

# Ice Age National Scenic Trail Volunteer Safety Handbook

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## BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, and AUTHORITIES

The National Park Service (NPS) has a continuing concern about the occupational safety and health of our employees and others who work in the parks as volunteers, contractors, concession employees, or in any other capacity. Controlling hazard exposures that affect employees can also positively affect the visitor experience and enhance the accomplishment of the NPS mission. In recognizing this, the NPS is committed to reducing workplace accidents, injuries and illnesses, and the associated pain, suffering, and losses associated with these incidents.

The NPS sets forth various policies and procedures for specific program areas through a series of Director's Orders, and their corresponding Reference Manuals.

The NPS Volunteers-In-Parks Program is managed through Director's Order #7, and the corresponding Reference Manual #7. Volunteer programs are also subject to the policies and procedures found in other Director's Orders and Reference Manuals.

Director's Order #50B: Occupational Safety and Health, is to provide NPS managers, supervisors, and employees (including volunteers) with direction for the implementation of a comprehensive risk management program throughout the NPS.

Reference Manual #50B provides information, guidance, and direction for carrying out the policy and program objectives found in Director's Order #50B: Occupational Safety and Health Program.

This Ice Age NST Volunteer Safety Handbook follows specific guidance as required by DO-7 & RM-7 and DO-50B & RM-50B.

## Safety Resources Locations

NPS Ice Age NST website: [www.nps.gov/iatr/getinvolved/supportyourpark/iatr\\_vip\\_program.htm](http://www.nps.gov/iatr/getinvolved/supportyourpark/iatr_vip_program.htm)

Ice Age Trail Alliance website: [www.iceagetrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/volunteer-resource-center/](http://www.iceagetrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/volunteer-resource-center/)

## Volunteer Agreement Renewals

The OF-301a Individual Volunteer Agreement is a contract between a volunteer and the National Park Service. The agreement requires volunteers to follow NPS safety procedures-- including specific training certification for certain job activities—be familiar with all Job Hazard Analysis assessments for specific

job activities, immediately report all injuries and “near miss” accidents to the NPS, and to initiate renewal of their volunteer agreement every 12 months with the NPS.

The agreement requires the NPS to provide all Safety, Health, and Wellness protections to the volunteer as it does to government employees—including specialized training and required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for certain job activities-- represent injured volunteers to the US Department of Labor seeking reimbursement of medical expenses for injuries sustained in performance of **approved volunteer work activities for which they qualify**, and extend legal protections to volunteers involved in Tort Claim incidents.

**Volunteers who do not maintain a current OF-301a Volunteer Agreement every 12 months with the NPS-Ice Age NST cannot be considered part of the NPS Volunteers-In-Parks Program and cannot receive any assistance, protections, or benefits offered through the program.** Additionally, volunteers who have received certain certification training (such as chainsaw operations) lose that certification whenever their volunteer agreements are expired.

## Job Descriptions

NPS safety policies require that each volunteer have a site-and-task-specific job description, complete with any appropriate JHAs (see below), as part of each volunteer agreement. Because Ice Age National Scenic Trail (IATR) works with multi-thousands of volunteers across 1,200 miles of trail route, and those volunteers perform a vast array of job functions in many different geographic locations, IATR cannot customize each volunteers’ job description as other “traditional” parks can usually accomplish.

IATR’s website lists 40 jobs available to IATR volunteers in a generic format, with specific job functions categorized under the four main headings of: Trail Construction and/or Repair, Trail Maintenance, Vegetation Management, and Support Services.

Specific job functions within these main categories (i.e., “pruning and brushing” under Trail Maintenance) have a numeric cross reference to the appropriate JHA(s) for that specific job function.

As stated in the template language of each volunteer service job description at IATR, the volunteer is responsible for reviewing job description and JHA resources on IATR’s website.

Chapter leaders, crew leaders, and any chapter-level volunteer engaged in assigning and/or supervising work of other volunteers—particularly new volunteers—must be familiar with these safety resources and ensure other volunteers are as well.

## Job Hazard Analysis (JHA)

A JHA is a simple safety resource which identifies all steps within a specific job task, identifies the common hazards associated with each task step, and identifies the safe “best practice” way of completing each task step. IATR’s JHA electronic library is numerically cross referenced to volunteer job descriptions for ease of matching appropriate safety messaging to different volunteer work activities.

All IATR volunteers are responsible for reviewing and following the appropriate JHA(s) as they perform their work.

Chapter leaders, crew leaders, and any chapter-level volunteer engaged in assigning and/or supervising work of other volunteers—particularly new volunteers—should read and review appropriate JHAs with the volunteers on site at all work activities.

