Leave No Trace Principles

The Principles of "Leave No Trace"

"Leave No Trace" is a nationally recognized outdoor skills and ethics education program. The Boy Scouts of America is committed to this program. The principles of Leave No Trace are not rules; they are guidelines to follow at all times.

The Leave No Trace principles might not seem important at first glance, but their value is apparent when considering the combined effects of millions of outdoor visitors. One poorly located campsite or campfire is of little significance, but thousands of such instances seriously degrade the outdoor experience for all. Leaving no trace is everyone's responsibility.

Plan Ahead and Prepare

Proper trip planning and preparation helps hikers and campers accomplish trip goals safely and enjoyably while minimizing damage to natural and cultural resources. Campers who plan ahead can avoid unexpected situations, and minimize their impact by complying with area regulations such as observing limitations on group size.

Proper planning ensures

- Low-risk adventures because campers obtained information concerning geography and weather and prepared accordingly
- Properly located campsites because campers allotted enough time to reach their destination
- Appropriate campfires and minimal trash because of careful meal planning and food repackaging and proper equipment
- Comfortable and fun camping and hiking experiences because the outing matches the skill level of the participants

Camp and Travel on Durable Surfaces

Damage to land occurs when visitors trample vegetation or communities of organisms beyond recovery. The resulting barren areas develop into undesirable trails, campsites, and soil erosion.
Concentrate Activity, or Spread Out?

- In high-use areas, campers should concentrate their activities where vegetation is already absent. Minimize resource damage by using existing trails and selecting designated or existing campsites.
- In more remote, less-traveled areas, campers should generally spread out. When hiking, take different paths to avoid creating new trails that cause erosion. When camping, disperse tents and cooking activities—and move camp daily to avoid creating permanent-looking campsites. Always choose the most durable surfaces available: rock, gravel, dry grasses, or snow.

These guidelines apply to most alpine settings and may be different for other areas, such as deserts. Learn the Leave No Trace techniques for your crew's specific activity or destination. Check with land managers to be sure of the proper technique.

Pack It In, Pack It Out

This simple yet effective saying motivates backcountry visitors to take their trash home with them. It makes sense to carry out of the backcountry the extra materials taken there by your group or others. Minimize the need to pack out food scraps by carefully planning meals. Accept the challenge of packing out everything you bring.

Sanitation

Backcountry users create body waste and wastewater that require proper disposal.

Wastewater. Help prevent contamination of natural water sources: After straining food particles, properly dispose of dishwater by dispersing at least 200 feet (about 80 to 100 strides for a youth) from springs, streams, and lakes. Use biodegradable soap 200 feet or more from any water source.

Human Waste. Proper human waste disposal helps prevent the spread of disease and exposure to others. Catholes 6 to 8 inches deep and 200 feet from water, trails, and campsites are often the easiest and most practical way to dispose of feces.

Leave What You Find

Allow others a sense of discovery: Leave rocks, plants, animals, archaeological artifacts, and other objects as you find them. It may be illegal to remove artifacts.

Minimize Site Alterations

Do not dig tent trenches or build lean-tos, tables, or chairs. Never hammer nails into trees, hack at trees with hatchets or saws, or damage bark and roots by tying horses to trees for extended
periods. Replace surface rocks or twigs that you cleared from the campsite. On high-impact sites, clean the area and dismantle inappropriate user-built facilities such as multiple fire rings and log seats or tables.

Good campsites are found, not made. Avoid altering a site, digging trenches, or building structures.

**Minimize Campfire Use**

Some people would not think of camping without a campfire. Yet the naturalness of many areas has been degraded by overuse of fires and increasing demand for firewood.

Lightweight camp stoves make low-impact camping possible by encouraging a shift away from fires. Stoves are fast, eliminate the need for firewood, and make cleanup after meals easier. After dinner, enjoy a candle lantern instead of a fire.

If you build a fire, the most important consideration is the potential for resource damage. Whenever possible, use an existing campfire ring in a well-placed campsite. Choose not to have a fire in areas where wood is scarce—at higher elevations, in heavily used areas with a limited wood supply, or in desert settings.

True Leave No Trace fires are small. Use dead and downed wood no larger than an adult's wrist. When possible, burn all wood to ash and remove all unburned trash and food from the fire ring. If a site has two or more fire rings, you may dismantle all but one and scatter the materials in the surrounding area. Be certain all wood and campfire debris is dead out.

**Respect Wildlife**

Quick movements and loud noises are stressful to animals. Considerate campers practice these safety methods:

- Observe wildlife from afar to avoid disturbing them.
- Give animals a wide berth, especially during breeding, nesting, and birthing seasons.
- Store food securely and keep garbage and food scraps away from animals so they will not acquire bad habits. Help keep wildlife wild.

You are too close if an animal alters its normal activities.
Plan Ahead and Prepare
Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
Dispose of Waste Properly (Pack It In, Pack It Out)
Leave What You Find
Minimize Campfire Impacts
Respect Wildlife
Be Considerate of Other Visitors