

Chapter 12 – Field Skills

PO.3 – Field Skills

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EO.1 – Apply Principles of Outdoor Tools Safety

In addition to personal clothing and equipment, you may be responsible for various outdoor tools while on an expedition or encampment. It is important to not only know which tools to choose for certain jobs, but how to use and store these tools safely. Below you will find a description of tools you may use while on an encampment.

Matches, Lighters or Fire Starters

Matches, lighters, or fire starters will primarily be used for starting fires or lighting lanterns. Any time you are dealing with fire of any kind, make sure you do so with adult supervision.

Safety and Use:

- Match books should have a striking surface on the back cover.
- Close the cover of the match book before striking the match.
- Strike the match away from your body.
- Hold the match at arm's length when striking and when in use.
- Do not use matches or lighters when distracted.
- Be careful around flammable materials such as dry leaves, wood, or flammable fluids such as gasoline.
- Always check lighters for cracks, leaks, or other defects.
- If lighter fluid has spilled on or near the lighter or match, clean the spill before using the lighter or match.
- Be careful where you dispose of matches in case of the presence of flammable materials.
- Only throw matches away once the flame has been extinguished and the match is cool to the touch.

Rope

Ropes have many uses during expeditions and encampments but will mainly be used for securing materials or tying down equipment. However, ropes are also used for guiding and during ropes courses. In all cases proper care is essential for rope safety. Check your ropes for any damage, tears, or frayed sections before use. Always check a rope's Safe Working Load (SWL), if possible, before using a rope that will bear weight or be lifting or pulling heavy objects.

Additional Precautions When Using Rope:

- Make sure there are no knots in your rope as they can reduce rope strength and can cause rope fibers to rub against each other.
- Keep your ropes clean. Dirt and grit can cause the fibers to be cut or abraded. Wash ropes with mild soap and lukewarm water then air dry.
- Be careful when running ropes over sharp or rough edges or surfaces such as a log or even the ground. Consistent force can cause tears in rope fibers or cut the rope while in use.
- Ropes are damaged by excessive heat or sun exposure. Be sure to store your rope in an area that is out of the sun and does not get too hot.

Knives – Pocket or Sheath

Knives are often essential tools for camp set up, cooking in the field, chopping wood, or clearing trails. They are only as good as the condition they are kept in, so it is essential to keep your knife clean and sharp. Dull knives are more dangerous than sharp knives because dull knives can cause you to lose control of the knife and injure yourself or someone else. Below are some tips to keep your knives clean and safe.

Safety and Cleaning:

- Do not use knives for anything but cutting. Hammering, chopping, prying, or using your knife for any purpose other than cutting can damage the blade, cause your knife to bend or twist, or even break away from the handle.
- Clean the whole knife, not just the blade. Keeping the handle clean will reduce accidents. If you have a pocketknife, be sure to also clean the pivot joint and locking mechanism.
- Keep your knife in a clean, dry place. If you have a leather sheath, don't keep it in there for too long because leather holds on to moisture which can cause your blade to rust.
- If your knife does rust or begins to change color, be sure to clean it properly immediately.

Safety and Use:

- Apply force away from your body. Never point a knife towards yourself or another person.
- Never try to catch a falling knife. Pick it up after it has fallen.
- Do not run or climb while holding knives.
- Always hand a knife to someone else handle first and never throw it to someone.
- Make sure the area you are using the knife in is well-lit, clear of debris, and away from anyone who may distract you or hurt themselves while the knife is in use.
- Never use a knife without adult supervision.

Hammers and Mallets

Hammers and mallets are fairly simple tools but can cause safety hazards when used incorrectly or when the wrong tool is chosen. You must first choose the proper tool for the job you need done. Hammers are best for driving in fasteners like nails or stakes when a lot of force is needed. Mallets are better to alter the shape of materials or when less force is needed. Once you've chosen your tool, you next need to make sure the tool is the proper length and size for your body. Hammers and mallets that are too long or too heavy can cause injuries to your hand and wrist. It is also a good idea to choose a hammer or mallet with a cushioned handle to protect you from the impact force.

