

## **Risk Management at NOLS**

The recognition and management of the inherent risks and hazards of living and traveling in remote wild areas is taught and practiced on every course. NOLS is committed to helping promote a positive learning environment and physical and emotional well-being for all students. We are very proud of our excellent record managing the risks of wilderness travel.

Most of our students first hear about NOLS from our graduates. This is probably the best indication of how our graduates value their NOLS experience. Yet we are sure they would be the first to join us in reminding you and your family that NOLS courses are not easy and involve travel through rugged terrain in which there are real dangers. The management of our activities with respect to these dangers is a fundamental part of the NOLS curriculum. Good physical conditioning and a positive mental attitude are essential. Each student plays an important role in the success of a NOLS course.

You will be responsible for transporting your own gear. You will sleep outdoors, possibly in co-ed tent groups, prepare your own meals and be expected to care for yourself in weather conditions that can be extreme. On many courses there are opportunities for students to travel independently of instructors in groups of at least three for one or more days. There are other times, such as in town at the beginning and end of the course or between semester sections, when students are not supervised by NOLS.

Wilderness activity involves hazards: rockfall, wild rivers and freezing temperatures can pose a risk to even the most experienced outdoor leader. Activities ranging from simple day hikes to climbing glaciers can, due to error in judgment or the unpredictable forces of nature, become dangerous and potentially life threatening.

Our courses are isolated expeditions. The remoteness of the areas in which we travel can create complex emergency situations that have no simple solutions. It is not uncommon to be days from medical help.

NOLS has comprehensive wilderness emergency response and evacuation procedures and is a leader in the use of appropriate field communication technology in remote wilderness locations.

We carry a radio or satellite telephone or other electronic communication devices on each of our courses for life threatening emergencies, but this does not guarantee reliable communication from the field to our support bases. Radios and portable phones can be unreliable depending on terrain, atmospheric conditions and other variables. Independent student travel groups may be separated from the radio/phone for 24 hours or more.

The majority of medical incidents (sprains, flu, diarrhea, etc.) may be treated in the field. A more serious incident, such as a fracture, will require evacuation of the patient to a medical facility.

It is important you understand that there are risks. Some adventure programs say that they can guarantee your safety. NOLS does not. The risk of injury, even serious injury or death, is unavoidable in the outdoor environment in which we teach. Indeed, much of the value of a NOLS course lies in learning how to identify hazards and adapt behavior, not only on the course, but also for a lifetime of enjoying the outdoors.

When you come to NOLS, you will be attending the school that sets the standards in wilderness risk management, wilderness medicine and student well being. We have published one of the leading texts on wilderness first aid and are on the board of the Wilderness Medical Society. NOLS' Wilderness Medicine Institute (WMI) is at the cutting edge in the growing field of wilderness medicine. Practices and curriculum developed by WMI are used on our field courses. We are the leaders of the national Wilderness Risk Managers Committee, and each year NOLS Professional Training convenes the Wilderness Risk Management Conference for outdoor educators and adventure program administrators.

Before you arrive, thoroughly read all materials we send you, and call us if you have questions. A report on NOLS safety management and history is available from our admission office.