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Dear Conditioning Hike Leaders,

I would like to thank all the dedicated and conscientious leaders that have made it possible for OCSS to offer our weekly conditioning hikes/walks. Presently, we have 5 regular conditioning hikes/walks each and every week sponsored by OCSS. It is amazing with all these hikes/walks going on each week problems are so few and far between. However, with the expected springtime increase in conditioning hike/walk participation, and with new leaders coming on board, it is time for a reminder concerning the rules and safety procedures that must be followed when leading conditioning hikes.

1. The Angeles Chapter outings policy provides that selected outings (conditioning hikes/walks) which are conducted regularly on established routes, may be conducted with only one appropriately rated leader. Sign in/out sheets for these hikes are optional. The applicability of this policy is under the discretion of the OCSS management committee and the Angeles Chapter Safety Chair.
2. Clarification of Angeles Chapter policy by OCSS Management Committee.

In order to protect the safety and increase the enjoyment of all participants on weekly conditioning hikes, particularly those who are participating for the first time and therefore are not familiar with the route, the following requirements must be observed.

For regular weekly conditioning hikes sponsored by OCSS, two leaders are required, one leading at the front, the other serving as "sweep" at the rear. If a weekly hike is split into separate hiking sections or groups (for example, a slow group and a fast group), each group must have two leaders, one at the front and one at the rear. Ideally, all such leaders should be appropriately rated Sierra Club leaders (a split group must have a Sierra Club leader leading). However, if not enough rated leaders are present for a given hike, a rated leader can appoint as his or her assistant (sweep), a non-rated but experienced hiker who, in the judgment of the rated leader, has the required personal qualities and sense of responsibility to serve as assistant on that occasion. If the rated leader believes there is no person present capable of serving as assistant, the hike should be canceled. It is the responsibility of the rated leader to make certain that the hiking group stays together and that contact is maintained with those hiking at the rear, including the sweep.

3. It is of course essential that leaders assure that all participants return to the starting point. If a large gap forms between a fast group and a slow group, the leader should let the slow group catch up to evaluate the situation. If another Sierra Club leader is available & willing to lead the slow group, the group should break up into a fast and slow group. If another Sierra Club leader is not available, the leader must slow the fast group down. Keeping the group together and safe must take precedence over the goal of leading a fast conditioning hike.

4. Only rated Sierra Club leaders may lead a regular conditioning hike/walk and they must follow the established routes. Participants or leaders wishing to do their own hike by declaring the hike not a Sierra Club outing, should be discouraged. We must not condone or appear to condone this activity. If we do so, the Sierra Club will not be shielded from liability. In addition, major changes in conditioning hike routes could disqualify a hike from the conditioning hike/walk exemption and may require OCSS management committee approval.
5. Leaders and participants must also follow all traffic regulations and use crosswalks when available. If crosswalks have traffic lights present, the group must cross with the appropriate light.
6. A common situation encountered on conditioning hikes is a participant that is unable to keep up with the group and is unwillingly to accept the fact that the hike is beyond his ability. To help reduce this possibility, leaders should clearly state (before starting the hike) the pace, strenuousness and that stragglers unable to keep up may be signed out.

It is of course within the leader's prerogative to sign out the problem hiker. However, this should be done reluctantly, with careful consideration and with sensitivity to the straggler's feelings and safety. In regards to his safety, no one should be signed out if there is any doubt that he may not be able to find his way back on his own. Options may include sending someone back with the straggler, taking the entire group back or slowing the group down. Again, leading a safe hike must take precedence over the goal of leading a fast conditioning hike.

The above policy statements are really nothing new and I'm sure with your continued awareness of these policies our good safety record will continue.

Sincerely,

*Ronald A. Weimer*

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Outings Chair,  
Orange County Sierra Singles Section.