

Guidelines for the Supervision of School/Social Hiking Clubs

(Adapted from a 1997 publication of the Mountain Club of SA)

1. Introduction

As a result of a tragic accident which caused the death of a young scholar, and the subsequent inquest which found prima facie evidence of culpability for her death, the *Mountain Club of South Africa (MCSA)* took the initiative at the request of the Attorney General to draw up a set of guidelines in an attempt to prevent the recurrence of this sort of accident.

In a short set of guidelines such as this it is impossible to cover all aspects relevant to the safe participation of hiking. It cannot be over stressed that there is no substitute for proper training and experience gained by participation in this sport.

2. Legal Implications

In the event of injury or fatality during a hiking trip the question of criminal or civil liability or both will arise. In this regard it is important to bear in mind that:

- a. Such liability will probably depend on the proof of casual negligence on the part of the person or persons being held liable;
- b. The undertaking of an activity requiring particular skills without having such skills is itself negligence.
- c. A duty of care is required and if not undertaken is regarded as negligence.

3. Qualifications

Due to the inherent risk involved in all outdoor activities it is essential that at least one adult, who is responsible for the activity, be properly qualified to supervise the members under their control.

In view of the developments in formalising proper qualifications for mountaineering based instruction and guiding in South Africa, the minimum qualification recommended is a Basic Mountain Walking Leader (BML). This can be obtained from several approved instruction and guiding schools throughout the country. This is the lowest Hiking leadership qualification awarded under the *South African Mountaineering Development & Training Trust (MDT)* training scheme. (www.mdt.za.org) As such it provides certification at the most basic level of supervision. Such activities would include hiking on marked trails.

If the activities of the club include forms of hiking other than that covered by the qualification mentioned above then the qualification that would be required is as follows:

- Advanced Mountain Walking Leader (AML)
Hiking off trail in unmarked or wilderness areas

At present, only qualifications obtained under the MDT enjoy international recognition through the *Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme (UIAA)*. (*World Mountaineering Federation*)

Definitions used in these guidelines:-

"Qualified person"

A person who holds a valid Basic or Advanced Mountain Walking Leaders certificate issued by an accredited MDT Assessor, and has overall responsibility for the activities of the club. This person would normally be a teacher or parent of a pupil at the school.

"Competent person"

A senior member of the school hiking club who has been designated as such by the qualified person. Ideally the competent person should also have attended a training course, although they cannot receive accreditation for it until they reach the age of 18 years.

4. Basic knowledge for hikers

On induction into the club all members must be taught and tested to do the following without assistance. Records of these tests should be kept

- Equipment selection for hiking trips.
- Basic camp-craft
- Basic navigation
- Basic emergency procedures

5. Safety of Hiking Trips

All single day hiking trips should have at least one qualified person and one competent person in overall charge of the trip. Overnight trips should have two qualified person in charge of the trip.

No single group size should exceed twelve (12) persons.

6. Accidents

In the event of an accident involving serious injury, the following procedure must be adopted:-

- Secure the injured person to prevent further injury, only moving them if there is risk of further injury in them remaining where they are.
- Administer first aid as required, (it is strongly recommended that the qualified person hold a valid first aid certificate - ideally the Primary Emergency Care Practitioner certificate or equivalent as a minimum).
- Send for help if required to evacuate the injured person safely. Mountain rescue teams can be tasked by phoning 10177 and asking to have your call patched through to Metro Control. Mountain rescue is a specialised task, do not try to improvise.
- Unless people are in danger, do not disturb the scene of the accident in any way, especially if the injuries are serious, and an enquiry could be necessary.
- In the event of a fatality call the SAPS immediately.