



EMERGENCIES

TIPS FOR LEADERS

The best way to handle an emergency is to start by planning ahead. Bushwalking NSW has a handy checklist - [trip planning](https://www.bushwalkingnsw.org.au/plan) - <https://www.bushwalkingnsw.org.au/plan>

Think about the risks inherent in an activity and work out how to avoid, manage, or minimize the risk. For more information see the SBC document – [Risk Management](#).

BUSH SAFETY DOS AND DON'TS

A checklist prepared by the **Bushwalkers Wilderness Rescue Squad** (BWRS):

DO	Give all group NAMES and complete route details of WHERE you are going to someone who cares. Include details of what equipment you're taking, where your car(s) will be parked and their description.
DO	Tell them WHEN you are LEAVING and RETURNING and anyone's SPECIAL medical conditions e.g. diabetes, asthma.
DO	Notify them of your SAFE RETURN.
DO	Take the correct MAP and COMPASS. Know how to use them. If you also use electronic navigation, make sure devices will have sufficient charge for the trip and/or a power pack for longer trips.
DO	Take appropriate clothing and footwear. Always take a windproof and waterproof JACKET and clothing that can keep you WARM WHEN WET e.g. wool and definitely NOT jeans.
DO	Take appropriate FOOD and WATER for the conditions and trip.
DO	Take waterproof MATCHES and some SPARE food in case of delays. Always take some cold snack food such as dried fruit, nuts or chocolate for quick energy.
DON'T	Overestimate your abilities. Always ALLOW TIME for the unexpected e.g. thick scrub, cliff lines.
DON'T	Go faster than the slowest member of your group. At regular intervals do a HEAD COUNT of your group.
DON'T	SPLIT up your walking group (except for below) during the trip. There is safety in numbers.
DON'T	Leave an injured person ALONE in the bush. A walking group of THREE or more will allow one to look after the injured while the other goes for help.
DON'T	keep moving when LOST. Find a campsite nearby with water that will be visible from a helicopter. Wave vigorously at any helicopters; they are probably looking for you!
DON'T	forget if you are OVERDUE to PHONE home as soon as your mobile phone is able or the first Police Station you come to.

The procedure you follow in an emergency will depend on the situation, and there can be no set of perfect guidelines. As a club, we have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of a large group with extensive experience. It is often said that it is easy to be knowledgeable about an event after it has happened; but hindsight is also a great teacher – reviewing incidents or ‘near misses’ is a useful in learning more about managing emergency situations.

Part of planning an activity should be to check weather reports and to make sure that the group has suitable equipment (clothes, shelter, food, water). Even with the best planning, the unexpected may happen, such as flood, fire, snow, excessive heat or unexpected difficult terrain.

Walk planning should also consider alternate routes – sometimes called ‘escape routes’. These are routes which can be taken should it be necessary to abandon the planned walk.

In the case of an emergency, the basic principles are:

- Assess the situation - is it dangerous to proceed, do you have food and water, enough shelter, do you know where you are, etc
- Identify the alternatives - can you stay another day, change the route, return, use an escape route or shorter route home, etc
- Organise help if needed - PLB, mobile phone, some kind of signal, etc
- Continue to assess the situation and be prepared to re-asses if conditions change.

PARTICIPANTS

Know where you are going, when you are expected back, and what conditions you should expect.

Notify a family member or other responsible person who is not participating in the activity what you are doing and when you expect to return.

If you are new to an activity (such as canyoning, off-track walking, longer walks) ask the leader for advice and follow that advice. Your leader must consider the whole group and an inexperienced participant at times may put other people at risk.

If you have a medical condition, that may cause an emergency if situations change, let the leader know.

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY:

Stop, think, consider the alternatives and consult the group as a whole.

If A Party Is Overdue

If a party doesn't return at the expected time, first assess the situation:

- Check the information about the walk – where did they go, when are they due back, how well were they equipped, how has the weather changed? A day walk overdue by 12 hours may be a concern, but not so a 6-day walk.
- Ring the leader of the walk – they may have returned or got a message home.
- Check your mobile phone – the group may have been able to SMS or ring.
- Ring a committee member or one of the Club's emergency contact officers (current contact details are on the back page of the Newsletter) – they may know more about the group, leader, type of activity or conditions such as weather and terrain.

If you believe the situation is an emergency, the police should be contacted to begin a search and rescue. Phone 000.

For more information see the SBC document – [Incident Response Guidelines](#).

If Your Group Becomes Lost

When features on the ground do not agree with those on the map, STOP and assess the situation before a temporary disorientation becomes a major loss of position.

