

## Appendix E: Event Safety

### 1. Introduction

Rule 1.7 covers event safety and lays out the main areas for consideration. This Appendix provides additional guidance.

Orienteering involves people with a wide spectrum of physical abilities making their way across potentially hazardous and challenging terrain. Despite this, the incidence of serious injury is low.

The responsibility for competing safely will be the competitor's (Rule 1.7.1), and this can be highlighted in event handouts. The organising team has the responsibility to avoid putting the competitor in an unreasonably hazardous situation. The safety of non-competitors in the area should also be remembered.

The organising team is responsible for making initial decisions on event safety. The role of the Controller is to approve the decision (or disapprove and ask that it is reversed).

It will never be possible to run a perfectly safe event but Organisers should be aware of the main safety issues and, if an incident occurs, be prepared to deal with it in a calm and effective manner.

The Controller should be satisfied that appropriate steps have been taken to deal with safety issues. For all events, from the smallest to the largest, it is important that the organising team consider, before the event, the main safety issues and how to plan safety into the event. The British Orienteering Office sends a Risk Assessment form to all Organisers when an event is registered. This can be used to help identify and assess safety issues.

Organisers have the right to impose whatever additional rules they think appropriate for an event, provided that competitors are clearly notified (see Rules 1.3.5 to 1.3.8). Whilst this right will only be used occasionally, Organisers should be confident that they can require competitors to follow specific instructions where to do otherwise would compromise safety.

### 2. Particular Safety Considerations

#### 2.1 First Aid Cover

It is fairly routine for orienteering events to request cover by one of the voluntary organisations, e.g. St. Andrew, St. John and the Red Cross. If they can attend, then they will be able to judge how many helpers to bring along. They invariably perform an excellent service in dealing with competitors at or near to the finish area. Make a generous donation!

Smaller events (and, for example, training/coaching sessions) may not be able to justify calling in such support. As a minimum, appropriate First Aid shall be easily available. The nature of this will depend on factors such as the type of terrain, the time of year and the distance from outside assistance.

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In more challenging terrain it may be helpful to ask whether a mountain rescue team can be available on the day. In an emergency the decision of whether to call them out is one for the police.

Organisers should know the location of the nearest accident hospital (is it open at weekends?) and be able to arrange the transfer of any casualty. A mobile phone can be helpful in summoning assistance without having to find a phone box, but coverage may be poor in remote areas.

### 2.2 Weather Conditions

Obviously the extremes of heat and cold (especially wet cold) are the main dangers. Drinks controls / points on longer courses may be necessary rather than just desirable. Consider whether additional guidance or rules on clothing are needed.

### 2.3 Terrain

The dangers of a particular type of terrain will generally be known to local inhabitants and to local orienteers so check with them, e.g. for old mine shafts etc. Don't assume that all orienteers will follow the best route between controls; even hazards well away from the expected routes should be thought about. The Planner must take this into consideration (see Rule 1.7.6). Dangerous features should be marked with yellow or yellow and black tape if they are likely to be visited by any competitors and are not already clearly marked as dangerous (see Rule 1.7.7).

### 2.4 No Whistle/Cagoule, No Go?

Rule 7.1.3 allows the Organiser to enforce the carrying of cagoules or similar weatherproof garments if necessary. Rule 7.1.4 allows the Organiser to enforce the carrying of whistles. Few topics are more likely to cause debate. Rather than join in the debate here, the following points are offered by way of advice:

- If you are requiring either or both to be carried, do explain your position in the pre-race information and prominently at the event so that everyone is quite clear about your requirements. Make it clear whether you are recommending or insisting.
- As with all such safety matters, the initial decision on whistles and cagoules rests with the Organiser.

### 2.5 Finish Location

Electronic punching allows the finish to be put some distance from the car park and assembly area. This does not remove the need to have an official at the finish, both to supervise competitors and to act as a point of contact in an emergency. The finish is the most likely place for somebody to go to report a problem such as an injured competitor. Facilities should be available to allow this situation to be handled.

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### 2.6 Electrical and Other Equipment

Equipment which is designed for outside use will tend to be safe provided that it is used appropriately and by people who know what they are doing. There is more danger from domestic equipment used 'in the field'. If in any doubt, seek qualified advice. The increased use of generators and computers to support electronic punching obviously requires careful thought to ensure that safety is maintained.

The siting or design of control canes and punches should aim to reduce the chance of competitors falling on them. This also applies when canes are used elsewhere such as the assembly area, start, finish and string course.

### 2.7 Roads and Traffic

The approach and exit routes of competitors should be looked at and, if necessary, discussed with the local traffic police.

Road crossings on a course may need marshals, depending on the visibility at the crossing, the weather, the age of competitors and the traffic density. The marshals are there to deal with the competitors, not the cars; even so they should use high-visibility clothing. Electronic punching enables timed road crossings to be used. Competitors are allowed up to a defined time (normally one or two minutes) between controls on each side of the road, and the actual time they take is then deducted from their running time.

### 2.8 Radios and Mobile Phones

Unless the competition is small and being held in a very compact space it is unlikely that the officials can easily communicate with each other. Radios can be useful in making an event run more smoothly; when there is any sort of incident they are invaluable. Mobile phones can also be used, but coverage is often poor in wooded or hilly areas, even when close to urban areas. Radios should be preferred for larger events.

## 3. Checks for Finishers

### 3.1 Introduction

It is a fundamental principle (Rule 1.7.2) that all competitors who start a competition shall report to the finish. It does no harm to remind competitors in pre-event information of their obligation to report back:

**“Once started, you must report back to the finish.”**

### 3.2 The Buddy System

The 'buddy' system supposes that most competitors do not travel alone and one of their companions will inform the organisation when a competitor has been out too long. It has the advantage that the Organiser is only alerted in genuine cases where a competitor is overdue, and the 'buddy' knows the missing person and can give a description.

