

What Price Accidents?



Fun and excitement are the main ingredients of Scouting, but when they lead to accidents everyone is affected to some extent. Obviously, the person who is hurt in the incident is the most affected, but Leaders have to consider the question...'Could it have been prevented?'

It is important to get things into perspective. Accidents can never be completely ruled out as long as the important and vital ingredients of Scouting-challenge and adventure-are included in our activities and programmes.

However, when poor supervision, bad housekeeping and general 'mucking about' creep in, accidents happen. This is where the Leader has a real responsibility and has to act quickly and decisively to cut down the frequency and the severity of accidents.

What price accidents?

Accidents can be expensive but not only in simple monetary terms. There is the loss of confidence - perhaps for all time - the inconvenience, the disruption, the disability (either temporary or permanent) - the unwelcome and sometimes, unjustified publicity, together with the guilt for having allowed it to happen in the first place.

The figures tell the story

Over a period of several years, The Scout Association has been monitoring accident reports involving Members of the Movement during Scouting activities. In percentage terms...

30% occur In, or near, Group Headquarters
37% happen at camp **3% occur on expeditions** **30% happen In other places**

The interesting feature of this is that there are twice as many accidents in what appear to be

the most harmless and least dangerous Scouting locations than in all the other locations put together, namely, camp and the Group Headquarters!

In these locations it would be expected that supervision would be at its best, so what goes wrong?

With adventurous activities there are rigorous safety rules which limit the possibility of accidents because there will be good leadership, good training and well-maintained equipment. Accidents that do happen may well be severe but are also, mercifully, rare.

At Group Headquarters and camp, however, complacency sets in due to familiarity with the surroundings, equipment and the people. The guard is dropped and chances and short cuts are taken which inevitably lead to accidents.

Most accidents cause some degree of incapacity and many are not particularly dramatic but, for those affected, they could result in scars, disability for life, time away from work or school, disruption of home life and worry for the family.

On occasions, for some unfortunate person, it signifies no more Scouting - ever!

Practical prevention

There is no place for carelessness, cutting corners, leaving things to chance, putting off or 'passing the buck' in a Movement that prides itself on training young people to accept responsibility towards others and for their own actions.

There is no need to be over-protective. Plain common sense is all that is really required. There are some points to bear in mind which are really a practical way to prevent accidents. Practical prevention are the key words to

remember when endeavouring to minimise the chances of preventable accidents. Here are some guidelines...

Location

Play indoor games and sports to suit the space available and in keeping with the age range of the players. Doors that open inwards, loose floorboards, damaged linoleum or tiles, unprotected windows or windows which have protruding latches, damaged furniture, wall projections, fire extinguishers, unguarded or mobile heaters and electrical leads or wiring are all potential danger points. Keep away from them if there is no way of putting up protective barriers.

At camp

Lifter and debris are not just unsightly but also cause health hazards and may cause injury

Thoroughly inspect the ground before setting up camp, keep it clear and leave it clear when you go. Woodpiles have a tendency to have nails protruding, particularly with the propensity of old wooden pallets that appear to be the main source of wood in camp sites these days. Splinters can also be a major hazard.

Guy ropes and tent pegs need protective markings to prevent people topping over them. Boundary fences around individual sites and pits within the sites need to be at a reasonable height to be seen without difficulty, not at ankle height and hidden by grass.

Equipment

The condition of ropes, pioneering equipment, climbing equipment, stoves and lamps must be checked frequently and they should be taken out of use as soon as there are signs of deterioration. What cannot be repaired must be replaced!

All cutting implements must always be kept sharp, masked or guarded and used under supervision-particularly when in the hands of the inexperienced. Also, ensure that instructions in respect of the use of the equipment are observed, Familiarity with equipment often leads to short cuts being taken and risks of accidents becoming more likely.

This applies to everything, in particular the use of stoves and lamps-paraffin and methylated spirits can spill or ignite and gas can leak and be a major hazard.

The SCOUTING Magazine chart - *Fire Kills* - gives a very graphic picture of what happens when gas comes into contact with a naked flame..!

Clothing

The correct activity wear is essential and, in particular, footwear must be the right type for the purpose and in good repair. Wellingtons are no good for climbing and walking shoes are no good for hiking over rough ground.