- Stop and think. Stay together and pool your knowledge and expertise.
- **Identify your last confirmed position** and estimate your present location. Except in specific areas of known magnetic anomalies, believe your compass and remember that modern topographical maps have few major errors.
- If possible, retrace your steps to where you were comfortable that you knew your position. Alternatively, if possible, proceed on a course that **MUST** bring you to a known feature in a reasonable time, such as a road or stream.
- Otherwise, remain where you are and make phone contact with police if possible. Consider activating a PLB if you have one.
- Keep calm, warm and seek shelter whilst waiting for assistance.
- Work out how to attract the attention of searchers in the air or on the ground.
 - move to a location above the tree line, into a clearing or an open section of a creek.
 - Place any brightly coloured items to form a block of colour to attract attention from the air. A space blanket is useful.
 - Lighting a smoky fire can also work.
 - Listen for calls or whistles from ground search parties.
- Remember that ground searchers are listening as well as looking so attract attention to your location the recognized distress signal of three regularly spaced calls. The "three calls" can be made by whatever means possible such as shouts, whistle blasts or even banging a spoon on a billy. At night use three torch flashes. This signal sequence should never be misused.

If Members Become Separated From Your Group

- If your party becomes separated, a search should be undertaken in the immediate area and the location where the missing persons were last seen or likely to have made a wrong decision.
- If they are not found within 3-4 hours (longer in a remote area) it is unlikely that your party will have the resources to undertake a full-scale search and you will need to seek external assistance.
- If communication by phone is not possible, a competent subgroup should be sent for the nearest help, with others remaining as visible as possible near the last point of contact.
- The police are responsible for all search and rescue operations and should be the first source of contact for assistance in an emergency.

If You Become Separated From Your Group

- Stop, sit down and have a drink or food. Think about the last time you were with the group.
- Unless you are absolutely confident about retracing steps, **stay where you are and stay calm**. The group will be looking for you.
- Listen for calls or whistles from your Group
- Attract attention with three regularly spaced blast from your whistle.

Minor Medical Issues

- Apply appropriate first aid with resources available.
- Information about what to do in the case of blisters, bites and stings, strains and sprains, cramp, minor burns, snakebite, hyperthermia, and hypothermia is included in the SBC document – [First Aid](#).

Accident

- Apply appropriate first aid with resources available.
- Keep patient warm and as comfortable as possible.
- Calmly assess the full situation with respect to the seriousness of the injury, the urgency and availability of any external assistance required and the resources of the group.
- If communication by phone is not possible, a competent subgroup carrying written information regarding the nature of the injury or illness and the detailed location of the party should seek the nearest help.
- When possible, call 000 to seek assistance from Ambulance and/or police.
- If you use a PLB to request help, it may take time. Decide with the group how you can minimise the impact. If there is another competent leader it may be necessary to split the group.

Bushfire

The best way to avoid danger from a bushfire is to avoid walking at high risk times and locations. Before leaving home, check the weather forecast and fire restrictions. Minimize the use of campfires at any time and always take extreme care when lighting fires.

If caught walking in the path of a bushfire:

- Walk quickly, preferably downhill, looking for possible shelter.
- Seek shelter from radiant heat which is the killer in a bushfire. Look for a stream or pool, a hollow in the ground such as an eroded gully or roadside drain, rocky outcrops or large log, a hut or building, or a large cleared or recently burnt area.
- Cover any exposed skin with clothing (preferably cotton or wool), earth or thick bark.
- Lie face down and breathe the cooler, less smoke filled air close to the ground. Drink water regularly to avoid dehydration.
- Stay in your chosen shelter until the fire front has passed.
- As a last resort, you may be able to run through low flames onto burnt ground.

Electrical Storm

- Avoid high ground, and isolated objects such as a tree in a clearing.
- If possible, insulate yourself from the ground by sitting on your pack.
- If all else fails, the recommendation is for the party to spread out, crouch down with feet together.

Flooded Creeks and Rivers

Consider changing your route before setting out on a trip involving river crossings where there has been heavy rain in catchment areas. Check with local authorities if there is a possibility that bridges may have been damaged by flood waters.

If you encounter a flooded creek or river:

- Be prepared to spend time and energy looking for a safe crossing place.

- Be aware of possible dangers downstream if someone were swept away whilst crossing.
- Be prepared to wait for a swollen river to subside, or more realistically, use an alternative route.
- Do not attempt to cross a dangerous river! Fast flowing water deeper than approximately thigh deep is dangerous.