



Every forest and park needs Friends

More About Liability Release Forms

Release Form Protocol

All friends groups should require liability waivers for their hikes and work parties. When your group conducts cosponsored hikes create a joint waiver so people only have to sign once. Add a disclaimer that includes the "property owner" which could be DCR or the town.

When participants are conditioned to sign forms there is seldom a problem. The waivers should include language that the participant is in physical condition to do the activity safely. Include a registration period of 15 minutes to half hour before the start of every event and activity. If you advertise a hike starting at 1pm, tell participants that registration is at 12:45 pm.

Let people know in notices that a liability waiver will be required and include a disclaimer to wear appropriate clothing and shoes and to consider sunscreen, insect repellent and water. When you start a hike, find a secure place to leave the clipboard so that anyone leaving the hike early signs out when they get back to the parking lot. Ask everyone to sign out. Then, if someone leaves the hike early you will know that they got back ok. Include a line on the sign in sheet for a description of participant's cars or license plates. If the car is still in the parking lot, you will know that you might have a problem.

Benefits of Release Form Requirement

The form should have contact information too. if necessary, you will be able to make a couple of phone calls to make sure participants are ok. Extra care in the beginning is worth the peace of mind it will provide group leaders! After the hike, share a copy with the other organization with which you have partnered.

An added benefit of registration forms is that you end up with contact info. Ask participants if they'd like to have notices of future events, etc: Sometimes you end up with new members that way! Keep registration forms/waivers simple and short. Make sure each sign up page includes the full text. That way someone won't be able to say that they didn't see or read it.

For minors, require a parental or legal guardian signature. If you hold an event with Scouts or other young people, give the leaders the waiver in advance. Let them know that they will need a parent's signature for every child who attends.

Partnering with DCR

It's always best if a friends group can partner with DCR when holding events. Partnering with DCR gives a friends group more protection. However, in today's climate, with all the budget cuts that limit how much DCR staff can do, friends groups can provide controlled learning experiences in a fairly safe manner.

Many people feel more comfortable hiking with others and would not get out on their own, so it's a win-win situation for everyone when friends groups can help fill the gap!

DCR Special Permits

There are situations where a friends group, as with any other group, will have to ask DCR for a special use permit. Certain activities carry a considerable inherent risk and DCR should not be expected to assume that risk if it is outside the scope of what would be normal use of the particular park. Most of the time friends groups are organizing activities that are considered normal use in a park. There are certain events with carnival type equipment (moonwalks) and climbing walls, providing food, etc., which require special permits.

View the DCR Special Use Permit Application at
http://www.mass.gov/dcr/permits/special_use_application-instructions2010.pdf.