WVMTR Race Preparedness/Safety Planning Guide

What follows are safety and planning considerations for each step involved in the organization and directing of a **West Virginia Mountain Trail Runners** trail race. This guide is meant to be used as an aid in making a race safer, and is not intended as a substitute for the use of common sense under existing circumstances. Those persons using these guidelines must understand that they are ultimately responsible for the conduct of a safe event. This guide is not all-inclusive. It is intended to provide basic information **to WVMTR** Race Directors tasked with organizing a race.

**Planning**: All phases of the event will benefit from adequate advance planning. In particular, the safety of the participants, volunteers and spectators can best be served by addressing the following matters well in advance of the race start date. Allow a minimum of 6 -12 months advance time to plan the event. In addition to the items listed below, you may need to devote time to obtaining race sponsorship and advertising.

* Meet With Local Authorities. Any required authorization from local authorities must be obtained long before the event date. As noted above, the local authorities should be made aware of your date, site selection, and details of your course design. They should be asked specifically about plans they have that would impact these items. Arrangements with local authorities for traffic control **(if applicable)** should be among the initial steps taken in planning the event. When contacting your local authorities contact all relevant authorities **to include local ambulance and first responders.** For example, contact the parks and police departments and the local County Commissioner’s office. Permits may be required with associated fees.
* Meet With Key Race Personnel. Meetings should be scheduled far enough ahead of the event to allow for proper coordination and planning. These key persons should be experienced in the area of which they are assigned or in turn be well instructed in their duties prior to the event. Examples of key race personnel include; Race Director, Lead Course Marshall, Volunteer Coordinator, Marketing and Communications Director, Start/Finish Line Director, Packet Stuffing and Packet Pick-Up Coordinator
* **Emergency** (Medical) Director. One of the primary considerations in the planning of the event should be the selection of an **Emergency** Director. Even in a small race, there should be one person assigned as the go to person if someone is injured. The **Emergency** Director should be accessible via the race communication systems at all times during the event and positioned so that s/he may be contacted immediately upon the occurrence of an incident, accident or injury and then be able to go directly to the scene. All race volunteers should be instructed that in the event of a medical incident, the **Emergency** Director should be among those persons to be contacted immediately. **In lieu of an Emergency Director, the Race Director shall assume responsibility for these duties. In the event of an emergency any and all volunteers should be directed to dial 911.**

The Emergency Director should have the following duties in the event of an occurrence:

* To make timely and direct contact with the person(s) involved in the incident and witnesses;
* To assure any injured person receives proper medical or other required attention;
* To remain with or arrange for persons associated with the event to remain with the injured person, to insure that the injured person receives proper attention;
* If not already contacted, to contact medical personnel to attend to the insured person;
* To gather necessary information in order to report the incident to the police, and if necessary, to the liability insurance carrier. The information to be gathered should include details as to how, where, when and why the incident occurred, names, addresses and phone numbers of the injured parties and witnesses, and if possible, photographic documentation of the scene.
* Communicate With Residents of the Race Area. Maintaining good public relations with businesses and residents impacted by the event should be a high priority. Make sure that affected persons and entities are informed well in advance as to what they may expect on race day, (i.e. specific street closings, length of the event), so they can take the steps necessary to alleviate any inconvenience to themselves, their customers, guests or families. It is suggested that churches, hotels, theaters, and other businesses be contacted directly. Residential areas can be forewarned by placing signs in the community in advance of the event. Many events go door to door along a race course to leave flyers or personally talk with residents. This can go a long way to prevent an angry resident from complaining to the authorities and jeopardizing the following year’s event.