Safety and Use:

- Before use make sure the handle is not loose, cracked, or splintered.
- Wear appropriate eye protection to protect your eyes from flying debris.
- Check the area around you to make sure no one is near enough to be hit by the hammer while you're working.
- Be sure you're on a secure and balanced surface and you have sure footing. Awkward body positions can cause strains or stress on your body.
- Do not use the side or cheek of the hammer to strike a surface or object.
- Never leave hammers strewn about the work area or campsite.

Shovels and Spades

Shovels are designed mostly to dig but are also used to move loose material such as dirt, gravel, sand, or snow. Spades are smaller, handheld shovels used for digging straight-edged holes that are usually smaller in size. For digging larger holes or for moving heavy or large amounts of material, a full-size shovel would be best. For digging smaller holes like in the case of a field latrine or planting, a spade would be a better choice. Always consider the shovel weight, handle type, length, and blade size before selecting a tool. Shovels that are too long for your body or too heavy for your task will put unnecessary strain on your muscles and can cause serious injury.

Safety and Use:

- When using a shovel, keep your feet wide with your front foot close to the shovel. Put your weight on your front foot and use it to push the shovel forward or down into the dirt or material you are shoveling. Shift your weight to your back foot and then turn your body in the direction you want to move the material. Never use your back to turn your load, or you could cause injury.
- Do not lift or shovel more than you feel comfortable. For example, don't shovel for too long and don't lift more than you can easily carry.
- Take regular breaks while shoveling, especially if you aren't used to the movements or level of exertion.

Bow Saw

Bow saws are used for cutting logs or branches. Portable bow saws are used during encampments to cut small or medium sized logs to build fires or shelters. Always have adult supervision when using or even handling a bow saw.

Using a Bow Saw:

1. Make sure the blade is sharp and clean. Have an adult help you with this step, especially if the blade appears to be loose.
2. Place one hand on the handle and the other on the piece of wood you will be sawing, making sure your hand is well away from the saw blade.
3. Use steady strokes in a forward and backward motion. Do not put too much pressure on the saw: let the blade do the work for you.
4. Move at your own pace so you don't cause the wood to wobble.

Safety:

- Keep your hand holding the wood in place six to twelve inches away from the saw blade.
- Wear protective gloves, goggles, and closed-toe shoes.
- Never stand beneath a branch if you are cutting it off a tree.
- Maintain a distance of several feet away from anyone else while using the saw. The one exception is the adult who is supervising.
- Never handle a bow saw unless you intend to use it and use the same precautions while moving as you would with a knife. Keep the blade pointed away from your body and always hand it to someone else to handle first.

Axes and Hatchets

Axes and hatchets can be more dangerous than other tools because of how they are used

and their size. Make sure to be especially careful and follow all use and safety procedures when handling an axe. Axes and hatchets are most commonly used for chopping kindling or firewood or removing branches from trees.

Before you begin using an axe, you need to establish a “safety circle.” This is an area around your body where you can safely use an axe without hurting anyone or yourself. Create your safety circle by holding the axe near its head and extending its arm’s length from your body. Rotate the handle all around you, including above you to make sure there is nothing you can hit while you use the axe that might get in the way.

Safety and Use

- Wear safety goggles, work gloves, and closed-toe shoes or boots.
- Use both hands to steady the handle. One hand should be further up on the handle, closer to the axe head, while the other should be closer to the end of the handle to steady yourself.
- Make sure you have a steady stance and are on a balanced surface. Use a wood block if necessary so you are not bending over too far when chopping wood.
- Always check to make sure the axe head is secure to the handle before use.
- Ensure your swing is not aimed at your foot.
- Sheathe the axe when not in use.
- To hand the axe to another person, make sure it is secure in its sheath, the head is down, and the sharp edge is not pointing towards either of you. The person you are passing the axe to should say “Thank you” to let you know they have a secure hold on the axe and that you can let go.

EO.2 – Demonstrate Stove and Lantern Safety

While on an encampment, your Unit Commander or the encampment planner may choose to use a campfire for cooking and light during the night. They may also choose to use a camp stove to make cooking easier and safer, and a lantern for more reliable light, or so more people can have light. When using both a camp stove and lanterns, it is important to follow safety guidelines, and make sure you have adult supervision while using both items.

Camp Stove Safety

- Fill, light, and use the stove outside of tents, buildings, and confined shelters. Camp stoves involve both flammable fuels and fire which can pose safety hazards when used in confined spaces.
- Ensure no pots or objects are placed on the stove when filling or lighting. The stove should be clear of all objects and cool to the touch before filling.
- Always fill a stove using a funnel.

