

The Mountaineering Scotland Safety & Liability Guidance for Clubs Supplementary Guidance for Meetup Groups

Meetup groups differ from traditional clubs in that they often have a large and rapidly changing membership which means that members may not be well known to each other and therefore unaware of the experience or fitness of other members when on a group activity. In addition, such groups may organise walks with relatively large numbers of people in a party, many of whom, despite clear statements to the contrary on group websites, may believe that such groups offer a free hillwalking guiding service.

These factors could have a negative impact on safety. Importantly they could also have serious financial implications for group members and organisers in the event that an incident on the hill results in a claim made by an injured party for compensation is awarded due to negligence when on a group walk.

This supplementary section of Safety and Liability Guidance provides guidance to affiliated meetup groups and their organisers regarding good practice.

1. IMPLEMENT ON THE HILL "LEADERSHIP OF THE GROUP BY THE GROUP" AND ENSURE ALL MEMBERS ARE AWARE OF WHAT THIS ENTAILS AS FOLLOWS

- All members must accept responsibility for their own safety. They do so by acting responsibly, carrying necessary kit and taking steps to increase their own skills and experience level before, during and after trips to the hill.
- All members must exercise a duty of care to others in their group at a level commensurate with their own current skill and experience level.
- All members should explicitly accept the risks of mountaineering and accept that if they decide to rely on more experienced members, this is part of that risk.
- All members should take part in dynamic risk assessment discussions and decisions as they arise during the trip.

2. DEFINE THE ROLE OF THE WALK COORDINATOR (and use only this term for that person)

They coordinate and facilitate pre departure onto the hill. They can do this by-

- i) Suggesting an objective and a time and place to meet, and advising prospective members of the group to check the mountain weather forecast relevant to the objective.
- ii) Facilitate lift sharing etc.
- iii) Provide and share information on distance and altitude gain. Information such as grade and technical difficulty will be given to group members by reference to information available in the public domain such as guide books/websites to enable prospective members to decide if this walk is within their fitness and ability level.
- iv) Signpost group members to useful information such as kit lists.
- v) On behalf of the group check such things as stalking and access issues and advise the group as necessary.
- vi) Liaise with the group members to ensure that all the required group kit (e.g. first aid kit, group shelter) is brought on the walk.
- vii) Facilitate a discussion within the group about any important medical conditions which the group need to be aware of in the event of an incident.
- viii) Facilitate a discussion about the day's objective and its suitability for the group members at their current level of experience and fitness, and given the forecast weather conditions. However, if the group feels it is too much for someone, then it is the group to decide this and to invite that person to withdraw.
- ix) Coordinate the setting up of a group 'check-in person' for the end of the day who can alert the police if they are overdue.

3. RESTRICT GROUP SIZE TO A MAXIMUM OF SIX PEOPLE & INTRODUCE A 'BUDDY' SYSTEM.

If more than six members want to do a particular walk then they should split themselves down into smaller sub groups before departing. Although they can plan to rendezvous at stopping points/summits etc they should be truly autonomous groups responsible for navigating themselves and carrying all necessary individual and group kit.

With 'mixed ability' groups, a system of 'buddying' could be introduced, so the more experienced folk are paired up with the less experienced and as a result problems/issues would likely be picked up immediately

4. ALL GROUP MEMBERS ON ANY HILL TRIP SHOULD BE MOUNTAINEERING SCOTLAND MEMBERS

Meetup groups are free to join so, even if the group is affiliated to Mountaineering Scotland, group members are not automatically Mountaineering Scotland members and therefore do not have civil and public liability insurance cover unless they take out membership of Mountaineering Scotland on their own behalf.

The implication is that in the event of an incident which results in an award of compensation due to an individual's negligence – one who is not a member of Mountaineering Scotland and therefore not insured – that the individual against whom the claim is awarded is unlikely to be able to pay the full amount of damages awarded by a court.

The injured party's insurers are also likely to pursue the group's officials for compensation.

Mountaineering Scotland therefore recommends that all active group members are members of Mountaineering Scotland as this will ensure that their activities are covered by appropriate insurance.