

Appalachian Trail Volunteer Injury INSTRUCTIONS

Overview: Volunteers, volunteer leaders with ATC and within A.T. Clubs, as well as agency partner personnel should be familiar with these instructions. A volunteer working on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) and enabled through an individual or group Volunteer Service Agreement (OF-301A), is considered an official volunteer of either the National Park Service (NPS) or the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) through the Volunteers in Parks (VIP) Act of 1969 and the Volunteers in Forest Service (VIF) Act of 1972, respectively.

These laws which authorize federal agencies to work with volunteers and provide them certain protections are commonly referred to as VIP and VIF. Through this legislation volunteers **are** considered to be federal employees for purposes of:

- (1) protection from tort claims, under the Federal Tort Claims Act, which may be filed by anyone who may claim to have sustained personal injury or property damage due to the actions of a volunteer; and
- (2) compensation for work related injuries under the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA), relating primarily to costs for medical care in case of injury; and
- (3) claims relating to damage or loss of personal property of the volunteer while performing volunteer service.

Volunteers **are not** considered to be federal employees for purposes of pay, benefits, retirement, or unemployment compensation. While this instruction sheet focuses on A.T. Volunteer Injuries because of their immediate nature, volunteers inquiring about work-related illnesses, tort protections, or personal property losses should contact volunteer@appalachiantrail.org or your ATC Regional Office.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION. All Appalachian Trail volunteers are covered under either VIF or VIP depending on **where** the injury occurs and the volunteer service responsibilities outlined in the club's Volunteer Service Agreement with each agency. It's important for volunteers and volunteer trip leaders to always be aware of their field work location, particularly due to the multi-jurisdictional nature of the A.T.

- **VIF** – covers volunteers working on the A.T. on lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service. This is about 45% of the Trail and includes both National Forest lands in GA, NC, TN, VA, VT, and NH; and certain other A.T.-lands managed by the USFS in VA, VT, and NH.
- **VIP** – covers volunteers working on the A.T. on lands administered by the National Park Service, National Wildlife Refuge, by a state agency, or any other non-VIF lands; totaling about 55% of the Trail.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS. An A.T. volunteer worker must be **authorized** as a volunteer in writing by either the NPS (for VIP) or the USFS (for VIF), using a standard form (OF-301a).

Most traditional A.T. volunteers are covered by a group agreement (OF-301a) between their local A.T. Club and agency partners—NPS and USFS. Workers must be listed in Club records as members, on an annual volunteer roster, or be listed as a participant in a club work party by way of a roster. Each group, ATC or respective A.T. maintaining club, is responsible for maintaining and updating official membership and volunteer records, and providing membership and volunteer information to the APPA or ATC Volunteer Coordinator upon request since it's an extension of the group agreement. ATC recommends submitting annual membership and volunteer rosters to volunteer@appalachiantrail.org and work-trip rosters to that email address after each organized work day.

Individual volunteers **not affiliated** as a member or work group with a local A.T. Club must have a completed individual or group agreement (OF-301a) between themselves and either the NPS or USFS.

Volunteers must work within the scope of the volunteer agreement, which includes working on approved tasks in an approved manner, such as following basic safety practices. This includes participating in a daily pre-work safety briefing (tailgate safety session), wearing all required personal protective equipment (PPE), and following required training and certifications for specific tasks.

Volunteers are **not** covered if injured during the drive to and from their volunteer duty station, and they are **not** compensated for time lost on a paid job due to an injury suffered as a volunteer.

In the Case of Injury Volunteers must know what to do in case of an injury. A basic emergency response plan should be developed for each work trip, and should include: emergency contact numbers, location of nearest medical facility, best evacuation routes, known allergies or medical conditions of workers.

If an injury occurs, a volunteer should follow these five steps:

- **Immediate Care and First Aid.**
- **Emergency Treatment by a Medical Provider, if needed.** (Inform agency partner contacts first, if possible.)
- **Reporting of Injury to Appropriate Agency Authorities.** (Ideally, this notification occurs **before** formal medical care is sought, or as soon thereafter as possible. Specific contacts for agency personnel should be known in advance and verified.) All injuries should be reported within 24 hours of occurrence.
- **Documentation.** Form CA-1 (Report of Injury) must be completed by the injured party for all injuries (even if medical treatment is not sought), and witness statements should be included.
- **Follow-up** with agency authorities and ATC.