- Never open a pressurized fuel tank when the stove is lit.
- Always fill the fuel tank in a different place than where you plan to use the stove. Stay downhill and downwind from other sources of fire.
- Set the stove on a stable, level, and clean surface when you use and fill it, but do not use the stove on the same surface where you filled it.
- Only fill or pack up a stove that is cool to the touch and has been off for several hours.

Lantern Safety

- Fill, light, and use the lantern outside of tents, buildings, and confined shelters.
- Only fill or pack up a lantern that is cool to the touch and has been off for several hours.
- Always fill the lantern in a different place than where you plan to use it. Stay downhill and downwind from other sources of fire
- Always fill lanterns using a funnel.
- Set the lantern on a stable, level, and clean surface when you use and fill it, but do not use lanterns on the same surface where you filled it.
- Ensure that the heat shield is in place before use.

EO.3 – Explain Protocols for Camp Preparation

In addition to handling tools and equipment, now that you have some experience within the Young Marines, you'll be taking on more responsibility during encampments such as helping to set up campsites. This section will cover how to select a camp site and construct a basic shelter.

When choosing your campsite, you will need to consider several factors. You need protection from wind, precipitation, and direct sunlight. Also consider the effect you have on the environment around you. Consult a guidebook or park resource that details the locations of campsites in more heavily visited areas. Some campgrounds or parks may require the use of specific sites, so know in advance what to expect.

Consider these guidelines when choosing a campsite:

- Look for previously impacted areas on flat ground where others may have camped in the past.
- Your site should be at least 200 feet away from a water source. You will need water for many camp activities, so be close enough for easy access, but not so close you risk polluting the water source.
- Be aware of proximity to insects and other wildlife. Choose a site with a breeze if you are at risk for mosquitoes and not close to animal dwellings.

- Check the weather before choosing a site. If there will be high winds, choose a location with trees or large rocks to block the wind. If there will be rain, avoid low spots that collect water.

Avoid the following situations when choosing your campsite:

- Ensure your shelter area is at least 100 feet from your cooking area to avoid attracting bears or other animals.
- If you choose a shaded spot for wind or rain cover avoid hazardous, hanging tree branches.
- Do not setup your campsite near other hikers or campers.
- Avoid selecting a campsite on a road or path.
- Avoid untrampled areas like meadows or lake shores to avoid damaging the area. If you must camp in a less-traveled area, choose flat land or rock.

Once you have chosen your campsite, you'll assist with shelter construction. As you move through the program, you will learn to construct various types of shelters. At this stage, you will assist with basic tent construction. Each tent will be slightly different to set up based on the type and size, but there are some similarities in equipment and in the set-up process. No matter the type of tent, you will need a ground cloth or tarp, a tent and poles, tent pegs or stakes, a waterproof cover, and a mallet for the stakes. Before setting up your tent, lay out all your equipment to double check you have everything. Also make sure you have the instructions for your specific tent, most tents can be set up by following these general steps:

- Lay down your ground cloth or tarp wherever you set up your tent. Make sure the ground is free of sticks or rocks.
- Position your tent so the doors face away from the wind.
- Attach the stakes to the tent floor. Make sure the tent floor is straight and tight before using the mallet to drive the stakes into the ground all the way.
- Once the tent floor is secure, attach the rest of the stakes to the tent body points to finish securing your tent.
- Lay out all your poles and assemble them if need. Follow the instructions for attaching the poles to your tent.
- Attach your waterproof cover if you choose to use one.

EO.4 – Light a Fire

The next step in setting up your campsite is to gather supplies to light a fire. This section will detail the safety equipment needed for this task and the basic steps to light a fire with standard equipment such as matches, lighter or a fire starter.

Fire Safety

Be sure before beginning you know the regulations concerning fires for the area you are in. Many state parks, especially conservation areas or areas used for training purposes, restrict fires at all times. Other areas may allow fires unless the weather has been too hot or dry.

Collect the following safety equipment before starting a fire.

