

Working in the Field Alone – Safety Session 12.2015

There are many situations where DNR employees work alone in the field, often in very remote locations. These settings present substantial challenges for safety planning. While there may not be perfect solutions for all cases, there are some practical tips to help create a safer and more secure environment for the employee. Planning and preparing can prevent many problems when working alone in the field.

Is it necessary to work alone?

- If possible, avoid working alone - especially in situations with potentially hazardous tasks, severe weather, hazardous terrain, hostile customers
- Request assistance and support for situations in which you are uncomfortable.
- Do not meet alone with a potentially violent customer. Can communication be done over the phone/email? Decide if the face-to-face meeting is really necessary. If so, request a third person to join you and select a safe meeting place.

What are potential hazards?

- Extreme weather (heat, cold, wind, rain, lightning)
- Fatigue, exhaustion, dehydration, hypothermia, or heat stroke
- Falls, floods, thin ice, deep snow
- Potentially harmful plants, animals, or allergies (ticks, mosquitoes, bees, poison ivy, bear, wolf, rabid animals)
- Mechanical problems; getting stuck
- Unfamiliar area, getting lost
- People who are violent or harassing

How can I prepare for emergencies?

WORK PLAN

- Schedule sufficient time to complete the work without rushing.
- Pace your activities to avoid excessive fatigue. Be alert for signs of fatigue while working and driving. Driving after a day of tiring work can lead to serious accidents.
- Schedule frequent rests and water breaks during the day.
- Plan for the terrain and conditions you will encounter. Be prepared for any special or unique conditions of the area.
- Monitor the weather forecast. Dress and plan your work accordingly. Be prepared to seek shelter and adjust your work plan to accommodate changing weather conditions. Bring additional clothing for unexpected conditions.
- Reduce your risk of being struck by lightning in the work area by planning for low lying shelter options. Avoid being close to tall trees and tall metal objects.

TRAINING PLAN

- Be trained for the work to be completed, e.g., proper lifting techniques, winter defensive driving, wild land navigation (GPS, GIS, map, compass).

- Be trained to safely use equipment (e.g., ATV's, power tools, snowmobiles, trailers, watercraft).
- Be able to identify and avoid potentially harmful plants and insects.
- Know how to administer first aid, and complete the certification training.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

- Know your location at all times
- Carry cell phone, two way radio, GPS "Spot locators" or similar devices, especially while on foot.
- Know whom to contact in an emergency and how long it will take to respond. Long response times may require more extensive preparations and larger first aid kits.
- Carry numbers for your contact person, supervisor, and local law enforcement to immediately notify them in case of an accident or emergency. Keep calling until you reach a real person. Voice mail messages are not reliable for summoning help
- Leave a detailed itinerary for the day or week with a contact person (such as your supervisor) or with someone at home.
- Establish a "check-in" system with your contact person so someone knows when you are safely out of the field.
- Develop a response plan with your contact person if you fail to check-in.

PHYSICAL FITNESS PLAN

- Know and accept your physical limits and skills. Don't exceed them.
- Take a few minutes to warm up your muscles and stretch before physical exertion.
- Watch your footing. Know what you are stepping on. Control your pace and balance.
- Use proper lifting techniques if handling materials or equipment.
- Do not drink untreated water from a stream or lake.
- For summer, dress in light colored, loose-fitting layers to protect from insects and weather. Wear layers in the winter for insulation.
- Protect yourself from sun exposure (hats, sunscreen, long sleeves, pants, sunglasses).
- Check for ticks and rashes after completing the day's work.

EQUIPMENT PLAN

Inspect emergency supplies and first aid kits before each trip to ensure that supplies are replenished and fresh. Conduct daily equipment inspections to ensure that all gear is in good working order. Secure equipment in the vehicle so it doesn't become a projectile in case of an accident.

Consider packing the following equipment:

- Cellular phone or some form of communication that works for your work area, e.g., satellite phone, two-way radio. Be sure batteries are charged. Carry the phone and emergency numbers with you in your vehicle and while on foot.

- First aid kits. Tailor the kits to the type of work being done and your ability to use them. Prepare one to keep in your vehicle and another to carry with you when you are on foot.
- Flashlight and spare batteries
- Insect repellents.
- Bee sting kit - if you have or suspect you have allergies to bee stings
- Protective clothing. Inspect, pack, and use personal protective gear. Know what protective clothing is necessary for the task and use it.
- Proper footwear for the conditions
- Sun glasses, sunscreen, and hat
- Extra clothing, including rain gear
- Extra food and water
- Pocket knife
- GPS, map, compass,
- Candle and waterproof matches or lighter
- Space blanket or large orange garbage bag
- Spare tools, windshield washer fluid, oil, transmission fluid
- Portable radio, weather or marine band radio, and fresh batteries
- Filters or tablets to disinfect water

SECURITY PLAN

Security Tips When Walking

- Be very cautious when walking through remote areas.
- Continually scan what is going on around you, first from a distance.
- Be familiar with your surroundings and know the history of the area so you can determine if something is abnormal.
- Do not approach stray animals.

Security Tips Around Vehicles

- Always lock the vehicle and secure storage compartments when leaving it parked.
- Put valuables or sensitive items out of sight.
- Park in a highly visible or lighted location, pointing the vehicle out toward the exit
- Approach vehicles in an observant manner. Watch for people who may be near the vehicle.
- Have your keys in hand while approaching your parked vehicle.
- Think about escape routes if a violent incident should be encountered.
- When approaching your vehicle in the dark, shine a flashlight under, around, and inside it before entering.
- Immediately lock the doors after entering your vehicle.
- Drive away as soon as possible.

Security Tips When Meeting People

- Approach all members of the public in a polite, but cautious, manner.
- Be aware of the potential for violent or harassing behavior.

- Help others identify you as a DNR employee by wearing your uniform, badge, or DNR logo on a cap or shirt.
- Keep a barrier between you and customer if possible: vehicle, picnic table, log, etc.
- If customer's dog is threatening, assure that it be restrained before continuing communication
- Introduce yourself, speaking low and soft, and use few hand movements.
- Assess the situation by letting the other person tell the story. Ask them to be specific in describing their problem.
- Acknowledge their problem by offering them feedback. Take notes and ask questions.
- Agree whenever they say something with which you concur.
- Apologize when it is appropriate.
- Act on their problem as quickly as possible.
- Be mindful of body language. Don't project a threatening posture or angry look. Maintain eye contact but do not stare.
- Remain calm and in control. Don't escalate, even if the situation does.
- Give them space by standing to the side, about 8 to 10 feet away. Standing in front of the person may block them in.
- Plan an easy exit. In the event of an emergency, equipment or supplies should not block you.
- Trust your instincts. If the situation does not feel right, excuse yourself, exit the area and report incident to your supervisor.
- If the situation gets out of control, seek assistance. Don't try to be a hero. Don't retaliate, confront, or try to negotiate. Leave and call local Law Enforcement or Conservation Officer immediately.