Where protective headgear is specified, it must be worn. No excuse should be accepted for not wearing it.

Sharp implements in pockets should always be removed and put somewhere safe during games or boisterous activities. Even combs and keys can be a danger. Spectacles should not be worn in situations where they can be knocked off or damaged as a result of the activity.

Fires and cooking

Whether indoors or outdoors, there must be strict rules about the use of kitchens and kitchen equipment. Only people who have an actual job to do should be in a kitchen and no messing about should be tolerated. Only those trained in the use of particular equipment should be allowed to use it or handle it unsupervised.

Gas cylinders and flammable liquids should be stored in a safe place and, again, only to be used by those competent to handle them.

Stoves and naked lights should never be allowed in, or near, tents. Cooking utensils containing hot liquids or fats must be placed so that they cannot be knocked off the fire

or stove or tipped over when on the ground.

Bums and scalds tend to account for somewhere in the region of four per cent of accidents within the Movement but these virtually all occur within

the Scout Section and are largely preventable. Remember, too, that of all accidents burns and scalds are prominent as major causes of permanent disfigurement.

Cause and effect

Time after time, when the cause of an accident is examined in detail, it all comes down to the fact that people were fooling about unsupervised or because of boredom. Leaders cannot be everywhere and are prone to the failings and frailties of every human being. Attention can lapse or a special situation may arise that has to be dealt with there and then, indeed there are many possibilities that can cause a situation where close supervision by the Leader is either impractical or impossible.

In the Scout Section, it appears that there is not enough delegation of responsibility to Assistant Leaders, Patrol Leaders or Instructors, whereas in the Cub Scout Section, Cub Scout Leaders seem more ready to use other adults to help with supervision which, no doubt, has a bearing on the lower frequency of accidents. ,

We don't need to become paranoid about accidents in Scouting and no one is aiming to put a dampener on everything that involves excitement with an element of risk, but the fact that we do have accidents in Scouting is why we have to put a large slice of the Membership Subscription into insurance premiums.

Additionally, as previously noted, the publicity attracted by such accidents does little to enhance the image of the Leaders in the Movement or, indeed, the Movement itself. Safety in Scouting is of paramount concern to all in the Movement. We are entrusted with one of the most precious commodities possible - someone else's child. Accident prevention is in everyone's interest and is everyone's business. If we always have that in mind, the frequency of accidents, their severity and their consequences can be minimised.

When you've done your best and it still goes wrong

As well as specifying the necessary safety precautions to be taken when involved in particular activities, Policy. *Organisation and Rules* is equally specific about what we do when,

despite everything, an accident occurs during a Scout activity.

'If a person, whether a Member of the Association or not, suffers personal injury (where injury necessitates treatment by a doctor, dentist or at hospital, or a call out of the emergency services) or dies in the course of, or

arising out of, a Scout activity or while on, or in connection with, any Scout property; or if an accident during a Scout activity results in damage to third party property, Headquarters must be informed immediately.

'On receipt of this information, Headquarters will issue the necessary instructions and forms in respect of insurance claims.'

The address for reporting a case of injury or ailment during Scouting activities where medical treatment is required is:

Scout Insurance Services, The Scout Association, Churchill Industrial Estate, Lancing, West Sussex BN15 BUG.
Telephone: 01903 **755352**

In Scotland, Scottish Headquarters should also be informed at:

Scottish Headquarters, The Scout Association, Fordell Firs, Hillend, Dunfermline, Fife KY11 5HQ.
Telephone: 01383 419073

In Northern Ireland, the contact address is: Northern Ireland Headquarters, The Scout Association, 4th Floor, 38 Dublin Road, BELFAST BT2 7HN. Telephone: 01232 240457

In the event of an injury or fatality, or damage to third party property, no admission of liability must be made unless advised by Headquarters.

The Scout Association provides a limited measure of Personal Accident and Medical Expenses Insurance for Members. Details of this and other policies are now available from Scout Insurance Services. (In Scotland from Scottish Headquarters).

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The Scout Association, Information Centre, Gilwell Park, Bury Road, Chingford, London E4 7QW. Email: info.centre@scout.org.uk
Website www.scoutbase.org.uk **Direct: 0208 498 5400 Local rate call: 0845 300 1818** Fax: 0208 498 5407