



*University of Alaska*  
**REMOTE TRAVEL SAFETY  
GUIDE**

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# UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA REMOTE TRAVEL SAFETY GUIDE

## I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Travel in remote areas of Alaska presents many challenges. This Guide was written to increase awareness and assist University of Alaska wilderness travelers by outlining some common safety issues and providing recommended actions or behaviors. If you haven't already done so, please be sure to consult the Remote Travel Pre-Trip Planning Guide before your trip and complete and file your Remote Travel Emergency Plan. This Remote Travel Safety Guide should be accompanied by an Emergency Survival Guide for your reference for other common safety issues that can occur in the wilderness.

This Guide is designed to be used by University of Alaska students, faculty, and staff who travel to remote areas for business, research, or recreation. Information is included on travel, clothing, food and water, health, safety, subsistence, and survival techniques. It is recommended that all supervisors, graduate student major advisors, research principal investigators, student affairs personnel, student organizations, rural faculty, and any other University of Alaska affiliated individuals traveling in remote areas be familiar with the contents of this Guide, carry it with them on remote travel, and use it for training on how to work and recreate safely in the wilderness. University department heads and supervisors are responsible and accountable for safety performance in their respective areas of responsibility.

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### III. TRAVEL SAFETY

#### A. Motor Vehicle Travel

A vehicle will provide shelter if you are stranded. Do not leave the vehicle unless absolutely necessary. The headlights from your vehicle can be used to signal potential rescuers. However, do not continue to use them for extended periods of time, as the battery will become quickly depleted, particularly in colder temperatures. Do not run the vehicle continuously. Make sure the tail pipe is clear of snow and mud. **NEVER GO TO SLEEP IN A RUNNING VEHICLE.** Make sure you have adequate ventilation, with a window slightly open. If possible, face the vehicle into the wind so that vehicle exhaust won't be drawn inside. See section on Carbon Monoxide Poisoning, Section V.C., for further information if you are stranded with a vehicle.

#### B. Boat Travel

Loading a boat safely is important. Keep the center of gravity low (don't stack gear too high). Distribute the weight of your gear evenly along the length of the boat. Do not depart if water conditions are not conducive for safe travel. Be aware of high water from rain, snow melt, or glacier melt, fast and unpredictable currents or tides, turbid water, floating debris, high winds and geographical features as these conditions may cause hazards. All participants must wear a Coast Guard rated and approved life vests whenever they are on a watercraft.

#### C. Air travel

Alaska Statutes, Section 02.35.110. Emergency rations and equipment, requires aircraft pilots to provide emergency equipment and rations for each and every flight within the state. Be sure that the owner and/or pilot confirms that the required survival gear is on board. Weight distribution is extremely important; let the pilot load the plane. Dress to survive the worst terrain and climate over which your air route will take you. Wear leather gloves. Carry extra clothes and your emergency survival gear. Do not smoke around fueling operations.

#### Helicopter Safety and Etiquette:

- § If possible, deploy some light weight material as a wind sock to indicate wind direction to the pilot.
- § Wait for directions from the pilot before approaching the aircraft.
- § AFTER the pilot has acknowledged your presence and you are cleared to approach the aircraft:
  - o Approach or leave in pilot's field of vision, usually from the front of the aircraft.
  - o Approach or leave machine in a crouching manner (to stay below the main rotor).
  - o Stay away from the tail rotor.
  - o Approach or leave on the down slope side.
  - o Carry tools horizontally and below waist level, never upright or over the shoulder.
- § Fasten seat belt after entering helicopter and leave it buckled until pilot signals you to get out.
- § Never leave the helicopter while it is at a hover.
- § Do not touch bubble or any moving parts (tail rotor, exposed linkage, etc.).
- § Do not slam the helicopter doors.
- § Wear survival clothing in flight, up to the waist, in case of an emergency.
- § Keep heliport clear of loose articles (water bags, empty cans, etc.).
- § Keep people away from helicopter during takeoffs and landings.
- § Keep cooking and heating fires well clear of helicopter.

#### D. Snowmachines, ATVs, Four Wheelers

When traveling by snowmachine, all terrain vehicle (ATV), or four-wheeler, carry with you extra gasoline and whatever gear you will need to survive. Carry tools specific for each vehicle, in addition to your own basic survival kit. Do not travel alone. Never go further than you can walk back. Always carry snowshoes with you when traveling on a snowmachine.

