

Surf Camp Environmental Impact Plan

Surf camps require planning similar to but more involved than just emergency response planning. Surfing activities often take place in unique and diverse coastal marine environments. Many of these natural venues are pristine, and require sensitive use and management and are susceptible to long-lasting damage from human activity. Dune systems are particularly vulnerable when groups are accessing beaches.

A wide range of environmental factors need to be considered when planning organized surfing activities in these locations. Factors include the location, accessibility, dune conditions, the strength of tides and currents, type of break, and the power of waves. Training and organizing staff should always consider ways to minimize the environmental impact of the activity they are planning.

Location

Due to the unique nature of each location, the teacher responsible for the activity should specifically assess the suitability of the location before the excursion. Base this choice on recent and first-hand knowledge of at least one member of the planning and supervising staff. Where this is impractical, planning and supervising staff should be thoroughly familiar with the general characteristics and conditions found in similar locations, and should have consulted with people who can provide recent and first-hand knowledge of the locations being considered, either surfers, or in the case of public parks, local park staff.

When assessing the suitability of a location for a camp, consider:

- The potential of the break to meet lesson objectives
- The level of access to resources, services and facilities that may be needed, such as campsites, water, walking trails, toilets, shelter from extreme weather, or interpretive information
- The level of access to communications and external assistance in the event of an emergency or extreme weather conditions — the more remote the location is, the more self-contained and self-reliant the group must be and this must be taken into account in the planning of the activity
- The potential exposure to environmental hazards and difficulties
- The ability and fitness levels of expected students

Contact with relevant authorities should be made in order to access current information and determine any access and permit requirements. These authorities may include:

- Park service or other land managers (including park rangers)
- Life guard and Lifesaving services
- Emergency response services
- Weather service

Camp staff must understand that severe weather conditions may develop before or during the proposed activity and should therefore be prepared to cancel, modify or relocate the activity at any time. This can include emergency transportation.

Surfing Conditions

Given the range of different conditions that might exist between apparently similar surfing venues, adequate knowledge of the specific beach should be obtained before school activities are conducted. There can be marked differences between beaches and break conditions, even beaches in close proximity to each other. These differences include human made hazards, marine life and seaweed, water temperature, sand bars, rips, reefs, currents and tides. In most cases, shallow beach break conditions are the preferred venues for beginners. Additionally, when in doubt about safety during even small close out conditions or when rips are present, cancel out.

If possible, activities should be conducted at lifeguard patrolled beaches. Where beaches are not patrolled, appropriate rescue aids need to be available, with staff members trained in their use and available to respond to an emergency.

Communications

The communication strategy should enable staff to receive weather forecasts and warnings, communicate with other school staff or outside services, and engage support in the case of an incident or emergency. In the continental US, the preferred method is either cell phone or walky-talky. It is also important to be aware of the limitations of the communication strategy.

Weather

Check the weather forecast for the location in the days leading up to the activity and on the day the activity commences. If the camp extends overnight, access weather forecasts and warnings daily and monitor and assess the weather throughout the camp duration.