



OACT Safety and Emergency Procedures

[Home](#) > [Resources](#) > [Event Management](#) > [OACT Safety and Emergency Procedures](#)

Revised February 2024

NB: This document is currently under revision, and should be seen as recommendations and guidelines.

Note: A printed copy of the following information should be taken to every event.

The Safety Policy of Orienteering ACT (OACT), on which the following procedures are based, is binding on all events organised on behalf of OACT or clubs associated with OACT. However, for smaller events, sprint and urban events some procedures may differ.

The OACT Safety Policy recognises that, by its very nature, orienteering involves risks to the safety of participants. The most common risks involve injuries (ankle, leg, or cuts and abrasions), stress from dehydration, overheating, hypothermia, or severe disorientation. The emphasis in orienteering must be on primary safety, that is, on ensuring participants minimise risk. However, provision must be made for emergencies and this policy outlines the steps that should be taken at OACT-affiliated events.

These procedures are in three parts:

- A. Safety considerations to be taken into account in the organisation of an event.
- B. Procedures to be followed in event of the need for a search.
- C. Procedures to be followed in the event of a serious injury or other medical condition.

A. EVENT ORGANISATION PROCEDURES

Event Safety Coordinator

The controller, course planner and event organiser must consider safety, emergency and search and rescue options in the planning of the event. At larger and remote events an Event Safety Coordinator should be appointed by the organising team. This would normally be the event organiser, although an inexperienced organiser may wish to delegate this role to the controller or another experienced organiser. The Event Safety Coordinator has overall responsibility for decisions relating to safety, search and rescue.

Pre-event Organisation

For larger and remote events the controller, course planner and organiser (and, if additional, Event Safety Coordinator) should meet and address the following. For small or urban events the following should be considered, but a specific meeting is generally not needed:

- Identify and seek to avoid or minimise any hazards specific to the event, map or proposed courses, and display the warning notices at registration and/or the start.

• Identify additional hazards in the case of bad weather/visibility.

• Minimise hazards for Moderate, Easy and Very easy courses, e.g. do not set controls near edge of map.

• Gather in case of emergency contact details for relevant management authority or landholder and have the contact details accessible at the event, e.g. to be able to provide relevant ambulance/ vehicle access through locked gates.
- Water is normally not provided at the events. Participants are encouraged to bring their own water.
- If water will be provided along a course, the locations where water is provided should be specified in the control descriptions, or on maps or master maps if drinks are not placed at controls.

Where appropriate, e.g. at remote bush events, ensure that safety directions and/or a **safety bearing** is advised at the start and/or printed on the map or control descriptions lists.

If pre-marked maps are used, print an **emergency contact number** on the map. That number should be contactable at the assembly area throughout the event until the last competitor has returned. In areas where there is unreliable mobile coverage, this may be the number of the satellite phone kept at the assembly area. For events in which competitors copy their own courses, the emergency contact number should be written on the master maps or displayed at the assembly.

Ensure that the officials responsible for the registration, start and event organisation on the day of the event are aware of and able to fulfil safety requirements, including knowing who to contact in case of emergency (e.g. the organiser, the controller, course planner or any specifically assigned Event Safety Coordinator).

Ensure that a list of phone numbers of search resources (including the relevant management authority or landowner), hospitals and search and rescue authorities is at hand. (Some phone numbers are stated further down in this document)

First Aid

At major events, when appropriate, external first aid providers can be engage, St John's e.g. Several orienteers are 1st aid certified. If first aid is needed, check with the people at the event. A First Aid kit and an emergency defibrillator will be at the assembly during major and remote events.

If practicable provide a list of qualified first aiders/doctors from among the OACT participants and volunteers to the organiser.

Ensure that a sufficient number of experienced people, together with an adequate number of maps for all courses, will be on hand for search and rescue, especially near the end of an event. At least six people should remain at the event site until all competitors have finished their courses. These would usually be club members who are helping to pack up and bring in controls. Even without a search situation, control collectors should be asked to watch for stragglers and direct them back if necessary.

Participant Registration

For each participant or leader of a group of participants, organisers must obtain sufficient details to ensure that emergency procedures can be implemented. This information should include:

- Full name of each person participating in the competition.
- Membership club (when appropriate)
- Contact phone number and emergency number (if available)
- Course entered.

This information is particularly important for participants who travel alone to an event and have nobody else on hand who can confirm their safe return, as well as for families or other groups who travel and participate together. The information may be obtained from pre-entry records (eg from Eventor) or by completing a registration card at the event.

