



Camping Safety

Going back to nature with camping means leaving behind some familiar conveniences. It means using some unfamiliar procedures. To make sure a camping trip is an enjoyable one, be sure to follow safety rules.

Some tents are manufactured from cotton, which is a flammable substance. Sometimes the fabric treatment used to make tents waterproof actually increases the flammability, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Buy a tent that is flame retardant. Remember, "flame retardant" doesn't mean fire-proof. A flying ember from a fire can land on the tent and ignite it in seconds.

There are other things in a tent that can burn such as sleeping bags, clothing and people. A tent should be sited upwind from any campfire or outside cooking or lighting devices. Create a three-foot clearing around the tent. Only use battery-operated lights near or inside it. Always refuel any heat-producing appliance, such as lanterns and stoves, outside a tent. Always store flammable liquids, such as gasoline, outside a tent.

Don't cook inside a tent.

When preparing a campfire, a site should be selected that is away from grass, trees and tents. An area 10 feet around the campfire should be cleared of ground litter, twigs, leaves and organic material, down to bare soil. The site also should be downwind from the sleeping area to prevent catching a tent or sleeping bag on fire from a spark or ember. Rocks should be placed directly around the campfire pit.

If weather conditions are especially dry and you don't really need a fire for cooking, don't build one. A small spark is all it takes to ignite dry grass and leaves. Be sure to pay close attention to forest conditions and warnings from the park service.

Never use gasoline to light a fire. It is very explosive. A fire should be lit using kindling or a lighter stick. Keep a pail of sand or water nearby in the event it is needed to control the fire or extinguish it. Wear tight-fitting cotton or wool clothing while working near the campfire. Always keep a careful eye on fires. Make sure children don't play near them.

Before you go to sleep at night or if you leave the campsite for a while, be sure to put out the fire. Many forest fires are started each year from unattended campfires or those that were not completely extinguished. Douse the fire with water or sand, break up the coals, add more water

or sand, stir it with a stick and cover the dead embers with dirt. Make sure the fire is completely out before bedding down or leaving the campsite.

If you're using a gas or liquid fuel camp stove or lantern, follow the manufacturer's directions. Make sure all connections are tight to avoid leaks. Never check for a gas leak with a lighted match. Instead, put a little soapy water on the connections. If the mixture bubbles, gas is seeping out. Don't try to use the appliance again until it's been checked by a professional. When using a camp stove or gas lantern, always fill it before each use. Do not refuel a hot stove or lantern. Wait until it cools off. Use a funnel to fill the appliances and wipe up all fuel spills before attempting to light it again.

When traveling with a camper trailer or recreational vehicle, use only electrically-operated or battery-operated lights inside. Maintain all appliances in a safe working condition and check them before use. Keep a fire extinguisher on board, preferably a multi-purpose one, and mount a smoke detector inside the vehicle.

- When the vehicle is traveling down the road, shut down gas to stoves and water heaters by closing the fuel supply at the gas bottle.
- Never operate combustion type or catalytic heaters inside closed campers or recreational vehicle. This could result in asphyxiation from either fumes or oxygen depletion.
- Don't cook while the vehicle is underway. A sudden lurching of the vehicle may result in spilling of cooking grease, causing a fire.
- Always fuel stoves or lanterns outside campers or recreational vehicles.
- Accumulation of vapors in the fueling process, from volatile fuels, could result in an explosion.
- Avoid accumulating and storing combustibles such as newspapers and grocery bags in your vehicle.