## Tailgate Safety Series

The IATR Tailgate Safety Series is located on IATR's website. It complements the JHA electronic library by covering additional topics. A JHA is a step-by-step process for safely performing a specific task or safely working with a specific tool. A Tailgate Safety Series topic discusses situational awareness and best practices in the event of extreme weather conditions, encounters with wildlife, and other such topics.

Chapter leaders, crew leaders, and any chapter-level volunteer engaged in assigning and/or supervising work of other volunteers are encouraged to use the Tailgate Safety Series as part of any work briefing. In example, if a volunteer event will be conducted on a day when rain is forecasted, the appropriate Tailgate Safety Topic to review with others during the safety briefing would be "Thunderstorm Safety."

## Safety Briefings

- \* Conduct a safety briefing at the start of each workday, and periodically throughout the day as necessitated by changing circumstances.
- \* No job is too small or easy, nor any staff or volunteer too skilled, to "skip" the briefing.
- \* Briefings should be conducted in two orchestrated parts-- by the Team Leader who provides the overview of the project, and by the Crew Leader who then briefs the smaller assigned group.
- \* Briefing topics should include such things as: introductions if not everyone knows one another; verification of training certification (such as use of chainsaws); weather outlook; review of the task(s) at hand; discussion of any known risks and how they will be handled (mitigated or avoided); brief review of any appropriate JHA; PPE check; Questions & Answers.
- \* Ensure everyone knows the location of first aid kits, AEDs, and communications systems used at that work site in case of emergency.
- \* Remember.... Briefings are meant to be brief, while still covering the essential information to provide for a safe and enjoyable work event.

## Sample Safety Briefing

"Good morning! My name is Mary Smith and I'll be leading the work project today out on the trail. I see we have a new person to welcome with us today, so let's all introduce ourselves and where we're from (introductions). It looks like we'll have pretty good weather today, but the temperature and humidity are expected to rise in the afternoon, so be sure you have several quarts of water with you and take frequent breaks in the shade. Let's also watch out for each other as far as heat illnesses. Right now, let's review the Tailgate Safety Card entitled "Heat Disorders" just so we're all familiar with the signs of heat stress (review card). Our job today is to walk about two miles up the trail and then back here to the parking lot, brushing and pruning the trail as we go. Mike and I will be in the lead with our bow saw, Jane and Frank can take the right side of the path with their pruners, and Sally and Joe can do the same

on the left side. Let's all stay within sight of one another. Just so everyone knows, there is a hornet nest up the trail about half a mile from here. I have it flagged, so we'll know when we're getting close. Does anyone have any severe allergy to bees or wasps? Oh, you do Mike? Do you have an epi-pen with you, and can we assist you if needed (discussion)? OK, that sounds good. I see we all have our gloves, and Mike and I have our hard hats and safety glasses in case we need to saw any overhead limbs. I have the First Aid Kit in my daypack, and the Injury Reporting form, too. Do we have any nurses, EMT's or medical professionals in the group today? Now before we get started, let's quickly review the JHA for safe carrying and use of our tools (review JHA). That's about it. There is 9-1-1 service in this area in case we need to call for help. Does everyone have their cell phone with them? Does anyone have any question or anything else to add?"

### *Trail Safe! Videos*

*Trail Safe!* is a series of eight self-study videos that provide volunteers the same core learning objectives as the 16-hour facilitated NPS Operational Leadership training course. NPS Operational Leadership, and *Trail Safe!*, explores the "human factor" of safety.

An addendum in RM-50B approves *Trail Safe!* as an acceptable substitute to NPS Operational Leadership for volunteers of the National Trails System in meeting the pre-requisites for National Chainsaw Certification training.

IATR requires its volunteer sawyers and swampers to watch the *Trail Safe!* videos and report completion to NPS-IATR. All other volunteers are welcomed and encouraged to watch the *Trail Safe!* videos. Time spent watching *Trail Safe!* should be reported as volunteer hours under the Training category.

The videos are located at: [www.nps.gov/iatr/trail-safe.htm](http://www.nps.gov/iatr/trail-safe.htm).

## Certification and Training for Specific Volunteer Jobs

### *Sawyer*

Only staff or volunteers possessing a current National Saw Card may operate chainsaws. National Saw Cards are issued by the US Forest Service, through NPS-IATR, to sawyers who have attained specific certification levels of saw operation (i.e., A-Bucker & Limber, B-Faller, etc.). No substitute coursework or training programs are accepted. All chainsaw operations on Ice Age NST are subject to the standards outlined in the IATR Chainsaw SOP.

The IATR Chainsaw SOP, and all other information on how to qualify and apply for chainsaw certification training at Ice Age NST can be found on the Alliance's website at:

[www.iceagetrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/nps-chainsaw-training](http://www.iceagetrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/nps-chainsaw-training).

