

# DV-AMC Trailhead Talk

Revised March 2014

Setting the stage with trip participants at the trailhead is one of your most important jobs as a leader. Remember that there may be many regulars in the group, but it is important that you take time to acquaint the new people with trip policies, with you as the leader, and with the other participants in the group. Interact with people before the official "circling up" begins, and try to draw people together to talk, especially the newcomers. Once the official circling up begins, make sure to include the following:

- 1. Sign in sheet** – Make sure that all participants sign the liability waiver. Review the fact that by signing, the hikers are executing a release of liability. Before stepping out on the trail, count noses and see if they equal the number of participants on your list. It is important that this sheet be with you during the trip so that you will have the emergency contact info. It's a good idea to keep a zip lock bag for the sheet in your pack in the event of inclement weather. Make certain that at least one other person knows where in your pack you are carrying the sheet.
- 2. Leader introductions** - be certain everyone knows your name, your role, and what you look like. If there is a co-leader, he or she should also be identified.
3. Group introductions - provide everyone a chance to put a name and home town with the faces they will be hiking with. Find out if there are any novice hikers and plan to have yourself or some other experienced hiker you know keep an eye on them.
- 4. Description of trip** - Be as descriptive as possible about what you're going to encounter on this hike. Let everyone know the route for the trip, mileage, any points of interest, location of water sources, terrain, elevation changes, pace (which may vary over the course of the hike), planned lunch or snack locations, shelters or campsites, etc.
- 5. Safety** – The safety of everyone in the group needs to be the number one priority of not only the leader but also of every person in the group. Identify specific safety issues as they relate to a particular hike (dangerous road or stream crossings, icy or slippery trail conditions, exposed above tree line trails, etc.).
- 6. Weather** - if relevant, discuss what impact the day's weather may have on your route and pace.
- 7. Clothing** - particularly in inclement, rainy or cold weather, be certain everyone has adequate clothing for the hike. Discuss the importance of stopping to adjust layers if needed in order to maintain a comfortable body temperature throughout the hike.
- 8. Medical issues** - If not previously addressed with participants in your pre-trip screening, be certain to request that anyone with a potential medical condition (such as allergies to stings, recent/chronic injuries, diabetes, peanuts, asthma, hypoglycemia) let you know. Offer them the opportunity to do this in private so they don't have to announce it to the entire group. Also, be certain to encourage everyone to speak up if they begin to develop a hotspot or blisters, or if they twist an ankle or knee so that the group can stop and see that the "injured" hiker takes proper action to alleviate their problem.

**9. Ask about people with medical training** - generally anyone who is a doctor, nurse or EMT will identify themselves. Also, identify who in the group, other than the leader (who should always have one) is carrying a first aid kit, and let the group know where your first aid kit is located.

**10. Check on water** - ensure that everyone is carrying sufficient water, particularly on trips where water supplies are or may be problematic. It is also a chance to give out any extra bottles of water a leader may have brought for just such an occasion.

**11. Food** - ensure that everyone will have sufficient food, and thus energy, for the trip. Have some extra snacks available if someone has not come prepared.

**12. Rules for the hike** – discuss separation breaks and leaving packs at the trail if going into the woods to answer the call of nature, the importance of keeping the group together, the times (every 30 minutes or hour) or locations (road crossings, trail junctions, summits, streams, in the event of a thunderstorm, at the end of the hike, etc) when people should wait for everyone to catch up. Emphasize that safety is our primary concern, that no dangerous stunts will be permitted, and the imperative that anyone leaving the group speak to you personally before doing so. Discuss Leave No Trace ethics and the importance of limiting our impact on the environment and on other people on the trail.

**13. Lead hiker and sweep** - determine who will set the pace and assign a qualified sweep. Explain that participants should always be behind the designated lead hiker and in front of the sweep. In a large group, having an assistant leader in the middle may also be a good plan.

**14. Maps and trail guides** - it is helpful to know who, other than the leader has maps and trail guides. Show interested participants what the day's route looks like on a map.

**15. Discuss AMC** - take time to tell the group a little bit about AMC, especially on Meetup hikes. Talk about the types of activities that AMC is involved in and where to get info on the club. Carry a few DV info cards that can be given to those who are unfamiliar with AMC. Provide information on upcoming hikes and let other leaders in the group announce their upcoming trips.

**16. Carpooling** - if carpooling to the starting trailhead (for a hike involving a shuttle) be certain that no one is left behind at the ending point and that everyone knows how to get to the starting trailhead if separated on the roads. Providing written directions and/or a map to drivers is helpful. Swapping cell phone numbers of those people carrying mobile phones is also recommended.

The foregoing list may seem long, but the items can and should be covered in a very few minutes and in a friendly and upbeat manner. Setting expectations clearly in the beginning of a trip can make for a much more pleasant experience for all involved.