Participant Awareness

A standard form **disclaimer** by OACT of responsibility should be displayed on any online entry system and on an appropriate notice attached or adjacent to the course information at all events. This notice should advise that participation in the event is deemed to be acceptance by participants of risks and responsibilities for their own safety. A similar notice will be included in annual OACT membership application and renewal forms, as a condition of membership.

The organising club and/or OACT officials present should ensure that any beginners or other inexperienced orienteers are briefed on safety issues (if relevant in the circumstances) before they start, preferably when registering.

Orienteering Australia Competition Rule 6.2 permits the refusal of an entry on a course if the organiser considers that a person is trying to compete on course beyond their capabilities. This may be an important safety provision in the case of inexperienced orienteers wanting to tackle a challenging course in some of the more rugged or remote areas used for OACT League events.

All orienteers should be encouraged to routinely carry a **whistle**, and to know when and how to use it. Event organisers have the discretion to make carrying a whistle mandatory, particularly for events in remote or rugged areas. The organiser may provide whistles for sale.

Beginners and others who may be concerned about the physical or navigational abilities should be encouraged to carry a **mobile phone** (if practicable) on the condition that it should not be used as a navigational aid except in an emergency.

The **course closure time** should be displayed on an appropriate notice attached or adjacent to the course information. All competitors must be advised to report to the finish by the advertised course closure time.

Start Records

For all events, regardless of whether SportIdent is used at the Start and Finish, accurate actual start lists are essential. Participants need to have either pre-registered online, or registered at the event before commencing their course. If SI is used, participants must also clear and check their SI stick and only commence their course when they have activated their SI in the start unit (unless otherwise instructed, e.g. for mass starts) Start times will be recorded in the Start SI unit, even for any starters who have inadvertently forgotten to register before starting (provided that their SI stick has been cleared).

For pre-entry events an accurate 'Did Not Start' (DNS) list must be maintained and available to the organiser or to the finish/results coordinator as soon as possible after the last start.

For events which are not pre-entry events, the computer registration procedure should be integrated with the Clear/Check procedure to minimise the risk of participants starting without registering. For non-members, an entry form should be filled out before starting. For members that have not entered online, their data will have been collected when becoming/renewing their membership. However, the organiser must keep track on who has gone out on a course: members and non-members, pre-entered or not. This is usually done via verifying start unit /check unit with competitors having downloaded after completing the course. It is essential that all competitors follow the routine of downloading after finishing the course, completed or not.

For Midweek events where a start list is provided, starters must record their start times on a list at the Start, and record their finish times (or DNF). For any event using smart device technology only (eg MapRun) participants are to manage their own start and finish arrangements at their own risk.

Finish Records

For SI-supported events, check the SI computer program regularly after the start has closed for participants who have registered but are not yet recorded as finished. In addition, if there is doubt at the end of the event about any participants not finishing, it is possible* to check the Start SI unit against the Finish SI unit and/or Finish download SI unit to confirm that everyone who started a course has returned. This provides a means of checking whether anyone who has forgotten to register but has still started is still on the course. This, however, is a skilled task requiring an experienced computer operator. It is preferable to use a system which guarantees that all starters are registered in the event computer when they enter the event.

**This may not be possible where SIAC is used.*

If SI is not used at the start and finish, match start stubs (if used) with finish cards or, in the case of Midweek events, from the start/finish sheet. Near the end of the event, maintain an updated list of participants still out.

For major and remote pre-entry events, an accurate actual start list should be matched with pre-entry list as soon as it is returned from the start to the organiser or to the finish/ results coordinator.

Smaller events, sprint and urban events

It is the assumption that these events are held in or close to urban areas, where there is mobile coverage and there are surrounding tracks or roads in a not too far distance. This will reduce the likelihood of a search being needed, but also improve better access should extra help be needed e.g. ambulance or other means of transport of injured participants. The above guidelines, for major and remote events, should be applied, or parts of, at the discretion of the controller and event organiser. However, for all events, regardless of whether SportIdent is used at the Start and Finish, it is essential to keep track of everyone that has started, and to match that with everyone who has come back, so nobody is unaccounted for.

