SUMMARY

On November 5, 2016, Jack Rose, an 11-year-old member of a local troop, was on an overnight backpacking trip with his father as well as with adult leaders and Scouts from his troop. The group was in the backcountry portion of the Daniel Boone National Forest. The unit camped at a location that had what may be called a hazard tree. The label “hazard tree” includes dead trees, live trees with dead parts, and live trees that are considered unstable (due to structural defect) and are within striking distance of people or property. A hammock was tied to a dead tree that later fell on Jack’s tent after everyone retired for the evening. Tragically, Jack was killed when the tree struck him.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Avoid campsites with hazard trees. Dead trees and dead limbs may fall at any time. A lack of needles, bark, or limbs on a tree may indicate structural defects. Trees with broken tops, multiple downed limbs, ants, or an abundance of woodpecker holes may have internal rot.

2. If a campsite that contains a hazard tree must be used as a campsite, be sure to place tents, chairs, and hammocks outside the fall radius of the hazard tree and advise campers to avoid this hazard tree failure zone. The fall radius on flat ground is considered one to one and a half times the height of the tree or tree part that could fail.

3. Have a contingency plan for campsite selection because your first choice may not be available, especially on public lands.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

• Share Jack’s story before your next camping trip and understand that hazard trees can fall unpredictably.
• Ensure qualified supervision is in place with the appropriate level of outdoor training.
• Know and understand all park rules and regulations.
• Remember to examine campsites to identify any hazard trees.
• Always test a hammock to ensure it is hung correctly before putting your full weight into it.
• Don’t use hazard trees or unstable supports to anchor your hammock.

RESOURCES

• Hammock Camping Safety Moment: www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/hammock-camping
• ENO General Safety Information: www.eaglesnestoutfittersinc.com/safety/
• U.S. Forest Service—Hazard Trees: www.fs.fed.us/visit/know-before-you-go/hazard-trees

Jack’s story is shared at the request of his family.