SUMMARY

Scouts and their parents expect all Boy Scouts of America activities to be conducted safely. To ensure the safety of participants, the Boy Scouts of America expects leaders to use the four points of SAFE when delivering the Scouting program. Included below are examples of real incidents in Scouting where at least one of these four points was not followed. Please do not put participants at risk by ignoring these principles.

GENERAL INFORMATION

S = Supervision: Youth are supervised by qualified and trustworthy adults who set the example for safety.

• Three youth went on a backcountry trek without adult supervision. One teenage Scout died of heatstroke.
• A 12-year-old Scout was alone in a dug-out sand dune that collapsed on him. He died later that day.

Scouting policies like two-deep leadership and the buddy system safeguard against tragedies like these.

A = Assessment: Activities are assessed for risks during planning. Leaders have reviewed applicable program guidance or standards and have verified the activity is not prohibited. Risk avoidance or mitigation is incorporated into the activity.

• Two Scouts were burned while lighting a homemade stove. They had made the stove out of a soda can and were trying to fuel it with HEET®, a liquid fuel additive. The use of homemade stoves is prohibited.
• A Webelos Scout slipped and fell 25 feet into a ravine while hiking with older Scouts who were exploring an unpaved trail. The boy hit his head on rocks and suffered severe brain trauma. He was airlifted to a local hospital and never regained consciousness.

Understanding and following the guidelines contained in program materials and the Guide to Safe Scouting helps keep all youth safer in our programs.

F = Fitness and Skill: Participants’ Annual Health and Medical Records are reviewed, and leaders have confirmed that prerequisite fitness and skill levels exist for participants to take part safely.

• An 18-year-old assistant Scoutmaster, who had recently tested as a beginner swimmer during summer camp, drowned while attempting to swim across a river with two younger Scouts on a unit outing.
• A 38-year-old Webelos parent suffered a fatal heart attack during an overnight backpacking trip with his son’s den. The parent had been denied participation in a similar hiking activity due to poor physical condition and a body mass index greater than 40.

Fitness is an aim of Scouting. Knowing who can and should participate in a particular activity — by having the necessary fitness and skill to do so — keeps youth and adults SAFE.

E = Equipment and Environment: Safe and appropriately sized equipment, courses, camps, campsites, trails, or playing fields are used properly. Leaders periodically check gear use and the environment for changing conditions that could affect safety.

• A 13-year-old Scout fell about 20 feet from a zip line at a commercial rock gym facility and landed on his feet, injuring his left foot. Witnesses say the youth was seen using the zip line without properly fastening the restraining carabiner.
• Three Scouts were sitting on a picnic table under a metal carport during a severe thunderstorm when they were struck by lightning. A safe building during a storm is one that is fully enclosed with a roof, walls, floor, plumbing, and wiring.

“Be Prepared” is not just a motto but a method to follow to be safe. Using the right equipment for the right activity and in the proper location keeps Scouting SAFE.

RESOURCES

• SAFE: https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safe/
• Incident Reviews: https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/incident-report/incident-reviews/
• Safety Moments: https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/