



BSA SAFETY MOMENT

DANGERS OF LEAVING SCOUTS UNSUPERVISED, SAND DUNES, AND DIGGING IN SAND DUNES – GAGE’S STORY

NOTE: *Gage’s story is shared at the request of his family.*

SUMMARY

Tragedy struck our Scouting family on September 29, 2018. Twelve-year old Scout Gage Wilson was with his troop on a weekend outing at the North Point County Park in Van Buren County, Michigan. North Point County Park is a large series of sand dunes along the Lake Michigan shoreline. Unfortunately, Gage was left alone, without adult supervision or another “buddy” Scout, digging in an area of the dune not visible to other Scouts playing on the sand dune. It appears he was laying or sitting in the dugout he made when it collapsed on him, leaving his head and torso buried by the sand. Efforts to save Gage were unsuccessful, and he died later that day.

This was not the only time digging/excavating has affected our Scouting family. In September 2008 and in 2012, other incidents occurred while digging in sand dunes. In one, a sand cave collapsed, killing a youth; in another, the youth was dug out of the sand and survived.

LESSONS LEARNED

Sand dunes can collapse unexpectedly, so it is important that Scouts, adult volunteers, and adult supervision understand these dangers and prepare for outings where sand dunes may be in the area.

Excavation, digging caves, creating places to sit in a sand dune, or digging tunnels into earthen mounds are not part of the Scouting program by design and are prohibited. Please do not put youth, yourself or others at risk by such activities.

Scouting’s buddy system and two-deep adult supervision requirements exist to prevent both abuse and safeguard against tragedies like these.

- Adult leaders emphasize the buddy system in unit planning and training activities.
- Adults supervise youth activities.
- Two-deep adult supervision by registered adult leaders 21 years of age or over are required for all Scouting activities. This includes patrol activities. These enhanced requirements have been in effect since October 2018.
- Buddies must stay together during activities.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Share Gage’s story before your next outing, especially if the area in which you will visit includes sand dunes, lakeshore near a sand dune or hill, or sandy soils, or has a history of cave digging.
- Supply two-deep supervision of all Scouting activities including meetings. This may mean extra supervision is needed for multiple patrol, den or crew activities.
- Utilize program materials, the Guide to Safe Scouting, and checklists to plan, identify, access, and mitigate risks on your next outing.

RESOURCES

- Guide to Safe Scouting: <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/toc/>
- Prohibited Activity List: <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss07/#b>
- Campout Safety Checklist: https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/HealthSafety/pdf/campout_checklist.pdf
- Scouting Magazine Buddy System Blog: <https://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2017/11/07/buddy-system/>