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Fact Sheet: Camping

Unchecked campfires, tossed cigarette butts, and fallen lanterns could potentially start a tent fire or an uncontrolled wildfire. Unsafe food handling can lead to gastrointestinal illness or attract wild animals. Camping with inappropriate gear could lead to hypothermia.

Personal Protective Equipment

- Multiple light sources
- Appropriate weather rated camping gear
- Knife to cut yourself out of a tent, if necessary

Preparation and Training

- Always check to see if there are any fire and/or fuel restrictions in place before starting to build any fire. Do not build a fire if a weather forecast shows high winds and dry conditions.
- Make sure your camping gear is appropriate to the location. Look for gear that is compatible with the temperature and expected wind speeds of your field location.
- It is recommended you take courses in: [Basic First Aid](#)

General Safety

- Start setting up camp well before it starts getting dark.
- Set up your campsite at least 200 feet from any bodies of water (river, lake, etc.) on higher ground to avoid flash flooding and contaminating the water with camp debris. Take care not to set up camp in a canyon, arroyo, or confined area that may pose a risk during a flash flood.
- Do not use sites with obvious signs of animal traffic to avoid a negative wildlife encounter.
- Set up tents at least 15 feet from the fire area.
- Do not set up tents near cliffs or dead, unstable trees.
- Avoid setting tents up in a way that presents an enclosed area. If an animal wanders into your campsite, it may panic if it feels trapped.
- All washing (dishes, clothing, or bodies) should be done at least 200 feet from bodies of water with biodegradable soap.
- If lavatories are not available, make sure eliminations are completed at least 200 feet from any body of water, trail, or campsite. Bury solid human waste with dirt in a hole at least six inches deep. Pack out all used paper and other sanitary products.

- If you are using the fire to cook, it is recommended that the cooking and eating area be 200-300 feet from tents. Do not bring clothes with food odors into your tent.
- Do not keep food, used cooking supplies, or personal hygiene products (toothpaste, scented lotions, etc.) inside the tents. If your campsite does not have a designated bear resistant food storage area, than you need to elevate it using rope and trees such that the food container is at least 4 feet away from the trunk or heavy branches and at least 10 feet from the ground.
- Pack out all camping debris and trash.
- To start a campfire, clear the campfire site of vegetation within a 15-foot radius. Store your gear and keep tents and vehicles upwind at least 15 feet from your fire. Keep a fire only as large as you absolutely need. Douse all campfires with water, stir, and douse with water again. Do not leave fire warm or glowing. If it is too hot to touch, it is too hot to leave.
- Take care if you use rocks to surround a fire, porous rocks may contain water and explode when heated by the fire.
- Do not make any type of fire inside your tent.
- When cold weather camping, use a sleeping pad to maintain insulation between your sleeping bag and the ground.
- Never drink water from a natural source that you haven't purified even if the water looks clean. Purifying water involves filtering to remove large particles and treating by boiling or with chemicals to kill organisms such as bacteria, viruses and parasites.

Emergency Response

- If you or someone else's clothing has caught fire: Stop, Drop, and Roll.
- Manage minor burns and injuries with supportive first aid.
- If you have lost control of a fire, contact emergency services immediately.

References and Additional Resources

- National Park Service [Camping](#)
- Center for Outdoor Ethics [Leave No Trace](#) provides information on responsible and sustainable outdoor practices.
- CDC [Water Treatment Techniques](#)
- Adapted from *Camping Fact Sheet*, by University of Maryland: Department of Environmental Safety, Sustainability & Risk (<https://essr.umd.edu/about/research-safety/field-research-safety/planning>) with permission.