B. SEARCH PROCEDURES

Determine the Need for a Search

The following procedures should be followed in a situation where a participant has not been recorded as finishing in the event computer or manual start/finish system after a thorough check of that information:

1. Check the Start SI unit to confirm when the participant actually started and whether the elapsed time appears reasonable for the course attempted.
2. If courses have closed* and SI is used, it may be possible to gather the control units and check them to ascertain whether the missing person has visited relevant controls on their course (or other controls)**. This can help to guide searchers to the last known place for the person on the course and give an indication of possible search areas.
- * Controls should not be collected if other runners are still on their courses.*

*** Not possible if SIAC was used*
3. Check if there are any family members or friends waiting for the missing person.
4. Check if any participants still at the event know the missing person and can confirm whether they have returned from the course.
5. Attempt to ascertain the phone number(s) of the missing person, and an emergency number, from the emergency contact master list or registration cards filled in on the day.
6. Check vehicles in the parking area to see if one matches the vehicle of the missing competitor (if known). Check if the remaining vehicles belong to event helpers or other participants still at the event. However, this is not always a reliable method, particularly in public areas, as vehicles that are unaccounted for may belong to a member of the general public, or to a participant who has gone for a walk after the event or has left the vehicle for other reasons. It is possible also that the missing person may have arrived at the event other than by car. Children may have been dropped by their parents before the event and collected afterwards.
7. Ring the participant's mobile or home phone number (if known) or, if there is no answer, another family member or emergency contact who may be able to assist.

If the phone number is not available through the emergency contact list or registration cards, attempt to contact an OACT member who has access to the Eventor membership database, which may contain phone numbers. Contact phone numbers for some of those members are given at the end of this document. It is worth taking all reasonable steps to clarify whether a participant is actually missing on a course before initiating a search.

If the participant has not returned or is not otherwise accounted for within thirty minutes of course closure, consider the following points before commencing a search:

- Participant details – gain as much information as possible, e.g.

◦ Age

◦ Fitness level

◦ Experience and competence

◦ Any known/perceived medical conditions

◦ Clothing the participant is wearing (if known)

◦ Equipment carried (if known), e.g. watch, whistle

◦ Last known location (if known)
- Course and conditions

◦ Prevailing and likely weather (hot – risk of dehydration/hyperthermia etc? cold, wet, windy – risk of hypothermia)

◦ Course distance/terrain/hazard features

◦ Course estimated winning time/compared to actual completion times

◦ Estimated completion time for participant

◦ Daylight remaining

If, after considering the factors above, a search is warranted, the decision to begin a search is made by the Event Safety Coordinator.

There are two levels of search. The Event Safety Coordinator may decide to initiate a comprehensive, higher level, search immediately if conditions warrant. However, it would be normal practice to undertake a lower level search first.

Essential Preparations for a Search

- Locate a base station where all searchers will report (usually the assembly area).
- Appoint a search coordinator, who should remain at the base station with a mobile phone (if coverage is available) or satellite phone (if accessible).
- Identify as much information as possible about the participant (see above).
- Narrow the search area by asking if anyone has seen the participant while they were competing.
- Develop maps showing the participant's course, and likely points of error/hazards.
- Identify where the participant could be if following the safety bearings.
- Identify major tracks/roads that the participant could have reached.
- Estimate the distance travelled and prepare a perimeter map identifying bordering roadways and rights of way.
- Transcribe those details onto the maps to be carried by searchers.
- Issue torches to searchers if appropriate and available.
- Ensure that due regard is given for the safety of searchers, who are OACT member volunteers.
- Agree on ways to communicate during the search (if found, if injured and more help is needed, when to return)

Signalling During Search

- Ten (10) short blasts of a car horn at 1 to 2 minute intervals is used to signal searchers to return to base.
- Remember to periodically call out for the missing person, and wait and listen for any response back (voice or other)

Lower Level Search

- Place observers and/or vehicles on major roads and trails.
- Assign teams of two or more to walk/jog the missing person's course. One team should do the course in reverse order, one in the correct order. Additional teams may be sent to particular hazard spots or locations where the participant is likely to have gone astray.
- Brief search party members as follows:

◦ Protect scent articles – do not touch or relocate possible scent articles, but wait for a search dog handler to collect them in the event that dogs are used in a higher level search.

◦ Instruct teams to pause frequently, looking ahead, back and side to side while using voice or single whistle blasts.

◦ Instruct teams on whistle signals to use during search and in event of finding the missing person and requiring further assistance.

◦ Each team should carry water, and an emergency first aid kit (at least a compression bandage) and preferably a mobile phone for communicating with the base station (if coverage is available).
- If the missing person is found and cannot be moved, at least one member must stay with the person.
- All searchers should return to the base station by a predetermined time (normally in time to allow any higher level search to commence well before sunset).
- Ten (10) short blasts of a car horn at 1 to 2 minute intervals is used to signal searchers to return to base.