INJURIES: TREATMENT PROCEDURES

1. If an injury requires emergency treatment, get it from the closest source of medical care. *You should plan for this possibility before each trip out to the Trail!*
2. All injuries should be treated on the date of the accident or ASAP afterwards. Failure to do this will result in higher costs and a poor rating for your agency partner!
3. As you seek treatment, you may request your medical costs be compensated by the U.S. Government due to your status as a volunteer (either VIP or VIF) under FECA. This compensation coverage is through the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Worker's Compensation Programs (OWCP). Emphasis added for communication to medical facility: *This is federal, not state, OWCP. It is not considered insurance.*
4. If you seek treatment, notify the appropriate agency personnel as soon as possible, preferably before arrival at the Medical facility. Have form CA-16 (Authorization for Treatment) and the *OWCP and the Treating Physician* with you.
5. All injuries must be reported to agency partners (using form CA-1) and ATC as soon as possible, but within 24-hours, *even if you do not seek treatment right away.* If your injury gets worse, you may need treatment at a later date and it will be hard to prove your injury occurred while working on the A.T. without the initial reporting.

REPORTING PROCEDURES (Separate procedures for VIP and VIF)

For A.T. Volunteers in PARKS (VIP):

6. If the injury occurred within the boundaries of a distinct NPS unit, contact that park. (*This includes Great Smoky Mtns NP, Blue Ridge Parkway, Shenandoah NP, Harpers Ferry NHP, C&O Canal NHP, and Delaware Water Gap NRRRA.*) For all other non-USFS A.T. lands, call the Chief Ranger for the Appalachian Trail to report the injury.
During Business Hours: Work: 304-535-6170, Cell: 304-650-2677.
After Hours: NCRCC/APPA Dispatch Line: 1-866-677-6677
(request that your message be delivered to Appalachian Trail Chief Ranger)
7. If you are seeking formal medical treatment, ask the attending physician to complete and return the enclosed form CA-16 (Authorization for Examination and/or Treatment) to:
Chief Ranger, NPS-Appalachian National Scenic Trail,
P.O. Box 50 (252 McDowell Street, Cook Hall) Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
8. For **ALL** injuries, complete form CA-1 (Report of Injury), *including the witness statement on the form*, and mail to Chief Ranger at the address above. S/he will contact you and the crew leader.
9. Contact your Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) Regional Office and report the injury to them also.
ATC - New England Reg'l Office 802-281-5894. ATC – Mid-Atlantic Reg'l Office 717-258-5771.
ATC - Cent+SW VA Reg'l Office 540-904-4393. ATC – TN/NC/GA Reg'l Office 828-254-3708.

For A.T. Volunteers in FORESTS (VIF):

VIF coverage is administered by each local RANGER DISTRICT on each NATIONAL FOREST. (*this includes the Chattahoochee (GA), Nantahala (NC), Pisgah (NC), Cherokee (TN), George Washington/Jefferson (VA), Green Mountain (VT), and White Mountain (NH) National Forests; and certain "transfer lands" managed by the USFS in central and southwest VA, all of VT, and all of NH.*) It is critical that you determine and verify the appropriate USFS agency personnel to contact in case of injury **before** your work trip.

6. As soon as possible, call the appropriate local USFS agency personnel to report the injury.

Business Hours: local Ranger District Office: _____ (**fill in locally**).

_____ (**name and ###**)

After Hours: local USFS emergency contact: _____ (**fill in locally**).

_____ (**name and ###**)

7. If you seek treatment and plan to request your medical costs be compensated by the U.S. Government as a VIF, call the USFS Workers Compensation Group in Albuquerque, NM (USFS OWCP) as soon as possible at 877-372-7248, press option 2, option 2 again, then option 1. Also call the Local Ranger District and/or USFS Emergency Contact as soon as possible. Inform the medical facility that you have been injured as a volunteer for the US Forest Service, and provide them with the local USFS emergency contact information and the USFS OWCP phone number. The USFS OWCP will issue a form authorizing treatment to be paid for by USFS. If the injury happens outside of normal work hours, communication with the USFS OWCP should happen as early as possible the next business day.
8. For **ALL** injuries, complete form CA-1 (Report of Injury), *including the witness statement on the form*, and provide it to the appropriate local USFS agency personnel, as soon as possible.
9. Contact your Appalachian Trail Conservancy Regional Office, and report the injury to them also. (*see above*).