**Volunteers**: The recruiting, coordinating and instructing of volunteers in a race event is essential in maximizing the safety of the race participants. Factors involved in volunteer coordination include the following:

* Designate a Volunteer Coordinator. Assign a volunteer coordinator to gather and assign volunteers to specific jobs. The volunteer coordinator can supervise the pre-race organization of the volunteers and on race day will be the person who will inform volunteers where they are to go. The volunteer coordinator can also make sure that each volunteer has signed a volunteer waiver
* Recruit Volunteers well in advance of race day. Determine how many volunteers you will need and in which areas you will need them. This will depend on the size of the event, the course itself; i.e. busy streets with many intersections will require more adult volunteers or police presence, and whether or not your race will have an “expo” or festival associated with it. Plan for more volunteers than are needed, and use age-appropriate volunteers. For example, only adults should be part of the course marshal group. Teen volunteers can assist with packet stuffing or handing out water and food at the conclusion of the race.
* Volunteer Waivers**.** Ensure all volunteers have signed a waiver and ensure the guardians of minors have signed a waiver on behalf of minors volunteering for the event.
* Meet With Key Volunteers In Advance of Race Date. Organize key volunteers to lead various areas of the race and make sure they fully understand the needs of their group. These key volunteers are then tasked with carrying out their duties along with the other volunteers assigned to the group. Make a check list for each key area containing duties and information to be passed onto the volunteers. Make sure volunteers are instructed as to a specific time of arrival on race day, and advise them of predicted weather conditions to ensure they dress appropriately.
* Volunteer Control on Race Day. The volunteer coordinator should meet volunteers at the designated volunteer check-in location and direct volunteers to their posts. It is helpful if all volunteers wear a special “race volunteer” shirt, or a vest to indicate they are helping with the event. Let the volunteer know that someone will come by to relieve them of their duties or let them know when it is ok to leave their post. There have been several incidents when volunteers have left their posts and accidents have occurred. Ensure volunteers have a cell number or contact process if they need to leave their post early.
* Thank Your Volunteers. Allow volunteers to partake in the post-race festivities, including refreshments. Ensure you have a good list of all volunteers who worked the event. After the conclusion of the event, send a thank you to each volunteer and solicit their feedback. Pave the way for next year’s event.

**Start Line**: The start line provides an important opportunity to communicate safety information to the race participants. Safety considerations to review at the start line are as follows:

* Water Providing water at the start of the race will assist participants in maintaining hydration. This should be a priority for all races, not just those occurring on hot and humid days.
* Communicate with Participants at the Start Clearly mark or identify the start line so that the runners know where it is located. Use a public address system or megaphone to amplify the starter’s voice to ensure the participants in the back can hear the announcements. Pre-race instructions should include how the race will start, ie: waves according to seeding approximately 30 seconds apart. Address any warnings concerning runners sharing the road with moving traffic, course conditions, hydration, weather, etc. Give a reliable countdown starting several minutes before the start to make sure the participants are given ample time to assemble for the start.
* Congestion. If you have done your homework, you have designed a course that is not too narrow at the start and is without sharp turns in the beginning. Therefore you do not have to be concerned about runner congestion at the start. However, in large races there seem to always be slower runners in front of faster runners at the start. This situation can in part be addressed in the start line instructions as well as with posting pace markers, from fast to slow from the start line back, at various spaces leading back from the start line. Be sure that any walkers are reminded to start in the very back; otherwise they could get run over. Have a volunteer review the start for small children or persons disregarding the prohibition against baby joggers, roller bladders, skaters, head sets and pets.

**Communications**: A reliable communication system is essential to the coordination of all aspects of a race in progress.

* Aid Stations. All medical aid stations as well as water stations should be coordinated through hand held communication devices in order to address any emergency that may arise. This assures that runners are no further away than an aid station or water station when informing a volunteer of a problem and requesting assistance.
* Key Personnel. All key personnel should be on the communication network during the course of the event.
* Radio Operation. All personnel connected with the race, in any capacity, should know where the radios are located and where the radio operators are stationed. All persons who are to use the communication system should be made familiar with its operation prior to the start of the event. The radios should be tested and the power supplies checked in advance of the race date.
* A note about using cell phones as a means of communication. Cell phones can be a great way to communicate before and after a race, but should not be relied upon as a primary means of communication during a race. Walkie-talkies (with fresh batteries) are the preferred form of communication, as all key race personnel can be alerted at once if a problem should arise. This will result in more expeditious problem solving.

