

Dayton Daily News

First aid in the great outdoors

Get Active

By [Debbie Juniewicz](#) - Thursday, February 25, 2016
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Students in the classroom learning how to reduce a dislocated shoulder. Contributed by Wilderness Medical Associates International

It was a shock – literally and figuratively.

Andy Niekamp was solo hiking on the Appalachian Trail in New York on May 31, 2015, when the longtime Dayton hiker was struck by lightning.

“It was the shock of my life,” Niekamp said. “I had numbness and tingling. I retreated to a low area and called 911.”

When the storm had passed and it was safe to continue on, Niekamp hiked a mile to get to the nearest road where he was taken to the hospital for evaluation and treatment.

“I was very lucky that it wasn’t more serious,” he said.

Whether it’s in the backcountry or on a bike trail, accidents happen. Preparedness is the key.

“If you have someone who spends a lot of time outdoors, sooner or later, they are going to need to use first aid,” said Niekamp, the chief adventure officer for the Outdoor Adventure Connection.

Wilderness Medical Associates International (WMAI) – a group of medical rescue professionals, researchers, educators, and advocates for healthcare in wilderness contexts – offers a variety of classes around the world, including the upcoming Wilderness First Responder and Wilderness First Aid classes offered in Dayton. While both classes are already at or near capacity, the first aid class will be offered again this summer.

“Wilderness first aid trainings are great for anyone who works or plays in the outdoors, especially in remote locations and may not have immediate access to definitive care,” said Angie Sheldon, Five Rivers MetroParks outdoor recreation coordinator.

Wilderness defined

“When people think of wilderness, they probably think of being deep into the backcountry, but wilderness can mean any situation where access to definitive care becomes difficult or dangerous,” said WMAI instructor Darren Stokes. “You don’t have to be far away to be in a wilderness context.”

A day hike at a state park, a ride along a designated bike path or a paddling trip down a local waterway – all are wilderness experiences.

“It might be a short walk into the woods but, if you become injured, it’s not going to be easy to get out,” Stokes said.

The classes focus not only on treatment but prevention, including pre-trip planning, risk management and early intervention.

“A small problem in the front country can be a big problem in the backcountry,” Stokes said. “We want people to be able to make good decisions and think critically.”



Student rescuers assess a patient's injuries during a Simulation exercise. Contributed by Wilderness Medical Associates International

First aid options

Niekamp also strongly endorses CPR certification. The American Red Cross offers a full slate of classes in adult and pediatric first aid, CPR and AED (Automated External Defibrillators) locally.

“Anyone can benefit from taking a first aid/CPR training,” Sheldon said. “They are a great way to help you prepare for the unexpected, by teaching you the skills needed to make decisions and respond appropriately to a medical emergency.”

Smartphone apps – like the American Red Cross first aid app – can also be useful in wilderness settings.

“Prevention is the key, but being able to recognize early onset symptoms is incredibly valuable,” Niekamp said.

For information on upcoming classes, visit the Wilderness Medical Associates International at www.wildmed.com or the American Red Cross at <http://www.redcross.org>.

Basic First Aid Kit Supplies

Andy Niekamp, Outdoor Adventure Connection

- Moleskin, foam, gel pads. (for blisters care)
- Gauze, both rolled and flat, adhesive bandages, Band-Aids (wound care)
- Triangular bandage, aluminum foam splint, elastic bandage, athletic tape (for sprains and breaks)
- Tweezers. (Tick and splinter removal)
- CPR mask
- Disposable nitrile gloves (non-latex) (for wound cleaning)
- Lip balm, Sunscreen, Insect repellent
- Compact foil emergency blanket (aka space blanket)
- Basic Medications — Aspirin, Ibuprofen, alcohol swabs, antibiotic cream.
- Prescription Medications - including Epi-pens and asthma inhalers. (Keep track of expiration dates and replace as required.)
- First Aid Kit Container Ideas: zippered nylon pouch, zip-loc bags, small plastic Tupperware like container. Make sure items remain waterproof.

For more information on first aid kit supplies, visit <https://www.wildmed.com/>

First Aid Tips

Andy Niekamp, Outdoor Adventure Connection

Tip: In the event of an emergency don't hesitate to call 911. Try even if your phone shows no coverage. The nearest cell tower, regardless of carrier, is obligated to accept a 911 call.

Tip: Know the basic medical background of your hiking group — allergies, heart issues, recent surgeries, back problems, history of dislocations or seizures, diabetes or difficulty maintaining blood sugar, required medications.

Tip: On multi-day trips, find out what other people in your group are carrying in their first aid kit to avoid duplication. Be knowledgeable of what the group has collectively.

Tip: During your journey, be familiar with nearby evacuation routes or access points for medical personnel — nearest roads, side trails and parking lots.

Tip: In the event of a serious accident or illness, send someone out to meet the rescue personnel and escort them to the patient's location. Clear a path if needed.

Tip: Know how to determine your GPS longitude and latitude coordinates with your smartphone. Relay these coordinate to your rescue personnel.

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