To Recognize a Hazard Tree...

...FIRST LOOK UP

THINGS THAT "SHOUT"—"WATCH OUT"...

dead trees

broken branches

material may fall from a tree

signs of disease

trees leaning more than 10°

1. **Dead trees (including those killed by beetles, fire, insects, and disease) are very dangerous.**
2. **Broken hanging branches may fall unexpectedly.**
3. **Material may fall from a tree (including nests) without warning.**
4. **Signs of disease, especially mushrooms or conks (perennial fruiting bodies), are evidence of weakened tree structure.**
5. **Leaning trees at greater than 10° from vertical pose a high potential for failure.**

Hazard Trees **Safe Backcountry Travel in Alaska**

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hot button: hazard trees

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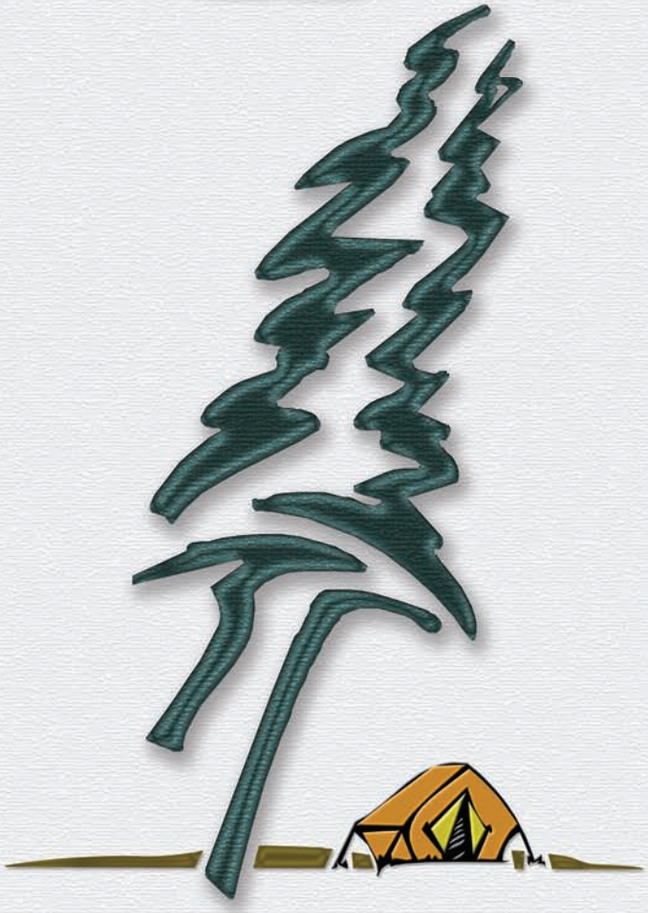
SAFE BACKCOUNTRY TRAVEL
ALASKA

HAZARD TREES



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Hazard Trees in Alaska

Trees are the dominant feature of forested ecosystems. Every tree will ultimately die, decay, and be recycled into the ecosystem to provide nutrients for future forests. While these processes are natural, they can pose a threat to backcountry travelers.

Alaska is known as one of the world's premier destinations for backcountry adventure. But with adventure comes the risk inherent with backcountry travel. This leaflet can help you recognize safe backcountry behavior around trees anywhere in Alaska.

What is a Hazard Tree?

The risk posed by hazard trees is often overlooked.

A hazard tree is defined by:

1. Potential risk of failure
A tree or part of a tree has a defect (or defects) that makes it predisposed to failure.

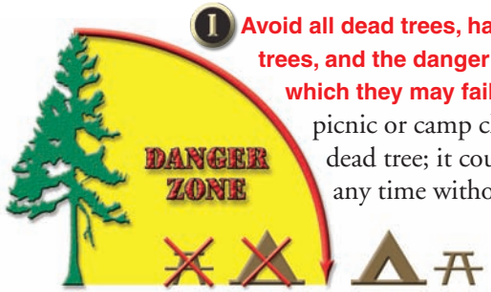
2. Potential for damage
A tree is located so that failure presents a threat to people or property.

What is Your Responsibility?

Land management agencies cannot remove all hazard trees in the vast public lands in Alaska, and typically they only attempt to remove hazard trees in developed areas with high public use. Visitors must be aware of the dangers of hazard trees and take precautions, especially in backcountry settings.

What You Can Do to Reduce Risk

Be observant! Examine trees in your camping or picnic area for evidence of hazard or failure potential. Take action by moving yourself and your belongings to a safe area if you suspect a hazard.



1. **Avoid all dead trees, hazardous trees, and the danger zone in which they may fail.** Never picnic or camp close to a dead tree; it could fall at any time without warning.

2. **Never underestimate the danger posed by small trees.** Dead trees or tree parts 6″ in cross-section have fallen and killed hikers and campers.

3. **Avoid trees with excessive lean (10° or greater) or evidence of defect.** Move yourself and belongings to a safe area.

4. **Be especially cautious of hazard trees in strong winds.** Select a safe place to spend the night.

5. **Do not chop or bang into dead trees as the entire tree or top branches may fall on you.**

What is Your Risk?

Exposure time to hazard trees varies based on the amount of time visitors are in one location.

Minimal

- Hikers spend relatively little time in one place (perhaps one minute).

Moderate

- Picnickers have more exposure (one to several hours).

Maximum

- Campers have the longest exposure. (from many hours to many days). Thus, campers have the highest potential to encounter a hazard tree.

Three Basics for Safety

We hope you enjoy your recreational experience and remember to practice awareness and good judgment around hazard trees in your travels.