### *Swamper (Sawyer's Assistant)*

Swampers are those volunteers who directly assist certified sawyers with chainsaw operations. Their primary role is to keep the work zone safe during cutting operations. Swampers must meet

certain criteria outlined in the IATR Chainsaw SOP mentioned above and receive a logger's hardhat from NPS-IATR before assisting certified sawyers. Full details are found at:

[www.iceagetrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/nps-chainsaw-training](http://www.iceagetrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/nps-chainsaw-training)

### First Aid and CPR

All volunteers are encouraged to maintain certification in Adult First Aid and CPR. Sawyers and Swampers must maintain currency in Adult First Aid and CPR to perform those tasks. Training may be provided free of charge through an Alliance-sponsored course. Volunteers obtaining First Aid and CPR certification in support of Sawyer or Swamper status, who pay for a local course not offered by the Alliance staff, may seek reimbursement of expenses from the Alliance. Please contact the Alliance for updated information and direction before paying any course fees.

### Heavy Equipment Operation

The use of certain heavy equipment machinery is becoming more common in trail building operations at Ice Age NST. Volunteers may qualify to operate certain pieces of heavy equipment only after they have completed specific safety training and receive sign-off by qualified operators. Please contact the Alliance for specifics on how to become a documented heavy equipment operator.

## Obligation to Report Injuries and Near Miss Incidents

Because volunteers are considered federal employees regarding all safety standards and protocols, volunteers are obligated to report accidents, injuries, and "near miss" incidents the same as any NPS employee.

### Near Miss

A "near miss" accident is an incident where something unexpected happened and a negative or unintended outcome was possible but did not occur. An example is a tree nearly falling on someone during chainsaw operations. Reporting these sorts of incidents helps to keep others safe in the future by correcting previously unidentified hazards or unsafe work practices. Documented near miss accidents are used to create Lessons Learned as described below.

### Injury

An injury is any harm that comes to a volunteer while performing their assigned volunteer work and can be pinpointed to a specific date and time. An injury may only require first aid, or it may require treatment from a physician. Examples may include cuts, bruises, broken bones, etc.

Incremental harm that comes to a volunteer over a prolonged timeframe (not pinpointed to a specific date and time) is considered an "occupational illness" and should also be reported to the National Park Service. Such an example could be a respiratory illness from prolonged and repeated exposure to dust or fumes.

### Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned is a proven method of sharing important safety messages. Based upon real-life incidents on the Ice Age Trail, Lessons Learned examines root causes of why an accident or injury happened and identifies corrective actions or mitigation to reduce the chance of future accidents. Lessons Learned does not identify people by name, nor is it finger-pointing or a way to place blame. It is an honest assessment of a chain of events that helps us find proactive ways to keep us all safer. Lessons Learned is another useful tool for volunteer work leaders to share during safety briefings.

The e-library of NPS Lessons Learned documents for Ice Age NST is found on the Alliance's website at:

[www.iceagetrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/volunteer-resource-center](http://www.iceagetrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/volunteer-resource-center)

### Report Form

Particular information is required by the NPS to enter injury and near miss reports into the SMIS system (see below). Volunteers needing to report an injury or near miss accident may download the "Near Miss and Injury Report Form" from the Alliance's website at:

[www.iceagetrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/volunteer-resource-center](http://www.iceagetrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/volunteer-resource-center)

## Safety Reporting -vs- Medical Expense Claim

Volunteers are sometimes confused by the difference between reporting injuries and/or near misses (as described above), and the separate process of seeking reimbursement for medical expenses due to a volunteer on-the-job injury. Often, volunteers fail to report injuries or near misses because they do not intend to seek any medical expense reimbursement. Regardless of the medical expense question, volunteers are obligated to report their injuries and near misses.

### Safety (SMIS)

The Safety Management Information System (SMIS) tracks both NPS employee and volunteer safety data as required by OSHA. Volunteers are required to report to the NPS any injury (both first aid only, and injuries requiring physician treatment), or near miss accident, so that the NPS can enter that data into the SMIS system, regardless of whether the volunteer may be seeking medical expense reimbursement.

### Medical Expense (ECOMP)

Volunteers are entitled to the same consideration for reimbursement of medical expenses for work related injuries through the US Department of Labor-Office of Worker's Compensation Programs (DOL-OWCP) as provided to regular federal employees. Volunteers are not required to seek reimbursement of medical expenses, but they have that option as guaranteed through DO-7 and RM-7.

The medical expense claim process for both federal employees and volunteers is called the ECOMP system. If a volunteer is injured and wants to file an ECOMP claim for medical expenses, please contact the NPS-IATR for further instructions.