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PRESS RELEASE: Inyo County Search and Rescue team launches **STOP** campaign to promote 4 principles of safer backcountry adventures.

Inyo County Search and Rescue is launching its new backcountry safety campaign for the week Sunday, June 21.



With the start of what is sure to be a busy summer after months of Coronavirus lockdown, the STOP campaign was created to partner with visitors by supporting them to be prepared for their time in the mountains of Inyo County. The campaign's letters, STOP, stand for four key principles that, in the team's experience, will help people get back down the mountain safely.

The principles are:

- Stay Together
- Turn Around
- Ownership
- Prepare and Train

Although backcountry helicopter rescues capture headlines, in reality, helicopter rescues are extremely limited and risky. Inyo County Search and Rescue works with several excellent and capable helicopter agencies, but has no control of availability or other limiting factors such as high winds, heat, altitude, or darkness.

Most people don't know that many who call for rescues or use their emergency beacons to call SOS actually aren't in a life-threatening situation. Rather, many of these callers are not prepared for their mountain objective and are looking for an easy way out of an unexpected, but non-emergency predicament.

The truth is that sometimes there is no easy way out of the mountains.

The members of the Search and Rescue team are experienced mountain travelers, but even for them, a backcountry rescue can be a highly risky endeavor and usually takes between 6 and 24 hours because of how remote and technical the terrain is, the distance to trailheads, and the time required to organize and transport people and equipment for a rescue mission.

To compound this, more people have been visiting Inyo County each summer, as recreating outdoors (and sharing locations on social media) grows in popularity. Not only has this meant an increased volume of visitors, but also an increasing proportion of those visitors being fairly new to the outdoors.

Being active is so good for us, and our public lands offer some of the most astonishing beauty; we are glad to welcome new people from more diverse communities to share it. We know that being informed is essential to recreate safely here, where activities that get you moving become alarmingly hard at altitude. Altitude sickness can be life-threatening, trail steepness may be surprising, and dehydration or a twisted ankle can seem like dire issues when the path home is through difficult, unfamiliar terrain.

Inyo County Search and Rescue wants to help these visitors know what they're getting into, and to support them to develop and enhance their skills and knowledge so they have a positive experience with minimized risk.

To create the STOP guide, veteran SAR members analyzed data on the types of calls they get most often, and used it to develop a guide which would enable visitors to prevent those kinds of situations in the first place, and hopefully bring the volume of calls down.

The campaign features postcards and other visuals for Visitor Centers and other common hiker contact points; a social media campaign to get the word out to people planning a hike or a trip here (they will use hashtags #STOPforSafeHiking and #InyoSAR); and a new section of the team's website, inyosar.com/psar.

"If sharing what we know can help prevent a rescue or minimize how many severe incidents we see, we'll consider this a win for everyone." said a representative of Inyo SAR.

"We understand people are antsy to get outdoors now, and we are looking to partner with visitors and the community to promote a culture of safer, responsible recreation here. We ask people to STOP and take a moment to plan for their own trips, and to spread the word to others. We ask locals to amplify our messages on social media by sharing them to their networks. And, we also want to remind visitors that they may unintentionally expose our community and our rescuers to COVID19—so keep following CDC guidelines to minimize the risk of contracting or spreading the virus."

Remember: Mountain Safety is No Accident.

For more information, Visit inyosar.com/psar
If you have an emergency call 911