

The following is a draft setting out guidelines for reporting safety-related incidents on Bellingham trips (hikes, climbs, snowshoe trips, etc.). The focus is on reporting the incident itself and the events and conditions leading to the incident, not on the aftermath – first aid, evacuation, role of SAR, follow-up – which may be added later.

INCIDENT REPORTING

WHAT IS A REPORTABLE INCIDENT?

An incident worth reporting is any event that, by itself or in combination with other incidents of similar type, may raise safety concerns or suggest a systemic weakness in some program or provide lessons learned for committees running programs (including committees in other branches) or for individuals in or out of the Mountaineers. An incident need not involve injury or illness. If there is no injury, it could be a close call (e.g., somebody barely self-arrests in time to avoid going over a cliff), but doesn't have to be: a party member on a hike who shows up seriously unequipped is not, as such, a close call. An incident may suggest more good things about a program than bad things, e.g., a successfully held self-belayed slip on snow. It can be as useful to learn why things work when they work as it is to learn why they fail when they fail. There is no clear line between reportable incidents and incidents that are too minor to be worth reporting. You have to use your own judgment. If you think there is a significant likelihood (certainty is not necessary) that this incident, perhaps when combined with other incidents of similar type, will provide anyone with any useful lessons learned, you should report it.

WHERE ARE INCIDENTS REPORTED?

In the online trip report form, there are two relevant reporting fields, allowing over a million characters each. One is for reporting concerns about a specific individual party member, who should be named. The other is for reporting incidents, including accidents. It may sometimes be reasonable to put something in both fields for a single incident involving a problem person, but there should be no fault-finding in the incident field; that should be kept in the other field. The focus here is on the incident reporting field. In some cases, there are reasons to have narratives or other information about the incident from other people involved: the victim, other party members, SAR. You may decide yourself that this is needed or someone may e-mail you asking for more information from you and/or from other people. In either case, it's usually best to handle the reporting largely

outside the reporting form, with just a brief note in the form, rather than by complex editing of the form.

[N.b. A fatality should never be reported on a standard report form. You must always contact the Mountaineers – president, executive director, branch chair. The investigation and reporting will be taken out of your hands, but you will be asked at some point to provide the information you have.]

WHO GETS THE REPORTS?

When an incident is reported on the trip report, an e-mail is automatically generated that sends the report to the executive director, the chair of the branch committee that has jurisdiction, and the chair of the Mountaineers-wide Safety Committee, who then sends copies to the other members of the Safety Committee. At the end of the year or the start of the next year, the year's incidents are discussed in a day-long session by the Safety Committee. The result of the discussion is a set of recommendations that are sent, along with the reports themselves (sometimes with changes), to branch chairs who generally pass them along to activity committees.

WHAT SHOULD BE REPORTED?

There is no good answer to this. The best thing to do when trying to decide on the details to report is to imagine that you have the opportunity to read through several score incidents of similar type collected over several years, looking for evidence of systemic problems and ask what information you would like to have about each one. That's the information you should provide, to the extent that it is available, even if some of it may seem irrelevant to your specific incident. Keep in mind that the whole purpose of incident reporting is to extract as much diagnostic value (the value to committees looking for systemic weaknesses) and cautionary value (the value to individuals) as possible.

Do not use proper names, use initials to identify the principals -- victim or near-victim and others directly involved. The report should be strictly factual: do not find fault or try to cite lessons learned; if you write a good, detailed report, you and three other qualified people who read it, may come to four different conclusions about whether there was any fault and if so where it lay. There is no "official" diagnosis. At most, there will often be a tacit consensus among the members of a committee – the Safety Committee or an activity committee – that this incident (more likely, these incidents) indicate a need to make some change in a program. Individuals, of course, will decide for themselves whether to change their practices in light of incident information.

Provide standard information about the principals as follows:

- Age and gender
- Statuses (e.g., '07 Basic grad, Scramble student)
- General relevant experience (e.g., novice snowshoer, many years of high-standard alpine climbing)
- Medical conditions (e.g., diabetes) if volunteered
- Approximate gross weight (for many incidents, e.g., self-belayed falls on snow)
- Physical and mental state before and at the time of the incident (e.g., extremely tired, trouble keeping up)
- Environmental factors: wind, temperature, precipitation (for many incidents, e.g., heat exhaustion, forced bivouac)

Provide the time of day and give the location or a general description of the location. There is no settled rule yet about whether proper names of locations will be included in final versions of reports.

By way of suggesting examples, the following are some ideas about what you should consider including for incidents of two fairly complex types: Falls on snow and leader falls on rock. The suggestions are not meant to be complete, since there are always details specific to the incident.

Falls on snow. Angle and quality of snow, line of travel (ascending, descending, ascending traverse). What was victim doing at time of fall? (if self-belaying, length of ax, how much ax was in the snow – half, two-thirds, etc. Did self-belay hold? Approximate gross weight of climber, clothing – rain pants increases acceleration). Condition of boot heels if plunge-stepping. Holding the axe pick-forward or pick back? Did victim go head downhill at any point? Was self-arrest successful? Did victim retain control of the ax?

Leader falls on rock. Length of fall and fall factor (estimated). Free fall vs. tumbling/bouncing fall vs. sliding fall. Did climber hit anything? Precipitating event (foot slip, hand slip, broken hold). Type and quality of climber's footwear. Device (cam, chock, etc.) of any protection that failed or held fall. Quality of rock in general and at any protection point that failed or held. Estimated amount of run-through if any. Diameter of rope, belay method or type of device (and mode for a two-mode device). Position of belayer vis-a-vis anchor. Tautness of attachment to anchor. Any partial failure of anchor. Was belayer pulled off stance? Was belayer wearing gloves?