- A shovel
- A rake
- A pail with sand or water
- And a fire extinguisher

These supplies are to stay by the fireside at all times in case of emergency and to control the size of the fire. Next you will need to choose your fire site carefully. Always choose a site that has been established such as a fire pit or ring and that doesn't have any flammable materials near it, such as overhanging branches, that could catch fire. You also must be at least ten feet away from any buildings. You want to anticipate where any sparks might fly and land, so choose a location away from anything that could be damaged by the sparks and never start a fire on a windy day.

Keep in mind once you've built your fire a small, hot fire is more efficient and useful than a large fire. It is also easier to control and maintain. Always keep the size of your fire under control and do not use more wood than is necessary to keep it burning. Finally, never leave a fire unattended and always make sure it is fully extinguished before leaving it.

Lighting a Fire

Fires require three basic components: fuel, oxygen, and heat. Your fire will get its oxygen from the air around it, but you'll need to collect your fuel and heat sources before beginning. Fuel comes in four basic categories:

- **Tinder** - small dry material used to ignite the fire such as small twigs, pine needles or cones, moss, or dry bark
- **Kindling** - thin wood that is thinner than your finger
- **Softwood fuels** - dry branches that will burn hot and fast to get your fire going
- **Hardwood fuels** - larger pieces of wood or logs that are difficult to ignite because of their size but will burn for longer periods to sustain your fire and create hot coals for cooking

You will also need a source of heat such as matches, lighter, or fire starter.

Follow these steps to start your fire:

1. Make a pile using a handful of **tinder**.
2. Cover this pile loosely with **kindling**. Remember fire needs oxygen, so make sure there is enough space between the pieces of kindling to allow air to get through. If there is no wind, you may need to blow on the tinder to help it ignite fully.
3. Once the kindling is burning well, add small **softwood fuel** to help the fire grow. Once you have a small fire of softwood, you can add the **hardwood fuel**. Be careful not to add too much hardwood, or you will smother the fire, because hardwood is difficult to burn. Use **only as much fuel as required** to keep your fire going at the size and intensity you need.

You can build your fire in a variety of shapes, but they will all require the same materials and follow a similar process to the one listed above.

When using a **cone** shape, start with a small handful of tinder loosely piled in the middle of your fire pit or ring. Build a small cone with the kindling around your tinder pile. Once the kindling is lit and burning strong, you can add larger logs a few at a time until your fire reaches the size you need. This is a good way to avoid over-burning your fuel.

You can also use a **log cabin** shape by starting with two larger pieces of fuel wood parallel to each in the center of your pit. Make sure to leave space between the two logs for your tinder and kindling. You will place two slightly smaller pieces of fuel wood perpendicular to the bottom logs to make a square shape. Put a good amount of tinder in the middle of the square. Continue to add smaller pieces of wood to each layer making sure to keep the square shape. Adding fuel wood in a perpendicular way to insure air circulates between the logs. Once you have the size you need, finish with a layer of kindling and tinder.

A **pyramid** is similar to the log cabin shape except you place the logs side by side instead of leaving space to make a square. Continue to add layers of smaller logs to your pyramid until it reaches the needed height. Top your pyramid with kindling and tinder.



Minimum Impact Campfire

Remember we practice minimum impact camping, and fires can be very damaging. Be sure to practice all the fire safety rules any time you are lighting a campfire. To minimize damage to the environment, follow these principles:

- Only build a fire where there is an abundance of wood
- Use existing fire rings and keep fires small and burning for only as long as you will use them
- Allow wood to burn down to ash or make sure to put fires out with water instead of dirt
- Do not build fires next to rock structures that may retain black marks from the soot and flames
- Use a fire pan if no fire ring exists to minimize damage to surrounding areas

EO.5 – Assemble a Survival Kit

Anything can happen on an encampment or expedition. It's important to always be prepared for any situation, so you should always have a survival kit with you. Carry your kit in a pocket because you could become separated from your pack in an emergency. The following is a suggested list of items you can select from to fill your kit.

Add to this list when you discover another useful item.