#### E. Travel on foot

Carry your emergency survival kit, high energy food, and adequate water in all seasons.

##### 1. Summer

§ Travel in pairs.

§ Be in shape and be prepared for difficult terrain.

§ Treat foot blisters early. Stop to put tape or moleskin over tender spots as soon as they develop.

§ Dress in layers, and stop to adjust the amount of clothing you are wearing if you start to become overheated when hiking.

##### 2. Winter

In addition to the above precautions for summer, which remain applicable for winter travel, the following should be noted:

Keep water bottles from freezing by carrying them close to your body.

Never venture onto ice without checking your path with an ice chisel, pole, or other tool you can use to tap the ice. Snow cover can camouflage the real condition of the ice and what appears to be solid ice cover may not be. The best way to travel on ice is to check the path ahead with an ice chisel or other tool. If the ice sounds hollow when tapped or breaks through when jabbed, find another route. Be especially careful around the vicinity of lake inlets and outlets, feeder streams, down river from towns, where the lake is shallow, and near warm underground springs. Observation of the color and texture of the ice cover can help you determine whether or not to trust that the area is strong enough to hold your weight or that of your vehicle. Be aware of overflow conditions where several inches of water and a thin layer of ice may lie on top of a good bed of thick ice. When in doubt, do not attempt a crossing!

Note that river ice is 15 percent and sea ice is 50 percent weaker than lake ice. Air temperature should be no higher than 20F (-6C) for traveling on ice. Repeated use weakens ice so always watch for cracks.

#### F. If Lost

If you are lost, have been in a plane crash, or are for any other reason disoriented and unable to find your way, it is generally best to stay put unless to do so would further endanger your situation. Carefully consider your decision to leave; decision making in an emergency situation is sometimes difficult and always critical. Don't travel if you don't have a compass or can't determine direction in some other way.

If you do travel:

- 1) know your physical capabilities;
- 2) do not travel without proper clothing (including footwear);
- 3) have adequate food, shelter, and signals for the weather conditions and country;
- 4) make careful plans;
- 5) leave information about your plans on the vehicle or in the area you're leaving telling rescuers:

- § when you left;
- § where you are headed;
- § your route of travel;
- § your condition;
- § what supplies you have.

Keep a sketch map of your travels, showing landmarks, distances covered, time passed, and direction. It will help you keep to a direct course, show progress, and enable you to retrace your trail, if necessary. Check your back trail continuously as you travel so you can retrace your path, if you need to. Terrain looks a lot different coming than it does going. Travel slowly, conserving energy, and taking regular breaks of sufficient duration to recover your strength and energy. Stay near open areas. Camp early in the afternoon, near water and timber, if possible.

#### IV. SURVIVAL BASICS

No matter how much advance planning you do, there is always a chance that something will go wrong and you will need to use your wits as well as your experience to solve the problem. Nothing can substitute for a positive mental attitude in those situations. If you have done your planning well, including advance thought about the emergencies which you might encounter, you will know that you have the capability to survive and to help your companions to survive whatever the situation may be. Keep your wits about you, and remember that your best resource is yourself.

The definition of an emergency is varied, and only you can know if you are in a survival situation, but do not underestimate the importance of considering the possibility. Do not assume that everything will turn out all right without working at it, and do not count on others to get you out of a tight situation.

##### A. Clothing

There are five ways that you will lose body heat:

Radiation	Up to 50 percent of body heat loss radiates from the head and neck areas. Keep these areas covered for maximum warmth.
Conduction	Cold is transmitted through contact with cold surfaces and will occur with lengthy periods of sitting or standing or otherwise having body contact with cold surfaces. Make sure there is enough insulation between your body and the cold surface, especially between your feet and the ground.

