

Emergency Action Plan: Alaska Outdoor School

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Introduction

The Kenai Mountains – Turnagain Arm Corridor Communities Association (KMTA) operates the Alaska Outdoor School program out of the Chugach National Forest's Begich, Boggs Visitor Center (BBVC) and follows the protocols outlined in their Emergency Action Plan. As a group on a field trip at the Visitor Center, you are responsible for the welfare of your group members. You should supply materials, vehicles, and trained staff to service your group's basic first aid needs. It is also your responsibility to bring health and insurance information for each of your students, to inform KMTA staff of any special needs/concerns, and bring that information to the medical facility during an emergency.

KMTA and the BBVC do not supply emergency medical services to visiting groups. 911 is the only service available. However, all KMTA and BBVC staff maintain (at a minimum) current certifications in Standard First Aid and CPR. Some staff members are trained in wilderness medicine. In the event of emergencies, available staff members will assist and administer care to the best of their abilities.

KMTA and the BBVC maintain first aid kits and equipment for their staff. These supplies are at multiple locations around the facility and available at a moment's notice. If a visiting group's supplies are unavailable, visiting groups can make use of these supplies. Ask a staff member to assist you. KMTA staff are on call to help with emergencies 24 hours a day. Their contact information will be provided to you upon arrival at the BBVC.

Emergency Communications

Phone/Cell:

For all emergencies **dial 911**. If you are calling from one of the phones in the visitor center connect to an outside line first and then dial 911. Instructions for connecting to an outside line can be found near each phone. **Note:** *Cell phones will not work inside of the visitor center and reception is limited right outside of the facility.*

Be prepared to inform the dispatcher:

- What is the emergency? Is someone hurt or in danger? Do you need the police, fire or ambulance?
- Do your best to stay calm and answer **all** questions.
- Know the location of the emergency. The visitor center is located at **800 Portage Lake Loop in Portage Valley** although you may be reporting an emergency elsewhere in the valley.
- Your name and possibly a call back number (if needed)
- Listen to the dispatcher for additional instructions. Hang up when the dispatcher has told they have all of the information they need.

Evacuation Routes

It is important for staff and group leaders to know where all the emergency exits are located in the event that the building needs to be evacuated. Supervisory staff and/or group leaders will serve as “wardens” in the event of an evacuation. They will be responsible for sweeping all public access areas of the building. Wardens may change daily based upon the supervisory staff that is working that day.

Fire

The fire alarm system is designed to operate automatically. In the event of a fire alarm activation, there will be a loud buzzer and strobe lights to indicate an alarm.

- Initiate the Building Evacuation Plan, exiting through the closest exit. Close any doors and windows as you exit the building only if there is time to do so safely. Supervisors or group leaders should sweep the areas they are in as they exit the building only if it is safe to do so. Personnel will proceed to the rally point at the far end of the second parking lot (bus parking).
- Supervisors or group leaders should conduct a head count to ensure that the entire staff or group is outside and accounted for. Personnel **SHOULD NOT** re-enter the building.
- Upon alarm activation, the ventilation system is designed to shut off to keep smoke and fire from spreading. It may be necessary to stay low to the ground (in some cases crawling) while traveling to an exit, to escape the smoke and heat.
- If you see smoke or fire and the alarm has not activated, manual pull stations are located at each of the exits. Proceed to an exit, activate the manual pull station when exiting the building.
- Once outside, use a cell phone to call 911 to report the emergency.

Flooding

Portage Valley receives a lot of rain - on average over 78 inches per year. During both the fall and spring, water levels in the creeks and lakes around the visitor center can be much higher than during the rest of the year.

During these high water events, the visitor center was designed to flood. It is not uncommon to have several inches of water in the basement during these high water times – this is not out of the ordinary and is not considered an emergency situation. If there is water in the basement, BBVC staff will monitor as necessary.

In the case of a true flood event that threatens roadways and access to the visitor center, evacuation of the facility and Portage Valley may be necessary. In this event, all staff and group members will gather in the visitor center. KMTA and BBVC staff will emergency evacuation procedures.

Earthquake

Earthquakes are a real risk that we accept as part of living in Alaska. Your actions during and immediately after an earthquake can significantly increase your chance of survival and reduce chances of an injury. The following actions should be taken during an earthquake:

During an earthquake

Due to the suddenness, all personnel and group members should **Drop, Cover, and Hold On**

- Drop to the floor on your hands and knees.
- Cover your head and neck with one arm and hand.
- Crawl under a sturdy desk or table.
- If not table or desk is around, crawl to an interior wall away from windows.
- Stay on your knees and bend over to protect vital organs.
- Hold On under the shelter, until the shaking stops.
- If you have no shelter, protect your head and neck with both arms.
- DO NOT attempt to go outside during an earthquake.
- If you have limited mobility, in a seated position bend over your knees. Cover your head and neck with your arms.

After an Earthquake

- KMTA and BBVC staff will ensure everyone is safe and inspect the immediate area for damage.
- After assessment of the situation, staff will initiate evacuation of the building if necessary.

Avalanche

While the visitor center itself is not directly located in an avalanche zone, avalanche hazards do exist in Portage Valley and along both the Seward Highway and the Portage Highway. In some areas of Portage Valley, avalanche dangers exist well into the summer months. Staff are briefed on avalanche conditions and no program activities will take place within zones where avalanche danger exists.