- Matches—at least 20, the kind that will strike anywhere and are waterproof
- Candle—tea light or small candles
- Strong thin cord—30 feet
- Fishing gear—15 feet of 15 lb. line, bare hooks, a lead weight, and a cork
- Adhesive bandages of various sizes
- Small safety pins
- Plastic bags—2 large garbage, 2 small bags
- Food—concentrated soup or hard candy
- Aluminum foil— or folded square
- Fuel tablets or fire starters—sealed in plastic to avoid contamination of the rest of your kit
- Mirror—unbreakable and shatter proof (not glass) for signaling
- Small, simple compass
- Emergency blanket
- Spare flashlight bulb and batteries
- Sewing kit
- Crayon (will write anywhere) and paper

Note: If you can carry only the bare minimum, carry matches, a signaling device (whistle), protection for your body from the elements (garbage bags), a container to heat water, quick energy food, and adhesive bandages.

EO.6 – Discuss the Principles for Outdoor Cooking, Storage, and Water Procured in the Field

In this stage of your training, you'll take part in helping to set up campsites during encampments. As a Young Marine Private First Class and Young Marine Lance Corporal, your primary concern will be helping to locate and prepare water and assisting with preparing, cooking, and storing food safely.

Locating and Purifying Drinking Water

Clean water is one of the most important items to take with you on an encampment or an expedition. Your Unit Commander and unit staff members will likely pack bottled water, but it is important to know what to do in case you run out of water, get lost while hiking, or are out in the wilderness longer than you planned to be.

There are three main ways to locate water: **using campground spigots, collecting rainwater, or locating clear, running water.** Even when water comes from a spigot or if it appears clear and clean, never assume water is safe to drink. Naturally occurring water often contains bacteria that can cause illnesses even if it looks clean. The same can be said for water from campground or trail spigots; you can never be completely sure the water has been properly filtered or purified. The following methods can be used for purifying water in the field:

- 1. Water filters:** You can pack water filters as a back-up option, especially for water retrieved from campground spigots. Filters can also be used for natural water if it has an iodine system built in to kill viruses. Be careful though because filters can easily become clogged when being used for muddy or dirty water.
- 2. Chemical tablets or iodine:** Chemical tablets or iodine are good options because they don't cost much and are easy to carry. They kill most common viruses and bacteria but will not be as effective if there are parasites in the water. Be sure to check the date of the tablets because most of them have a limited shelf life.
- 3. Boiling water:** Boiling water is a sure way to purify water and can usually be done with equipment or tools you have on hand such as stoves or campfires and pots. You must bring the water to a full boil (large bubbles) and let it boil for a full minute then let the water cool down so you can drink it.

Note: The only method that works well for muddy or dirty water is using water filters. Using chemical tablets, iodine, or boiling the water will not be able to remove dirt or solid impurities, nor can they improve the taste of water. Make sure to choose the option that best fits your needs while in the field. The best option always will be to make sure to plan and prepare properly so you never run out of clean water.

Preparing and Storing Food in the Field

Another important piece of your field experience is making sure you have enough healthy food to maintain strength and energy. Being out in the elements, strenuous exercise, and the constant activity of an encampment or expedition uses up a lot of your energy reserves which can only be restored with proper nutrition.

One of the ways you may get nutrition in the field is through a Meal Ready to Eat (MRE). Each MRE is composed of pre-cooked meats, vegetables, and fruits in sealed foil packets as well as dried fruits, drink mixes, coffee, tea, and hard candies or chocolate. The cooked foods can be heated using boiling water, and any dried foods can be rehydrated before eating. Your Unit Commander may also supplement the MREs with snacks such as trail mix or other packaged foods with a long shelf life.

The reason MREs and packaged foods are so commonly used in the field is because they are packaged in a way that prevents them from spoiling easily. When you are on an encampment or expedition, it is very important to ensure the food you are eating is safe. The easiest way to do this is by only eating non-perishable food items like MREs or prepackaged foods. However, make sure to check the expiration dates as even MREs can go bad.

If you are unable to bring precooked or prepackaged meals, you will likely be cooking food in the field. This can be done in a number of ways, several of which are similar to how to cook food at home.

- **Boiling** food is the simplest and easiest way to ensure that your food is cooked properly.
- Meals can also be prepared **over a campfire** by roasting meat and vegetables or wrapped in foil and placed directly in the fire or under hot coals which will act like an oven would at your house.
- Meat can also be **smoked or cured** though this requires additional equipment and precautions to make sure the food is properly prepared and safe to eat.
- Food can also be cooked just as you would at home **using a pan and stove or campfire** if these items were brought on the encampment.

