



VOLUNTEER TRAINING NOTE 7

In-field Operations personal behaviours

By now you will have realised that SAVEM places high priority on individual and team safety. This means, just as in First Aid training, to assess the situation for **danger** prior to acting: to yourself, the surrounding team, and in the wider context safety implications. (Later, if you pursue SAVEM and Emergency Management training, you will learn about Risk Assessment, Dynamic Risk Assessment and Treatment of risk).

It is too easy to focus on the target – the area to be surveyed, the animal, the photograph record to be captured – and to miss that the ground you about to step onto or move toward has hazards. “Hurry up and wait”. Think before acting.

- **White ash** outside the vehicle door can signify sub-surface root burn out. Beneath the fragile surface ash may be a hot crater, the void where tree roots once were. Serious injury can result from stepping into white ash.
- **Falling burnt trees** are a constant hazard on a fireground in woodland. Highly trained firefighters have been killed and injured by falling timber incidents. The cracking sounds, the smouldering tree trunks, signify the burnt forest area is liable to drop branches or whole trees. This is a hazard to people and vehicles. Some search areas therefore are inaccessible and best surveyed by thermal imaging camera and binoculars.
- Steep ground signifies loose surfaces which can be an access hazard – the burnt out vegetation means the ground has lost its stabilising root mesh and moisture.
- View finders distort viewing and shut out potential hazards to sides and below the scene – don’t move while scanning.

The Team Leader will make a Dynamic Risk Assessment and the team’s actions are thus determined. But just as the Incident Management Team (IMT) all have input into the Incident Action Plan (IAP) [See *later Training Note*], the Team Leader will discuss the presenting situation with the whole Team, and explain the risks. Everyone’s opinions are valued, and effective teamwork is critical.

Before setting out, the Team’s “org chart” will be described, outlining tasks and roles. Everyone will have allotted tasks, and these must be followed, while being mindful of the Team’s actions as a whole. The temptation is for everyone to rush to the animal recovery. But just as important are the people who stay at the vehicle to maintain communications support, prepare materials (cage, drugs, blanket) to deliver to the scene, or to act as scribe for field records, photographs and evidence gathering.

Team work may include survey. It is important to set routes where each individual remains visible to others, communications to the First Response Vehicle is maintained and carriage of team materials is shared.

Personal Protective Equipment, **PPE**, and other essential items (such as water bottles) are mandatory.

The SAVEM Jeep has a Team back pack, water and other materials for teams to share.

Before rushing into action, discuss the sharing of survey and carry tasks, routes, fall back and fail safe positions, and when to stop, re-evaluate and retreat.

There is no ignominy in acting conservatively. The worst outcome is a trapped team, needing external retrieval/rescue; when other agencies already have plenty to do.

