



IMR Wilderness Executive Committee
Safety and Wilderness
September, 2008

Many NPS employees, volunteers, and researchers work in the backcountry.

- ROMO incident
- Many hazards, esp. unpredictable situations
- Requirements for backcountry travel plans – each park
- Involve communication, dispatch, check-ins
- Too many requirements discourage employees from going into field
- What are appropriate protocols for overall backcountry travel

2. Safety for specific jobs

- JHAs – collected to post on www.wilderness.net, but people should really develop their own
- Universal Risk Assessment Model
- Olympic safety card

3. Repetitive stress injuries

- Concern because work in wilderness emphasizes non-motorized equipment and non-mechanized transport
- Aging workforce
- Are such injuries and trends documented?
- Hand tools are not inherently less safe than power tools
- Minimum requirements does have place to factor safety – need more work with safety and wilderness understanding complexities

4. Risk – a part of wilderness for visitors

- Safety is a priority for visitors, employees, volunteers, and contractors
- NPS Management Policies 2006, 6.4.1 “The NPS will not modify the wilderness area to eliminate risks that are normally associated with wilderness, but it will strive to provide users with general information concerning possible risks, any recommended precautions, related user responsibilities...”
- IMR Wilderness Executive Committee asked National Wilderness Leadership Council to address issues of risk and safety in wilderness

5. New Technology

- Personal locator beacons, SPOT – issues for visitors, response by NPS, possible use for employees working in wilderness

IMR WEC Notes from ROMO Discussion: Wilderness and Safety

A focus of the IMR Wilderness Executive Committee in FY 2008 will be wilderness and safety. A key goal of the committee is to integrate safety into all work that employees do in wilderness. We had our annual committee meeting in August, and spent part of the time meeting with staff at Rocky Mountain National Park. Among the things we discussed:

- Repetitive motion injuries occur in backcountry work, for example from handling heavy materials. The park has employed a trainer from 24-hour fitness to teach stretching, and is starting to make a dent in injuries.
- Safety is largely a shift in culture, younger people think of themselves as indestructible; employees respond best to safety messages from peers; weekly tool checks and safety walk-arounds help.
- Another part of the culture shift is the NPS mission-driven pressure – we have to heed safety first and maybe let deadlines go. It's a self-imposed attitude.
- Safety education also needs to address days off –many employees play hard and need to do so safely.
- Minimum requirements analysis needs to take cumulative effects of safety into account.
- Travel plans are now a part of all backcountry travel. Travel plans are filed with dispatch, and include routes, communication plan, and safety. Plans can be changed in the field, but must be called in. They are like a flight plan.
- The park is going to provide first aid kits to everyone going into the backcountry.
- Volunteers in OSHA's eyes are an employee. ROMO has thousands of volunteers.
- Research permits have a safety component. The park tries to provide a person to travel with a solo researcher.
- Job Hazard Analysis and Minimum Requirements Analysis require thought, and are not one-size fits all. Each situation should be evaluated and actions tailored accordingly, rather than blanket actions.
- The number of steps that must be taken for an employee to get out in the backcountry requires very intense supervision and results in some employees getting out less and losing contact with the resources.

Thank you to the staff of ROMO who took time to meet with the IMR Wilderness Executive Committee in August.