

BACKCOUNTRY HORSEMEN OF CALIFORNIA

Bare Bottom Basics

A COMMON SENSE GUIDE FOR PROPER SANITATION

Imagine— it's late afternoon, high in the backcountry. You gently check the heat beneath your cook pot in drooling anticipation of your evening feast as you begin to relax with a sense of achievement in the extra effort it required to get here. The awe-inspiring vista laid out before you is truly splendid as the sun gently dips behind the magnificent granite peaks. The serenity of the mountain meadow, the beauty of the alpine lake, the majestic grandeur of the stately pines and the errant strand of double-ply toilet tissue wafting delicately in the breeze through your camp! HUH!!?

Sadly, this scenario (or one equally disgusting) is played out all too frequently. In many areas there is no such thing as complete isolation in our backcountry any longer. If you are there, chances are someone else has been there too and how we deal with our waste is of prime concern.

Many folks don't have a clue when it comes to dealing with the most basic of human functions in the backcountry, away from the friendly confines of their personal, porcelain throne! While difficult and uncomfortable for many to discuss, the subject of bowels is one that is common to us all.

Please take the time to learn these Gentle Use Techniques to properly dispose of your waste and toilet items. They are easy to master and will help to make you a better backcountry visitor. Everyone will appreciate the proper disposal of human waste as we enjoy our time in the backcountry.

Whether you use the term Gentle Use, Tread Lightly, Minimum Impact, or Leave No Trace, the principles are all the same.

It is a simple fact that humans regularly consume both food and water and the end product is the production of urine and feces .

Urine attracts wildlife. Animals may defoliate plants because of salt in urine. Therefore, urinating on non-vegetated soils away from any water source is a simple solution.

Solid waste is a bit different. The problem is that fecal waste is the medium for disease. Some of the most common means of transmission are direct contact with feces, contact with a contaminated insect, or ingestion of contaminated water. Improper disposal of human waste can produce significant health hazards. The most common problem being a severe diarrhea with dehydration. This can be very dangerous to you and others.

Proper disposal should ultimately accomplish the following objectives:

Avoid pollution of the water source

Avoid negative response of others finding it

Minimize the possibility of spreading disease

Maximize the rate of feces decomposition

No means of human waste disposal is without problems. No single recommendation is correct for every situation. Use toilets where they have been provided. If these are not available, then you must consider all factors and use other methods: catholes, latrine, or pack it out.

In popular areas one method to consider is the use of catholes. Decomposition is slow, but the prime objective is to decrease contact with others. The main idea behind the use of catholes is to disperse the waste, not concentrate it. Always choose a site out of the way, where others are unlikely to walk, and more than 200 feet from any water source, trails and camps. Dig your hole six to eight inches deep. It should have at least two inches of topsoil. Camouflage the surface when you are finished.

Latrines are another suitable option of human waste disposal. They may be necessary when disposal sites are limited. They are appropriate for large groups in popular areas during long stays. This is especially true if you have inexperienced campers or young children. If you dig a latrine, make it wider than it is deep, but a minimum of twelve inches deep. After each use cover the feces with soil and compress with shovel to help with decomposition. When the waste is four inches from the surface, fill it in.

For group use during an extended stay, modification of the latrine is advisable. Dig a shallow trench or a series of catholes. The advantages are an appropriate site and the feces are not concentrated in one hole. This should only be used in an area which is non-vegetated or has exposed mineral soil.



Now for the toilet paper (T.P.) topic. Toilet paper that is discarded or uncovered can linger. This is disgusting to others and a health hazard. When you use T.P. try to get by with the smallest amount possible. Please consider non-perfumed and non-ink printed products. The best option is to put it in a plastic zip-lock bag and pack it out. One alternative is to burn it later in a hot fire. (A hot fire does sterilize and incinerate). At the bare minimum, bury it deep in the cathole with the feces. Remember in a dry or cold environment the paper lasts a long time. At some point you may run out of that great modern invention! At that time you may have to consider another source such as leaves, grass, rocks, pine cones, sticks or snow.

Feminine hygiene articles are another story. The best solution is to double or triple bag them and carry them out with your trash. You may pack them with crushed aspirin, used tea bag, baking soda to reduce odor. Never bury them in latrines or catholes as animals will dig them up. They are difficult to burn and you need a really hot campfire for complete combustion. Ladies — your cycle may begin one week earlier due to change in altitude, increase in exercise or change in daily routine. Please go prepared! Extra precautions are needed in bear country.

Sometimes it is uncomfortable for people to talk about these subject so we hope this information has been of help and that you will take the time to consider how you have managed your waste in the past and how you will in the future.

Please Be A Gentle User

