Incident Review #1
A group of Scouts was on an overnight backpacking trip in a national forest. They were in the backcountry portion of the park. The Scouts camped in a site that had a “hazard” tree—the U.S. Forest Service classification for trees that are dead or dying, or live trees with dead or unstable parts. A hammock was tied to the dead tree and it fell on a tent, killing the youth inside.

Key Points
- Avoid campsites with hazard trees. Dead trees and dead limbs may fall at any time. Trees without needles, bark, or limbs may indicate structural defects.
- If a campsite does have hazard trees but must be used, be sure that all tents, chairs, and hammocks are placed outside the failure zone or fall radius of those trees. The fall radius on flat ground is one to one-and-a-half times the height of the tree or tree part that could fail.
- Dead trees, hazard trees, or other unstable objects are not appropriate hammock supports.

Incident Reviews #2 and #3
A 13-year-old Scout was swinging in a hammock and refused to stop. He fell out and injured himself during the fall when he braced himself by extending an arm. In a similar incident, an 18-year-old camp staff member was playing around by swinging in a hammock. When the hammock became untied, the staff member fell and suffered a large gash when he hit his head on a table.

Key Points
- Hammocks are not swings, and horseplay should never occur when they are used.
- The BSA disapproves of hammock stacking. Although not part of these incidents, the practice of hammock stacking has led to serious head injuries and fatalities outside of Scouting.
- Supervision of youth using hammocks helps prevent accidents.

Incident Reviews #4 and #5
An 11-year-old Scout fell from a hammock that was hung from the rafters of an Adirondack shelter. Afterward, he did not remember the fall when asked. In a similar incident, a 14-year-old Scout fell 6 feet from a hammock, landed on a rock, and suffered lower back pain.

Key Points
- Hang hammocks with the ends no higher than 3 feet off the ground such that the bottom is around 18 inches above the ground when occupied.
- As much as possible, the ground or floor under the hammock should be checked for and cleared of objects such as rocks, logs, chairs, tables, etc.

Incident Reviews #6 and #7
A Scout, age unknown, was lying in his hammock when a knot slipped. He fell and hit his head on a tree. In another incident, a 17-year-old Scout hit his head on a rock when his hammock broke.

Key Points
- Before use, hammocks and support systems should be inspected for rips, tears, or weakened support ropes.
Hammock Safety

- Check integrity of seams and attachments.
- Follow manufacturer instructions, including those for weight limits.
- Provide support that maintains the bottom at 18 inches or lower from the ground.
- Clear all hazards from beneath.
- Do not place hammocks above one another. Don’t stack!
- Use sturdy objects, e.g., solid posts, as anchorage points for hammocks.

Discussion Questions

- How can leaders provide appropriate supervision for the use of hammocks?
- What items should be on a safety checklist for hammock use?
- If hammocks or hammock-tents are to be used, does the landowner, park, or camp allow use of live trees as supports?
- If live trees are used as supports, are the anchor ropes made in a way that limits damage to the trees?
- Why are hammocks or hammock-tents that stretch across or extend over streams, rivers, or waterfront areas not recommended?

Resources

- [www.hammock-hammocks.com/safety-index.htm](http://www.hammock-hammocks.com/safety-index.htm)
- [U.S. Forest Service—Hazard Trees: www.fs.fed.us/visit/know-before-you-go/hazard-trees](http://www.fs.fed.us/visit/know-before-you-go/hazard-trees)