

Top 5 Tips for Outdoor Safety

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Wear appropriate clothing, especially footwear.

No matter where you're hiking or pursuing outdoor recreational activities, you need to be dressed appropriately. Footwear is especially important and should provide good ankle and arch support. People who wear inadequate footwear and clothing are at higher risk of injuries due to slips, trips, and falls than those who use proper equipment.

Wear blaze orange during hunting season.

While it's extremely unlikely for a responsible hunter to mistake a hiker in the woods for a game animal, it's always a good idea to be visible when hunting seasons are open. Wear a blaze orange hat and/or vest to be sure you will be visible to anybody who is hunting in the area.

Be aware of venomous snakes.

Tread carefully! Northern Copperheads and Timber Rattlesnakes are locally common in some areas of Morgan County. While it's unlikely that an envenomating bite from either of these species will be fatal, a bite can cause severe pain and swelling and will require

substantial medical attention. While Timber Rattlesnakes will typically warn passersby of their presence with a loud tail rattle, Northern Copperheads typically do not offer any warning. Always watch your walking path carefully, and don't use rocks, tree roots, or other structures as hand-holds without first checking for snakes. If you encounter a venomous snake, leave it alone and give it a wide berth.

Be bear aware!

Black Bears are becoming increasingly common in Morgan and Berkeley counties. While the safety risk posed by bears is generally very low, it's important for recreationalists to be aware of their surroundings and situation at all times to avoid startling a bear or getting too close. If you encounter a Black Bear, give it a wide berth and do not approach it for any reason. If the bear does not approach you, simply walk away from the animal but maintain awareness of what the bear is doing. If the bear approaches you, raise your arms above your head and make plenty of noise. "Look big, be loud, back away." Retreat from the animal in a deliberate but slow manner to ensure your safety from trips and falls.

In the extremely rare instance a black

bear attacks you, FIGHT BACK! Target the eyes, ears, and nose of the animal. Do NOT play dead -- this only works in the instance the bear attack is territorial in nature (as with most grizzly attacks in the West), and Black Bear attacks are almost NEVER territorial. The most likely attacker is not a sow with cubs, but rather a large male.

There have been fewer than five bear attacks recorded in West Virginia since the early 1900s, and all of these resulted in generally minor injuries to the person who was attacked. Do not put bears in a situation where they do not have a clear route of escape.

Concerned hikers may carry bear spray or attach "bear bells" to their walking staff if they so desire.

Be sure you're in adequate physical condition before taking a long or strenuous hike.

Many hiking injuries or rescues are related to people who attempted a difficult hike without appropriate equipment and/or were not in adequate physical condition to make the hike. If you're in doubt about your readiness for rough terrain, stick to roads, trails, and gentle slopes until you're properly conditioned for a more challenging hike. If hiking



WV Poison Center

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1-800-222-1222
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with a pack, be sure your pack fits you well and offers a waist belt to better distribute weight in the instance you're going to be carrying a heavy load. Being in shape will make your hiking experience both safer and more enjoyable.

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