In the event that an avalanche occurs in Portage Valley that closes access to/from the visitor center:

- All staff and group members return to the visitor center and shelter in place.
- BBVC staff will call Alaska Department of Transportation to report the road closure. KMTA staff will work with ASD staff to notify the school and begin communicating with parents.
- All staff and group members will remain at the visitor center until DOT has reopened the road for use.

Inclement Weather on Programs

Alaska Outdoor School programs follow [ASD Severe Weather policies & procedures](#). On site, weather can impact our ability to lead programs in a safe manner. Staff are trained to assess current weather conditions and take appropriate actions to mitigate risk associated with weather. Both KMTA and BBVC staff monitors the current weather conditions. When a severe weather warning is issued, staff members guide participants to the safest location in the situation. Most of the time this will be an indoor location; however, we recognize that due to the diverse locations that we operate programs in this may not always be possible. In such situations, staff members will move the group to the safest possible outdoor location.

Thunderstorms and lightning

Thunderstorms can lead to lightning, which can create a serious risk while out in the field. If you see lightning, count the number of seconds between the lightning to the thunder. If it is less than 30 seconds, there is the potential lightning could strike close to your location – get out of the open and seek shelter in a vehicle or cabin. Wait at least 30 minutes from the last time you heard thunder. Even if the lightning is far away, return to the Visitor Center if you can do so safely.

If you are in the field and unable to get to a proper shelter:

- Shelter in the place.
- Try to find low ground, and if there is something to shelter with, do so.
- If you cannot get to shelter, make yourself as small as possible with minimal ground contact (crouch in a ball on the balls of your feet).
- Leave packs, walking sticks, etc. a distance away from yourself.
- If you are with multiple people, have everyone do this, while keeping distance between each other (roughly 100ft) so as to minimize multiple victims in the event of a strike.
- Wait at least 30 minutes from the last time you hear thunder. With a group, do a headcount.

In the event of a person getting struck by lightning, staff will practice proper first aid and emergency communication procedures.

High Wind

Portage Valley can get strong winds whipping through. If high winds are forecasted, staff will be briefed and programs may be moved indoors. If high winds occur during outdoor programming, staff will assess group safety and return to the visitor center if necessary.

If high winds are forecasted, our programs will remain indoors. We are well prepared to adapt programs accordingly.

Wildlife Safety

The Chugach National Forest is home to numerous different species, and we are charged with the task of finding a way to coexist with them. All staff will receive this training at the start of the season. Field Interpreters have the additional task of sharing this information with the public to ensure the safety of the visitors and the wildlife.

Bear

The Chugach National Forest is home to both Brown and Black Bears. All CNF staff will participate in training sessions about bear behavior and ecology at the beginning of the season. All field-going personnel will carry bear-spray with them. Always be bear aware.

Staff will report any bear-human conflict to their supervisor as soon as you can. If medical treatment is required, call 911 or use whatever means (radio, etc.) to get the assistance required, and then report the situation to your supervisor.

Moose

The CNF is home to thousands of moose, so encountering them is a possibility, year-round. All staff will learn about traveling in moose country and what to do in different situations at the start of the season. Always be on the lookout for moose, as well as inform students about the risks.

Staff will report any moose-human conflict to their supervisor as soon as you can. If medical treatment is required, call 911 or use whatever means (radio, etc.) to get the assistance required, and then report the situation to your supervisor.

Road Closures

The Seward Highway and Portage Glacier Road can have road closures, as determined by the Alaska Department of Transportation. We have no control over these closures, but they might delay or alter the plans for visitors and groups. If there is an expected delay due to road construction, avalanche or any other reason, groups will be informed prior to their field trip. If there is an unexpected delay on your way to Portage, communicate with KMTA staff as best as you are able. If there is an unexpected delay returning to Anchorage, communicate with your school as best as you are able.

Missing Persons

Notify KMTA CCA or BBVC staff if a group member is missing. Neither organization are formal Search and Rescue (SAR) providers, but will initiate the following protocols to locate the missing person:

1. Begin incident log- found in forms filing cabinet in office.
 - a. Who? Name(s) of missing person(s).
 - b. When? How long has the person(s) been missing?
 - c. What? Which field study, activity, etc.
 - d. Where? Point Last Seen, direction headed.
 - e. Why? Specific conditions (medical, mental status, etc.).
 - f. Search routes, time search begins and ends, weather conditions, etc.
2. Establish control center (CC) and incident commander (IC).
 - a. Use BBVC Break Room as control center.
 - b. IC monitors all actions and searches from the control center.
 - c. Search teams check out of BBVC when they begin their search route.
 - d. Search teams check in at BBVC when they complete their search route.
 - e. Relay any pertinent information immediately to incident command.
3. Begin search procedure.
 - a. If sufficient time has elapsed to allow person to return on their own, begin search.
 - b. Turn on all visitor center lights, inside and out.
4. Prepare search teams.
 - a. Divide available personnel into pairs.
 - b. Outfit each search team with supplies.
 - c. Establish search routes maximizing personnel.
 - d. Instruct search teams in appropriate search procedure (walk, stop, shout and listen frequently, keep flashlights on as much as possible, check out and in with control center).
5. HASTY SEARCH: Dispatch search teams
 - a. Search inside BBVC using one search team.
 - b. Dispatch search teams on major trails.
 - c. Dispatch one team to lake/creek shore.
 - d. All search teams must report back to the control center within 45 minutes of beginning search.
6. FINE SEARCH: Re-dispatch search team
 - a. Repeat search procedures searching ALL trails and adjoining routes.
7. Grid Search- Contact USFS Law Enforcement and Alaska State Troopers to take over search efforts.