you have back-up plans for bad weather? Do you use the buddy system at all times and do head counts very hour or so? Is rock climbing really a good idea if only one

leader can go along with your youth? Does everyone wear a proper personal floatation device for all water activities? Do all leaders know what medication to administer to a youth with diabetes?

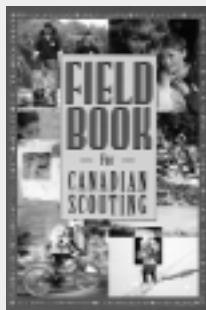
Do you carry accident report forms in your first aid kit? Do you know what your campsite looks like before you arrive? Are there adequate facilities (kybos, running water, firewood, shelter) for your group? Did someone listen to the weather so you know what to expect? Does everyone have a hat and sunscreen for hot summer activities? Did you bring along enough stoves and lanterns and tents and coolers and tarps and...? Does one of your leaders carry a cellular phone for emergency calls? Who has it and where is it?

### Be Prepared, But...

The bottom line: Be prepared. But recognize that you can't possibly be prepared for every emergency. Life is risky. You can take the training, think things through clearly and objectively, and even have several doctors present at your camp, but you'll encounter emergencies. When this happens, don't panic. Several deep breaths and a few extra seconds of clear thinking can save many outings from disaster. ^

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## SEE THE ALL-NEW FIELDBOOK



Scouts Canada's *Fieldbook for Canadian Scouting* features many chapters dealing with emergencies and how to avoid them.

You will find tips on winter camping, building fires, cold water survival and orienteering. You'll also learn how to avoid snowblindness, and identify poison oak and poison ivy.

The *Fieldbook for Canadian Scouting*: get yours today.



Photo: John Reinhold

**"Let's perfect our knot-tying before we make that emergency stretcher on our outing."**