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For those travelling alone the enquiries tent or registration should record their details and relieve them of something valuable such as their car keys so that there is an incentive for the competitor to report back.

Unless the Organiser declares otherwise, the use of this reporting out/reporting back system is optional.

### 3.3 Keeping a Check on Starters

It is only possible to check for finishers if a 'check' has been made for starters. This can be by ticking starters off on a pre-printed start list or by using control card stubs. The "clear" and "check" stations used with electronic punching can also record starters.

The list of starters is then matched against the known finishers. Experience has shown that this system is not foolproof. It works best in good weather with a small event and an efficient finish/results team. In bad weather with lots of wet control cards it can be difficult to guarantee that the system doesn't produce outstanding stubs for people who have actually finished, or fail to spot someone who has been out for a long time. Electronic checks can be more effective (or at least much quicker), but still require an understanding of how to carry out the check. This should be sorted out before the event.

Ticking starters off should produce an accurate start list (what about late changes?) but it is logistically difficult to match control cards from finishers with the list.

### 3.4 A Missing Competitor

If a competitor is identified as not having finished then the Organiser must make a decision as to whether they are simply a bit overdue or seriously missing. Either way, the Organiser will want to get some preliminary information about the competitor, e.g. age, appearance, experience, course, start time etc.

If overdue then it could be appropriate to just wait – the lost competitor will almost invariably appear, having come to no harm. Sometimes sending a friend of the missing competitor round the course backwards is helpful - but make sure they don't become missing as well. They should only set out with the Organiser's permission, adequately equipped and with clear instructions about returning by a certain time.

If the Organiser feels that the competitor is missing and that there are genuine reasons for being worried then they must be prepared to take positive action. Organisers should consider the following questions when deciding what to do.

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### 3.4.1 Who should be doing what?

It is essential that the strategy for this has been worked out before the event.

Tasks to be done include:

- Gathering the intelligence
- Controlling the progress of the initial search
- Team leaders for search teams
- Liaison with other organisations (e.g. police, mountain rescue).

### 3.4.2 What factors should influence whether or not we search?

Age/experience of the competitor	Density of competitors still in the forest
Amount of daylight left	Nature of the terrain
Car left in car park	Elapsed time
Weather now and forecast	Time of year
Known medical condition	

### 3.4.3 What should we do then?

Try and build up as much 'intelligence' as possible. Check obvious places and check the start list and finish list again to make sure the person really is missing. Get a good description of the person, both physical and psychological. Alert potential searchers, control collectors and others. Deal with the needs of friends and relatives. Quiz finishers to check if anyone has seen the missing competitor or anything unusual.

### 3.4.4 How should we conduct a search?

This depends on the environment and the nature of the problem. The deployment of searchers must be based upon probabilities and the terrain:

Which areas have the highest probabilities of containing the competitor? A field may have the same area as a piece of woodland but can be covered much more quickly by a smaller number of searchers. Allocate searchers accordingly.

There are two methods of search to consider:

*Ribbon searching* – this only covers linear features and the land on either side. A competitor injured in the middle of a thick block of forest may still be found by ribbon searching if they use their whistle or shout for help. Following the competitor's course is a sort of ribbon search but it is difficult whenever there is a route choice.

*Sectoring* – this involves a comprehensive sweep search of selected pieces of land. It is very slow and labour intensive - probably requiring more people than you will have available.

The reality of searching is that, if the missing person is unconscious, it will take a very long time to locate them in the sort of terrain that we use.

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The search must be monitored closely to avoid duplication or omission. Any feature that cannot be 'cleared' must be noted, e.g. a mine-shaft. A map showing the progress of the search should be kept. If the area is not bounded by a good physical feature then consider the possibility that the person has strayed out of the vicinity completely. If there are perimeter or access roads then a quick tour by car may intercept the lost competitor. If and when the missing person is found, it must be possible to recall the searchers.

### **3.4.5 When should we contact the police and what sort of response should we expect?**

There is no simple answer but, in general, the police will appreciate early notification, even if you are not actually requesting help at the time. Their response will depend on the circumstances - they will decide whether to alert mountain rescue if you are in a suitable area or to start to gather searchers, based upon the information which you supply. It is important that you give as many details as you can of the situation and the missing person including, for example, home telephone number, car registration number etc. Although an officer may attend reasonably quickly it can take a significant length of time for them to mobilise any number of helpers. Even when help does arrive, the expertise of orienteers to navigate precisely over complex terrain, even at night, should be remembered.

### **3.4.6 While the search is underway, what should be happening?**

The searchers themselves may have already had a long and tiring day. If the weather is bad, are they suitably prepared or will they become casualties themselves? Are the friends / relatives of the missing person being looked after? Is there someone briefed to deal with the press (in consultation with the police)? Are the searchers' families being informed that they will be late home?

### **3.4.7 What pre-event preparation should be carried out?**

The organising team and the Controller should discuss plans for meeting various crises. One of these crises is the overdue competitor and everyone involved should be aware of their responsibilities should the situation occur. Members of the organising club (perhaps the control collectors as a minimum) should be alerted to the fact that they should not leave for home until everyone has been accounted for. If appropriate, they could be asked to bring head torch, food and suitable clothing – just in case.

Radios will make a big difference to the efficiency of the search but make sure that the batteries are not running down at the end of the day just when you most need them.

All clubs should ensure that their members are aware of the basic safety rules associated with orienteering. Running a search exercise for a missing competitor is informative and prepares the whole club for the day when it may be for real.