Higher Level Search

If a higher level search is warranted, the Event Safety Coordinator should take into consideration the amount of time that the search has taken so far and the amount of daylight remaining when determining when to contact the appropriate authority.

In initiating a higher level search, the Event Safety Coordinator should:

- notify the appropriate authorities that a search is required (e.g. area manager, ACT or NSW Police)
- notify a home contact for the missing person using information from the registration card or participant database if available
- transfer any relevant information to the authority responsible for coordinating the higher level search
- support the search as required by the responsible authority, and
- notify a senior OACT officer (President, Executive Officer or Secretary in that order of priority).

C. SERIOUS INJURIES AND OTHER MEDICAL CONDITIONS

The following procedures should be followed in a situation where a participant has experienced a serious injury or other medical condition and requires assistance to return to the assembly area and/or requires on-site treatment. The precise response may depend on the nature of the injury or medical condition.

If Urgent Medical Treatment Is Required

1. **Immediately** phone the relevant ambulance service (ACT or NSW, dial 000 or 112) **and**, if access through locked gates is needed, the relevant management authority or landholder.
2. If not already in hand, send a suitably qualified medical, paramedical or first aid person, if available, to the site of the incident to attend to the person until ambulance personnel arrive.If the OACT trailer is at the event, it should contain a field first aid kit in a backpack and a folding stretcher in addition to the standard first aid kit kept with the event equipment.
3. Once the urgent actions are in hand, the Event Safety Coordinator should notify a senior OACT officer (President, Executive Officer or Secretary in that order of priority).

If Medical Treatment Appears to Be Less Urgent

Depending on the nature of the injury or medical condition, it may be appropriate for a suitably qualified person to assess the situation prior to calling an ambulance. If in doubt, an ambulance should be called, but not necessarily with the same degree of urgency.

Some situations may be managed by event officials or other participants, subject to the guidance of a suitably qualified person. If the trailer is at the event, it should contain a stretcher which, in some situations, may be used to transport an injured person if there is a delay in a regular ambulance being available. Access through locked gates should be arranged with the management authority or landholder if this would assist in rescue operations.

Any participant who comes across an injured fellow orienteer is required to render assistance and abandon their course if necessary.

If possible, one or two people should stay with the injured person until help arrives.

The following additional steps should also be taken as appropriate:

1. If there is mobile coverage, ask passers-by if they have mobile phone and can call for help (emergency number might be found on the map).
2. Note location on map and character of injury/sickness as well as, if possible, participant's name, gender and approximate age.
3. Send one person (preferably a faster runner) with the annotated map to get help. In case the injured person can move, needs to be moved or potentially needs to be moved before additional help has arrived, agree with the person going for help on the intended route or location so help gets sent to the right place.
4. When reaching the assembly, inform relevant first aid person if known, otherwise, ask someone at the computer desk/registration who to contact.
5. The Event Safety Coordinator should notify a senior OACT officer (President, Executive Officer or Secretary in that order of priority).

CONTACT PHONE NUMBERS

Unless more specific phone contact numbers have been compiled for the event, the following contacts may be useful:

OACT Officers

President: Susanne Harrysson 0484 649 186

Executive Director: Phil Walker 0409 778 213

Secretary: Stephen Goggs 0401 994 975

Phil Walker with access to Eventor membership database: Bill Jones 0428 255 210

Phil Walker 0409 778 213

OACT Office 6162 3422 (only during office hours)

External Contacts

Emergency (Ambulance or Police): 000 or 112 (alternative for mobiles)

Access Canberra (for any ACT Government agencies, all hours): 13 2281

Canberra Nature Park North: 6207 2113 (working hours only) or through Access Canberra

Canberra Nature Park South: 6207 2087 (working hours only) or through Access Canberra

Namadgi National Park Visitor Centre: 6207 2900

Stromlo Forest Park (Manager): 0417 248 374

ACT Forests: Through Access Canberra, 13 2281

ACT Police: 13 1444

NSW Police:

Queanbeyan 6298 0599

Bungendore 6238 1244

Cooma 6452 0099

Monaro – Queanbeyan Local Area Command 6298 0555.

ACT Ambulance: 000 or 112.

NSW Ambulance Service: 13 1233

For specific areas including private land, see contact details in the relevant Event Planning and Management Guidelines (if available).

AFTER THE EVENT

Following an event involving a major search or serious injury, a written report from the Event Safety Coordinator is to be submitted to the event controller and to the OACT Office. This report should detail decisions and actions, as well as the nature and extent of the search, rescue or injury. Any lessons learnt may also be included.