



## Hiker Responsibility Code

*Code provides guidelines for safety*

White Mountains, NH — The Hiker Responsibility Code is the centerpiece of the hikeSafe program, and is a set of principles that all hikers can look to before they hit the trail. Similar to the Skier's Responsibility Code endorsed by the National Ski Areas Association, the Hiker Responsibility Code was created to help hikers become more self aware about their responsibility for their own safety every time they are on a hike. It also acknowledges the inherent danger of hiking in the wilderness, and encourages hikers to be better prepared every time they are on the trail.

hikeSafe endeavors to teach people how to avoid a dangerous situation as much as it educates people on what to do during an emergency, and the Hiker Responsibility Code stresses prevention as the best means of staying safe. The Hiker Responsibility Code advises hikers to be, above all, prepared for the worst situations and gives instant insight on how to do so. It also advises veteran hikers to reach out to inexperienced hikers and share the Hiker Responsibility Code and their experience with them.

Designed for experienced trekkers and novice hikers equally, the Hiker Responsibility Code will be posted throughout the White Mountain National Forest and other New Hampshire locations, from trailheads and public parks to sporting goods and gear retail outlets.

### Hiker Responsibility Code

You are responsible for yourself, **so be prepared:**

**1. With knowledge and gear.** Become self reliant by learning about the terrain, conditions, local weather and your equipment before you start.

—Try to eliminate the possibility of an unexpected situation. Hikers must be aware of the specific region they're entering—does the weather change quickly and without warning? Have stream crossings become difficult due to recent rainfall? Know ahead of time what you might be facing, and you'll be far better prepared to deal with situations as they arrive. As far as gear is concerned, it is better to carry extra than be carried out. By packing an extra layer or a space blanket, hikers could be averting a potentially dangerous situation. Most important, however, is knowing how to use the equipment in the backpack. Hikers need to take the time to learn the proper way to use all the equipment in their pack. For example, a first aid kit will only go so far for an untrained user, and a map and compass are useless unless one knows how to use them.

**2. To leave your plans.** Tell someone where you are going, the trails you are hiking, when you'll return and your emergency plans.

—By leaving plans with a friend, relative or local ranger, hikers greatly increase the odds of coming home safely if they become lost or injured. The itinerary left behind should be specific as to the trails being used and the times one plans on being on the trail. Being prepared doesn't just mean carrying the right maps and equipment, it means covering *all* of the bases to keep safe.



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**3. To stay together.** When you start as a group, hike as a group, end as a group. Pace your hike to the slowest person.

—Hiking is a fun activity that is best shared with a group—the sights, sounds and overall experience of being in the backcountry mean something different for everyone, and the hiking community thrives on its togetherness. If a lone hiker becomes lost or injured, they are at a much greater risk than when with others. When people stick together they are best prepared to handle potentially dangerous situations because they can depend on each other and work as a group. However, it is also important to be understanding of those not as physically fit or experienced, so groups need to remember to hike at the slowest person’s pace to keep the day enjoyable for all.

**4. To turn back.** Weather changes quickly in the mountains. Fatigue and unexpected conditions can also affect your hike. Know your limitations and when to postpone your hike. The mountains will be there another day.

—Although “summit fever” can be a persuasive emotion, ambition is not a good reason to put oneself in a dangerous situation. When the weather changes suddenly, hikers need to respect nature’s unpredictability and head for home. Or, if someone finds themselves tiring earlier than they thought, the body’s message needs to be acknowledged—it’s time to turn back. Respect the messages and signals nature and the body send—it’s the sign of an experienced and intelligent hiker, as well as one who can return to bag the peak another day.

**5. For emergencies.** Even if you are headed out for just an hour, an injury, severe weather or a wrong turn could become life threatening. Don’t assume you will be rescued; know how to rescue yourself.

—There’s no such thing as a day hike, because emergencies can make even a day hike an overnight ordeal. Hikers need to be ready to handle anything. A first aid kit is essential every time hikers set foot in the wilderness (as is the knowledge of how to use it). A headlamp, space blanket and waterproof matches are also items that hikers may need. Hikers who have taken a wilderness first aid course are even better prepared to handle any situation—knowledge, the ability to use that knowledge and a cool head are often more important than gear.

**6. To share the hiker code with others.**

—Hikers are part of a greater hiking community that stretches from coast to coast. Approaching a hiker and sharing the Code with them might steer them from making an unfortunate mistake and help them become better educated about hiking. It might even encourage them to take the next step towards taking a hiker safety course so they will know what to prepare for *before* they get to the trailhead.

**hikeSafe: It’s Your Responsibility.**

The Hiker Responsibility Code was developed and is endorsed by the White Mountain National Forest and New Hampshire Fish and Game Department.

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