**Water Stations**: Considerations with regard to water stations include:

* Distance Between Water Stations. Consider the time of year, the weather conditions, the length of the race and the number of participants when making the determination about how many water stations to have in your race. Make sure the runners are well informed in advance of the start of the race as to the **location and distance between aid stations**. **Ensure that every aid station is well stocked with water, sports drink and a basic first aid kit. In summer months or warm conditions make sure that each aid station also has an adequate supply of ice.**
* Location. Do not locate the water station on a downhill. It is important as to place the water station at a point where there is sufficient room for runners to slow and get the water while other runners who chose to bypass the station can run unobstructed past the slowed or slowing runners. Also consider the tangent of the course when selecting the water station location. If the course is making a turn to the right and you locate the station on the left, the runners are more likely to bypass the station in order to take advantage of the tangent. The water stations should not be located exactly at a mile marker but either before or after the actual marker as the attention of many of the runners will be diverted to their watches instead of watching for runners who have slowed to drink. Avoid intersections or high traffic areas and remember the trash factor. All those empty cups will get tossed.
* Staffing. Water station volunteers should arrive several hours before the start of the race in order to fill enough cups before participants begin to arrive. People with obvious signs of sickness should not be handing out water, and everyone handling water should wear plastic gloves.
* Cups. As a rule of thumb have, at a minimum, one cup per entrant at each water station. If a hot and humid day is predicted have as a minimum two cups per entrant at each water station (anticipate that the runners will drink one cup and dash the other on themselves to help cool off). In order to minimize the amount of spillage use a smaller cup, 7-8 ounce cups are recommended. Always try to use paper cups in place of hard plastic cups or Styrofoam cups. The hard plastic cups and Styrofoam cups tend to break when grabbed by the runners and are not biodegradable. Be sure that the water station volunteers have been instructed in proper cup handling. Cups should be filled no more than ¾ full, and placed on the palm of the hand or held gently on the sides of the cup when held out to passing participants.
* Water and other replacement Fluids. Arrange for water and any replacement fluids (i.e.: Gatorade) to be delivered to the water stations several hours before the start of the race. Be sure any concentrate, coolers, and stirring sticks are also delivered along with mixing instructions. Pay special attention that water is placed in a different cup than the electrolyte replacement drink and is located in a different section of the water station. I.e.: water should be offered at the first table, and Gatorade at the last. Make sure concentrated mixes are mixed correctly with the proper ratio of water to product. For each water station, have rakes on hand so that cup debris can be cleared from the road as soon as possible. Make sure that specific volunteers are assigned to the task of continually removing the debris from the course. This is imperative on a course where the same water station is used by participants more than once during the race. Locate trash receptacles strategically at the end of the water tables and a few yards past the water tables to encourage runners to discard the cups there. Make sure to provide plastic trash bags for clean-up, and recycling of the paper cups.
* A Special Note, for races held during winter months. One potential hazard of a water station in a freezing location is the water left on the ground from spilled cups can freeze causing runners to slip and injure themselves. Plan to supply these water stations with salt or sand to toss on the ice if this occurs.

**Medical Assistance**: Available on-site medical assistance is a mandatory requirement regardless of the race size or distance:

* Heart Attack victims need Advance Life Support in 4-6 minutes. If a race participant suffers illness or injury, how fast can you get EMS to that person? The foundation of your medical coverage is communication.
* Space for Medical Team and Ambulance. Provide a convenient area for the medical team and ambulance (if deemed necessary) to set-up at the finish. If your race is large, consider having a second ambulance available at the half-way point of the race. Plan ahead so that if the ambulance must leave the race area it will be able to do so quickly and efficiently and will not need to cross the path of the participants.
* Quantity and Quality of Medical Team. Make sure that medical personnel are appropriate for your event. ***Contact local community medical providers such as EMT’s operating out of fire stations, private ambulance services, local hospitals, or private consultants. Make sure that you provide a sufficient amount of medical personnel to attend to the needs of the participants.*** This determination will be based upon the number of race participants, anticipated weather conditions, type of course and training of the medical team. When determining the proper quantity of medical personnel, consider the scenario where two emergency situations arise and the only medical team or ambulance has already left the event due to the first occurrence.
* Communication with the Medical Team. Remind the medical team prior to race day of the time at which they needed to set-up. Include them in the communication network you have set-up and make sure that they have been informed as to the proper operation of the communication equipment you are using. Consider in your plans how accessible each part of the race course will be for the medical team in case of an emergency and make sure to go over this plan with the medical team in advance so they will know what to do should a medical emergency arise.
* Supplies. Review with the medical team those supplies they will provide and what they will need that you will provide. Always arrange to have ice available to the medical team prior to the start of the race.
* Identification. Make sure that the medical team and medical tent are marked in an obvious way. Inform all volunteers as to the location of the medical teams and how best to communicate with them if they are needed.
* Medical Emergency. Make sure that the volunteers are also instructed as to what actions they are to take in the event of a medical emergency. Such common sense matters as not moving a person who has sustained head, neck or back injury need to be reviewed at the volunteer meetings in advance of the race date. A hand-out entitled “Steps to Take In the event of An Accident or Incident that May Involve Personal Injury” is included in the Appendix for use in instructing and reminding volunteers of emergency procedures.

**Weather**: One of the most crucial factors involving any road race event is also the least predictable: the weather. The following is a list of considerations involving weather:

* Plan Ahead. As the race date gets nearer, the weather conditions will become more predictable. If it is going to be extremely hot, additional water stations and ice should be considered. The location of the finish line medical team should be moved as close to the finish line as possible. As a rule of thumb, plan with the thought in mind that the conditions will be more extreme than predicted.
* Medical Team. If extreme weather is predicted make sure to contact the medical team so that they are able to prepare in advance for any additional material or personnel they will need.
* Lightning. An electrical storm within the race course area within 1 hour of the start time should be considered potentially life threatening to runners. A determination should be made at the time as to whether the race should be continued as scheduled, delayed until the storm has passed or cancelled altogether.
* Dehydration and Heat Exhaustion. In extreme heat conditions, the possibility of dehydration and heat exhaustion are increased dramatically. Adjustments can be made in advance of the race date by making sure that the runners are warned to maintain their hydration before, during and after the event, and also by making sure that water is provided at the start of the race. Under extreme conditions, the distance and time of the event must be considered. If the combination of the length of exposure of runners to extreme conditions presents a life threatening situation, cancellation of the event must be considered. Consult with your medical director or other health officials. ***Included in the Appendix are information sheets concerning cold and hot weather racing which should be included in the race packets if applicable. (???)***
* Shelter. In both hot and cold extreme conditions, shelter from the elements for the runners becomes important. Obviously shelter is something that must be arranged well in advance and therefore must be considered as part of your initial planning. If it is pouring or freezing at the start of an event, runners will want and seek shelter. It’s the same at the end of the race. Runners will want shelter while waiting for the awards ceremony.
* Start Time. If a race is held in an area where extreme heat is common, then a start time earlier than 8:00am should be planned.
* Course Conditions. If the general condition of the course has become extremely hazardous due to the weather, then a decision to delay or cancel the event must be made. Common sense should prevail. Consult with local authorities in making your decision.

**Finish Line**

* Persons Present In Finish Line Area. Make sure that only those persons essential to the finish line operations and associated with the finish line medical team are in the finish line area. All others should be kept back behind barricades or flags.
* Water. Have water readily available for all finishers in close proximity to the finish line.
* Runners in Distress. Have the finish line workers instructed in the necessary procedures to contact the medical team in the event that a finishing runner is in distress.
* Equipment. Make sure that the volunteer in charge of the finish line equipment has sufficiently secured the equipment to prevent it from being blown down in high wind. Make sure that finish and start banners are placed high enough to allow trucks to pass underneath without hitting them.

WVMTR Race Director:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_