

## **Guidelines for Use of the ATC Incident Report/Search Form by ATC and Appalachian Trail Maintaining Clubs**

### **In an emergency (a situation requiring immediate medical or law-enforcement response):**

- 1) Call the appropriate emergency-response dispatcher (usually 911);
- 2) Call (or ask the dispatcher to call) the Shenandoah National Park 24-hour communications center at 800-732-0911, which will notify the NPS Chief Ranger for the Appalachian Trail.

At the site of the incident, ATC and club representatives should remain available to assist as requested in emergency response.

### **Incident Management**

The Appalachian Trail crosses lands administered by the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and state and local agencies. Local, state, and federal agencies are obligated, equipped, trained, and staffed to respond to emergencies and law-enforcement incidents along the Trail. Neither the Appalachian Trail Conservancy nor any Appalachian Trail maintaining club should assume the lead role of managing an emergency, investigating an incident or crime, or contacting victims' families. Those decisions and actions should be implemented by the appropriate agency. Because the A.T. is a unit of the National Park Service, the NPS-ATPO office should be notified of all incidents on the Trail.

ATC's Hiker Security Policy states: "*In incidents or emergencies known to ATC that may put hikers at risk, ATC will actively assist appropriate law-enforcement and public-safety agencies on how best to inform hikers and other users.*" ATC and the Trail clubs may be able to provide information to emergency responders about local contacts, access, terrain, and other features of the Trail that may be needed for prompt response to an emergency. ATC also can play an important role in responding to inquiries from the press and general public.

*In an emergency*, the most important role ATC and the Trail clubs can fill is that of disseminating accurate information as quickly as possible to the appropriate emergency responders and agency officials.

*In incidents that are not emergencies*, the principal role of ATC and the Trail clubs still is to provide accurate information to the right people as soon as possible, including NPS-ATPO and the appropriate land-management agency. ATC and the Trail clubs also should take steps to prevent or mitigate recurrence, including removing garbage and graffiti, repairing vandalized structures, closing or gating roads (with the consent and cooperation of abutting landowners), providing ridgerunners, *etc.*

### **Incident Reporting**

The NPS-Appalachian Trail Park Office should be notified within 24 hours of any emergency, law-enforcement response, resource damage or any other incident involving A.T. users. Incidents reported to ATC, whether by e-mail or other means, will be shared with the NPS Chief Ranger as well as the appropriate land-management agency, law-enforcement official, and Trail club officer.

### **Why Reporting Incidents is Important**

Reporting incidents or suspicious behavior helps the land-management agencies, law-enforcement officials, ATC, and the Trail clubs become aware of criminal activity, vandalism, resource and facility damage, or possible threats to hiker safety on the Trail. This helps to determine the steps that may need to be taken to resolve a situation. A seemingly isolated incident in one Trail club's section may be linked to incidents elsewhere—if they're not reported, no one will make that connection.

**Incident report form**

The ATC incident report form is designed to report and share information regarding Trail emergencies, criminal or suspicious activities, and damage to natural resources. It is intended to report information, not to manage an ongoing emergency. The form can be filled out electronically and e-mailed or can be printed, filled out, and then faxed or mailed. Incidents also may be reported by telephone to ATC headquarters at 304-535-6331 during normal business hours, Monday through Friday. ATC offices are closed on most federal holidays, on the day after Thanksgiving, and on December 24.

The report form has a description section for persons to “be on the lookout” (BOLO) for—missing persons, lost hikers, shelter squatters, or individuals whose behavior is threatening or suspicious. The [incident report form](#) is available on ATC’s Web site, and an abbreviated version is included in the *Appalachian Trail Data Book* for use by hikers.

**Use discretion**

Names and contact information of victims or persons making reports should be shared only with law-enforcement agencies, land managers, NPS-ATPO, and ATC. Posting of alerts, descriptions and other information at shelters, Trailheads, club Web sites and forums, etc., should be done only at the request of law-enforcement officials and should be coordinated through the land-management agency and NPS-ATPO.