

So Why is Training Important?

As all of you may have noticed, the last weekend was quite an impressive show of Mother Nature's fury: torrential downpours here in town which turned streets into streams; campgrounds swept away in Santa Barbara, and massive snowstorms in the mountains. My home Troop, Troop 730, had planned an overnight snow backpacking outing to Little Jimmy, in the Angeles National Forest. For those who aren't familiar with Little Jimmy, it's at around 7,500 feet up the Angeles Crest Freeway, and is near to Mt. Islip and the Windy Gap. The hike is around 2.5 miles and a perfect first backpacking outing for new backpackers in the spring and summer. We'd planned to head up on Saturday morning, hike into Little Jimmy, and play in the snow (dig a few snow shelters), and then sit around the campfire, and hike out Sunday.

Well, for those of you who have taken the Weather Hazards safety online (a requirement for outing leaders), or the Basic Backpacking & Outdoor Leader course offered by the VCCHAT, you'll know that keeping track of weather forecasts--and adjusting your outings is critical to keeping your troop safe. Our leaders, who are all well trained (including at Winter Backpacking and familiar with Winter Camping), were watching the weather, and on the Tuesday meeting before the outing, we made the tough call to delay the outing until a better day. We'd been watching the forecasts and warnings from the National Weather Service, storm watches and warnings on sites as Wunderground, and even in the case of Little Jimmy checking out what reports were coming from nearby ski resorts (in this case, Mt. High in Wrightwood, Mt. Baldy, and Mt. Waterman). All of those reports the week before showed that there was some serious, serious weather all week, and timed to hit Thursday and Friday, and although there was a forecast of Sunny and Clear for Saturday--there was weather moving back in by Saturday evening and Sunday morning. So, after gathering our leaders, we made the hard decision to put off the outing until a better day. Troop 730 never cancels an outing -- we tell our parents, we camp and hike in the rain -- but it just seemed the prudent thing to do in this case.

Needless to say, it was a good call. By Friday, there were Winter Storm Watchings, Flash Flood Warnings, High Wind Warnings, and more for the mountains. We might have made it to the trailhead at Islip Saddle on Saturday -- after dodging mudflows, rocks, and hopefully not sliding off the Angeles Crest, which needed four wheel drive and chains -- but we'd have been in some serious, serious trouble by Saturday night, when nearly 6 feet of snow had fallen overnight and winds were expected to be as high as 90 miles per hour (which is more than enough to match a Category I Hurricane), and low 20's temperatures. The Angeles Crest was closed on Sunday from 4 miles west of Islip Saddle -- meaning we'd have been snowed in (if we could even dig out our cars out of six feet of snow!). There were avalanche warnings and avalanches at Wrightwood (only 5 miles to the east). It could have been disastrous. Even some of the alternatives we'd looked at -- hiking the Sespe locally up the 33, heading to Camp Three Falls -- which would have been equally tough (the

33 was closed due to snow and mudslides, the Sespe hit flood stage and had flash flooding, the CHP was restricting local residents only with chains to Lockwood Valley at the Flying J, and roads were nearly impassable for two days). So, without the Weather Hazard and outdoor training, we could have been in a world of hurt.

I know a lot of leaders think of training as painful and tedious, but all of the training we do is to make scouting safer, fun, and help so we can. Yes, some of it is there for legal reasons, but all of it helps promote scouting, get you better prepared (Be Prepared) for your outings, and help you improve as scout leaders. Please do your part to take advantage of all the training available to you. You can find lots of online training resources at myscouting.org, the District Site at and VCCHAT. I also hope to be emailing out a calendar of upcoming training events to everyone on a regular basis.

Please join me in bringing your packs, troops, and crews up to date on your training, and continue to improve the scouting experience for your boys.

Ben Kuo Incoming Conejo District Training Chair