	thermax, and silk. Do not wear cotton. Wet fabrics next to your skin will make you feel cold and conduct more heat from your body.
Middle (insulating)	You need to create a dead air space to insulate your body. Good fabrics for this purpose include polarfleece, down, and wool. Wool and polypropylene are especially good as they retain most of their insulating value even when wet. Down will not provide effective insulation when wet and should always be avoided in wet or moist environments.
Outer (protection)	This final layer should protect your body from wind and moisture yet be breathable and allow for the evaporation of moisture. Gore-Tex is a Teflon-like substance that is both breathable and waterproof. Its pores are small and do not allow water to penetrate the material fr









times following exertion. Hypothermia can occur in rugged mountain terrain where the weather can change extremely fast, or after being soaked in a stream crossing or a boating accident since most Alaskan waters are very cold all year long. The onset of hypothermia is insidious. Prevention must be practiced as an individual's ability to recognize and react to hypothermia dramatically declines as the condition develops. Hypothermia adversely affects an individual's decision making process.

Symptoms: Feeling cold, uncontrollable shivering, clumsiness due to loss of muscle coordination, slurred speech, inability to think clearly, and eventual unconsciousness and cessation of reflexes including heart and lung functions. Many victims in the later stages of hypothermia feel warm and try to shed clothing. Watch each other!

Treatment: Allow core area to warm up before warming the extremities. You want to keep blood circulating in the core area until it is warm enough to circulate to the extremities and to prevent cold blood from being circulated back to the core.

Strip and dry the victim; dress in dry clothing. Re-warm the victim SLOWLY; do not warm fast by immersing in warm/hot water. Cover the head and neck with warm clothing or blankets. Provide shelter out of the weather; get victim into a pre-warmed sleeping bag, into blankets, or into whatever is available to provide shelter and warmth. Chest to chest skin contact with another person in a sleeping bag works well. Warm rocks wrapped in clothing or hot water bottles are helpful. Warm drinks are not necessary, but may help in the psychological recovery. Breathing steam vapor may help. Do NOT give alcohol. Try to keep victim awake; this helps keep the body temperature up. Handle victim gently; don't let victim move or exercise.

Prevention: Dress appropriately and in layers so you can remove extra clothing before becoming overheated and wet with perspiration. Always carry rain gear and/or dry clothing. Keep your head and neck covered as up to 50% of body heat can be lost from these areas. Snack when



Treatment: remove wet gear from feet; pat dry (do not rub when feet are wet as this can cause tissue damage), re-warm, and elevate.

Prevention: Change socks whenever they become wet.

## **VI. WILD ANIMALS AND OTHER HAZARDS**

### **A. Bear safety**

To avoid dangerous situations in bear country:

- § Make your presence known while you are traveling by creating noise and traveling in groups.
- § Avoid traveling through thick brush with restricted visibility. If you have to hike through brush, keep the wind at your back so your scent will carry ahead of you.
- § Avoid, and never get between, a bear and her cubs.
- §

## B. Moose and Other Large Animal Safety

Although moose appear slow and passive, they are capable of stomping a person to death in a matter of minutes. Never approach a moose and never go anywhere near, or come between, a moose and her calf. Moose and other large animals will attack to protect themselves or their young, to defend their mates, or even to guard a food supply. Stay away from large animals and do not give them a reason to attack you. Do not make sudden moves either toward or away from them, as this may be interpreted as aggressive or territorial.

## C. Animal Bites and Rabies

Avoid wild animals that seem curious or don't run away from humans. Arctic fox, red fox, wolves, caribou, dogs, and possibly river otters are known to carry rabies in Alaska. If bitten, clean the wound and control bleeding. If possible, and without endangering yourself or others, capture or kill the animal. Keep the animal's head as this part is needed for rabies determination. Do not touch the carcass with your bare hands. Get medical attention immediately.

## D. Insect bites

A smoky fire helps keep insects away. Some individuals may experience minor skin irritations with commercial mosquito repellants. If repellant is not available, cover hands and face with oil, fat, or mud. However, do not use the oils and fats in bear territory as the aroma can attract the bears to you. Some insects can carry disease. Avoid being bitten by wearing protective clothing and/or using repellants and nets if possible. Cold packs may reduce the itching and swelling of insect bites. Solutions of household ammonia (without detergent) applied directly to the affected areas (not eyes and mucous membranes) are also very effective in reducing itching and irritation caused by most insect bites. Wash the skin with soap and water and minimize scratching to prevent infection.