Food Safety

When it comes to handling raw or uncooked food, certain precautions need to be taken to protect yourself and others from foodborne illnesses such as food poisoning. The most common problems that can cause illness are when germs are passed from unclean hands to foods, food spoiling, or raw meat handled incorrectly.

To avoid spreading germs from your hands:

- Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the restroom or handling any outside materials or tools. Use hand sanitizer if you don't have soap.
- Dry your hands with towels or paper towels that will not be used to dry dishes.
- When sharing food from a bag, always shake food into someone's hand. Do not reach into bags with unclean hands.
- Always wash your hands before handling food.

To keep food from spoiling:

- Perishable items (meats and dairy) must be kept at or below forty degrees.
- Pre-chill your cooler with bags or blocks of ice for at least an hour before packing them. Then use frozen water bottles or sealed bags of ice to keep food cold. The best bottles to use are insulated water bottles because they will stay cold longer than plastic bottles.
- Freeze foods ahead of time and make sure any food that could leak such as raw meat is put into two bags for an extra layer of protection.
- Pack your cooler by putting frozen meat or any food most likely to spoil in the bottom closest to the ice and packing all the food you'll use first at the top.
- Avoid opening the cooler or leaving it open for longer than necessary to keep the inside cold and be sure to use a thermometer to monitor the temperature.

To avoid cross-contamination from raw meat:

- Cut up and package your meat (using two bags) before you leave home to avoid having to pack extra knives and cutting boards.
- If you do cut raw meat at camp, cook the meat immediately and wash everything that touched the raw meat (knives, cutting boards, your hands) with hot water and soap.
- Make sure to use separate knives and cutting boards for food you will not cook such as cheese, fruits, or vegetables.

Food Storage

Once your food has been cooked, or even beforehand, it is essential that it is stored properly. This serves two purposes: to prevent food from spoiling and to keep wildlife out of your food and away from your camp. This last point is the most important since human food can be dangerous for wildlife to consume, and it is also dangerous to have wild animals approach your camp and search for the food.

Follow these safety tips to keep your food safely stored and out of reach of animals:

- **Always check with the parks first to learn their regulations for storing food.** Not following those rules may result in fines, your food being taken away, or removal from the park to protect both the visitors and the animals.
- In Picnic Areas and Campgrounds:
 - o Always keep your food where it is easily available and never leave your food unattended. During the day, keep all of your food stored safely in a cooler. At night, make sure all of your food is secured in a cooler that can be additionally secured against bears, either one that has a locking mechanism or in a metal box or bear box.
 - o Be sure to secure your food, garbage, and other scented items first thing when you get to your campsite. Any odors will attract wildlife
 - o Do not store food in your tent or backpack.
 - o Wash dirty dishes immediately.
 - o Do not attempt to burn excess food. It is very difficult to completely burn food or trash and the remains will still attract wildlife. You should also never dispose of food waste in the wilderness. Pack and store all uneaten food and make sure there aren't a lot of crumbs or trash around the campsite. Treat any other garbage the same as you would food.
- While Backpacking or Hiking:
 - o Check with the park before traveling with food. Some do not allow it at all on hiking trails, while others may provide or require special containers for transporting food.
 - o Choose foods easy to carry, high in nutrition, and do not have strong smells such as tortillas, jerky, nuts, dried fruits, peanut butter, and protein bars.
 - o Take food out of its original package and use resealable bags instead of bottles, jars, and cans, and be sure to dispose of them properly.
 - o Carry food and garbage in plastic bags to contain crumbs and grease that can leave odors in your backpack.

EO.7 – Participate in a Unit or City-Wide Conservation Effort

Conservation efforts within communities can be anything from creating or continuing recycling programs to sponsoring park clean-ups to assisting with wildlife preservation or conservation efforts. Conservation is important for the community because it can ensure clean lands and water for the community to use. It can also bring a community together. It is important to be involved in conservation efforts within your unit and within your community.

Conservation efforts can be as simple as a unit-wide recycling initiative or cleaning up trash in a local park and as big as planting trees or plants in a natural area. Check your local news channel or your city, county, or state government office for information on proposed or ongoing conservation projects. Work with your unit to research the conservation needs in your city or town and help come up with a reasonable plan for everyone to get involved with.

Check the database library and Young Marines website for forms to help you log your conservation efforts.