## E. Giardia

Giardiasis is an intestinal infection caused by the parasite *Giardia laniblia* found in northern rivers and streams. See Section IV. B. for ways of disinfecting all drinking water.

## F. Fish poisoning

The sharp dorsal spines of some saltwater fish can cause wounds that become easily infected from water-borne bacteria or from neurotoxins in the spines themselves. Rockfish or other sculpins are especially toxic. Remove the spines from the skin, wash the area well, and apply an antiseptic.

## G. Jellyfish stings

Jellyfish in Alaska are more a nuisance than a real danger. Wash tentacles away from the skin with saltwater (not freshwater, as this may trigger more stings). To deactivate the toxins, wash the affected area with any alcohol or vinegar for 30 minutes. Aldof's meat tenderizer is a field expedient anti-toxin.

## H. Paralytic shellfish poisoning

Paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) is caused by a toxin and can cause death if consumed. One of the highest concentrations of PSP in the world are reported to be in the shellfish in southeast Alaska. However, PSP can be found along any Alaskan coastline. Clams, mussels, oysters, snails, scallops, and barnacles can all store the poison in their bodies. The toxin has been found in these shellfish every month of the year. Some clams have been known to store the toxin for up to

two years. If you are not sure that the shellfish you plan to eat are free of Nhat t;he shu Tc that ellfis.

- § **Flares and Rockets:** If you have flares or rockets, fire them straight up in the air when the search vehicle is pointed in your direction. Do not point them in the direction of the search vehicle.
- § **Mirror Signal:** A flash of reflected light is one of the easiest and most effective signals when the sun is shining. It can be seen for many miles. Use a reflective mirror or any other reflective material.
- § **Smoke by day, fire by night:** Put green boughs or grass on a hot fire to produce white smoke. Rubber or plastic will produce a thick black smoke, more visible on snow. Do not breathe smoke from these fires. Be ready to light a fire at night when you hear a plane. Oil-soaked rags should be ready to light three fires set in a triangle, 10 feet long on a side.

Standard ground to air signals: See codes below. Signals may be tramped in the snow, made of branches, cloth, or stone, trenches dug in the tundra, or patterns cut in vegetation. Try to make as big a color contrast as possible between your symbol(s) and the surrounding terrain. The symbol(s) should be 8 to 10 feet long and 3 feet wide for spotting by plane. The surfaces of your airplane or vehicle, which will generally be in sharp contrast to the surrounding area, are also a signal that can be seen from the air. In addition, you should use any means possible to try and attract an aircraft's attention: radio, flames, smoke, flares etc.

Require doctor - serious injury.....	
Require medical supplies.....	
Am going in this direction.....	→
Unable to proceed.....	X
Yes.....	Y
No.....	N
All is well.....	LL

Air-to-ground signals:

Understand.....	Rock wings (in daylight) or make green flashes with signal lamp (night).
Do not understand.....	360 turn to right over party (in daylight) or make red flashes with signal lamp (night).
Proceed in this direction.....	Pass over party while rocking wings; proceed for 1 minute on heading desired, then return and repeat maneuver two more times.



**IX. EMERGENCY & INSURANCE CONTACTS**

PUBLIC RESPONSE	
ALASKA STATE TROOPERS	911
COAST GUARD	1-800-478-5555
POISON CONTROL	1-800-222-1222

U	Environmental, Health and Safety	907-786-1351
A	University Police	907-786-1120
A	Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)	907-269-3063 1-800-478-0084 (After Hours)

U	Risk Management	907-474-6771
A	Environmental Health & Safety	907-474-5413
F	University Police	907-474-7721
	Institute of Arctic Biology	907-474-7658
	IARC	907-474-1597
	Facilities Services	907-474-7000
	Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)	907-451-2121 1-800-478-0084 (After Hours)

U	Safety and Health Officer	907-465-6799
A	Facilities Services	907-465-6496
S	Juneau Campus Emergencies (after 4:30p.m. & before 8:00a.m.)	LJ Alarm: 907-789-8237
	Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)	907-465-5340 1-800-478-0084 (After Hours)

S	Risk Management	907-474-7465
W	Environmental, Health and Safety	907-474-5005
	Insurance Coverage	907-474-5278
	Claims Adjustment (Anchorage)	907-786-7755
	Claims Adjustment (Fairbanks)	907-474-1972
	Land Management (Anchorage)	907-786-7766
	Land Management (Fairbanks)	907-474-7212

INSURANCE CONTACTS		
Each participant on a remote travel assignment is individually responsible for securing adequate insurance protection for themselves, whether it be through a University of Alaska program or private insurance. Emergency calls regarding insurance coverage can be directed to the Statewide Office of Risk Management, at 474-7465 or 1-800-478-8632 (in state only).		
FOR UA EMPLOYEES	Health Claims Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alaska (Health Benefit Eligible Employees Only)	1-800-245-6784
(Includes eligible)	On the Job Injuries (Workers' Compensation)	907-474-5322 or 1-800-478-8632 (in state only)

volunteers and graduate students on stipend – for eligibility confirmation call 907-474-7465.)	Travel Accident	Assistance Services (emergency medical, legal, travel): 1-800-626-2427 inside the U.S. or collect 0-713-267-2525 if outside the U.S.
	Foreign Travel	Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc. Call toll free (800) 766-8206 from within the USA or Canada. Call collect (202) 659-7777 if outside the USA or Canada
FOR UA STUDENTS	Accident Insurance Purchased Through SW Risk Management	907-474-7465 or 1-800-478-8632 (in state long distance)
	UAA Student Health Insurance	907-474-7465 or 1-800-478-8632 (in state long distance)
	UAF Student Health Insurance	907-474-7465 or 1-800-478-8632 (in state long distance)
	UAS Student Health Insurance	907-465-6457 Student Resource Center

## X. UA FIELD STATIONS AND FACILITIES

UA field stations and facilities should you need to contact someone in your vicinity in an emergency:

UAA
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- § **Anchorage:** Elmendorf AFB Military Education Services, 3 MSS/DPE 4109 Bullard Ave, Suite 21, Elmendorf AFB, AK 99506, 907-753-0204
- § **Anchorage:** Ft. Richardson Military Education Services, Kiska Hall, Bldg. 658, Rm. 131, Fort Richardson, AK 99505, 907-428-1228
- § **Cordova:** Cordova Extension Center, Cordova, AK 99574, 907-424-7598
- § **Eagle River:** Chugiak/Eagle River Campus, 10928 Eagle River Road, #228, Eagle River, AK 99577, 907-694-3313
- § **Fairbanks:** Eielson AFB Military Education Services, 3124 Wabash Ave, Room #105, Eielson AFB, AK 99702, 907-372-3484
- § **Fairbanks:** Ft. Wainwright Military Education Services, Ft. Wainwright, AK 99703, 907-353-6395
- § **Glennallen:** Copper Basin Extension Center, Glennallen, AK 99588, 907-822-5574
- § **Homer:** Kachemak Bay Branch, 533 E. Pioneer Ave, Homer, AK 99603-7624, 907-235-7743
- § **Kodiak:** Kodiak College, 117 Benny Benson Drive, Kodiak, AK 99615, 907-486-4161
- § **Palmer:** Matanuska-Susitna College, Palmer, AK 99645, 907-745-9726
- § **Valdez:** Prince William Sound Community College, Valdez, AK 99686, 907-834-1612

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- § **Bethel:** Kuskokwim Regional Campus, 543-3400 (College of Rural Alaska, Fairbanks, 474-7106)
- § **Brooks Range North Slope - Toolik Field Station:** (Institute of Arctic Biology, Fairbanks 474-7640)
- § **Chatanika:** Poker Flat Research Range, 474-7015 (Geophysical Institute, Fairbanks, 474-7558)
- § **Delta Junction:** Delta Rural Center, 895-4292 (College of Rural Alaska, Fairbanks, 474-7106)
- § **Dillingham:** Bristol Bay Regional Campus, 842-5483 (College of Rural Alaska, Fairbanks, 474-

7106)

- § **Fairbanks:** Ester Dome Observatory, 474-7502 (Geophysical Institute, Fairbanks, 474-7558)
- § **Fort Yukon:** Fort Yukon Observatory (Geophysical Institute, Fairbanks, 474-7558)
- § **Fort Yukon:** Fort Yukon Rural Center, 662-2521 (College of Rural Alaska, Fairbanks, 474-7106)
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