



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY GROUP
of the Ventana Chapter
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To: Sierra Club Board of Directors
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Re: Santa Cruz Group of the Ventana Chapter Resolution on Outing COVID-19 Protocols

Dear Director Murphy and Members of the Board,

On behalf of the Santa Cruz Group of the Ventana Chapter Executive Committee, I respectfully submit the following resolution, which was approved by a unanimous vote. An acknowledgement of receipt and a reply are requested. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our concerns.

RESOLUTION: The Santa Cruz Group joins the SF Bay Chapter and Loma Prieta Chapter in opposing elements of the July 6 COVID Protocols imposed on all Local Outings by Sierra Club National Staff which have no bearing on our safe navigation of health challenges presented by the Covid-19 virus. In particular, we oppose the requirement of completed Medical Forms for participants and Safety Management Plans for leaders on local day hikes. These requirements have already led to a significant reduction in the number of outings for the Santa Cruz Group, which in turn is negatively impacting the Group's mission to preserve and protect wild places.

Why We are Appealing Directly to the Board of Directors

Two Local Outings representatives (Lisa Barboza, Outing Chair, ExCom member, and Charles Schafer, CCL rep, ExCom member) are on the Outings Activities Governance Team (OAGT) that was formed last April to review and approve outings policies, with an equity lens. Both volunteer representatives expressed objections to requiring participant medical forms for Day Hikes, and to the requirement that hike leaders submit Safety Management Plans. They also expressed objections to the arbitrary definitions of “back-country” and “front-country,” especially when applied to local day hikes.

The OAGT held numerous meetings with outings leaders across the country, “listening to [leaders’] input.” Our Outings Chair and longtime local day hike leader, Steve Bakaley, attended these meetings. The overwhelming feedback from those present was that the new requirements had virtually nothing to do with preventing the spread of COVID and added very little value to the safe management of local day hikes. We have not seen our concerns being taken seriously. In fact, our comments were dismissed with the comment

that “change is hard,” and that Safety Management Plans are becoming a standard for commercial trips even though the day hikes that local chapters offer do not meet the definition of commercial use (see 43 CFR § 2932.5). In short, we felt that our comments were summarily dismissed. We wish to restate our objections here and, again, request a substantive response.

Objections to the Medical Form

- **Privacy Concerns:** The medical form asks participants for detailed information that is beyond the need to understand a person’s physical fitness for a hike. A person’s age, date of birth, and details about every medication that they are taking, the dosage, the reason, and side effects are asked. Whether or not they have been vaccinated is also asked, although we do not object to that. A person’s age, name, and location can be used for identity theft, which all are aware is an increasingly common crime. In most instances, a person’s pharmaceutical information has no bearing on their ability to complete a hike.

- **Unreliable or Incomplete Information on Medical Forms:** Outing leaders have no way to verify the information provided on these forms. The Loma Prieta Outing Chair has attempted to implement the new “backcountry day hike rules” on her own day hikes. When she did, she found that participants often filled out their name and signature but otherwise, did not complete the form. This suggests that participants are finding the form unduly burdensome. Their reluctance to complete it may also stem from a perception that the new guidelines are unnecessarily invasive of personal privacy.

- **Increased Liability for Outings Leaders and the Club:** The leader now has the responsibility of reviewing a person’s medical information and making a decision with respect to whether or not the person can attend the hike. While our leaders are trained in first aid, this is unreasonable and complicates the liability protection for the leader. Several medical professionals, when shown the form, indicated that even with their level of training they would not be able to make an accurate judgement regarding the physical ability of the participant to complete the hike. To ask our leaders to do this, especially at the trailhead, is not reasonable.

- **Retention and Security of Medical Information:** Our leaders now have the additional burden of safely storing and securing private information on the Medical Form, then destroying it in a secure manner afterwards. Information on the medical form, if not stored carefully, could lead to identity theft. Misuse of the data could, for example, lead to participants being turned down for employment (for being prescribed psychoactive drugs) or for long term loans (for life threatening conditions).

Safety Management Plans and Day Hikes

The additional requirements are an unnecessary burden imposed with inadequate justification. For day hikes, leaders already know local sheriff and medical care locations. Our leaders, in preparation for an outing, will usually pre-scout the location in person, review trail maps, hospital locations, weather conditions, trail conditions, and also will screen participants. We currently train leaders to follow safety management protocols. Thus, asking them to also fill out a form is a superfluous time-wasting hurdle for leaders to clear in order to lead a hike sponsored by the Club.

Other Concerns

The Santa Cruz Group has observed the following with great dismay:

- The Loma Prieta Chapter has lost one of its largest outing sections, the Singleaires who have decided to continue their outings programs outside of the Sierra Club.
- The Ventana Chapter no longer has any outings program. Several of their leaders are conducting their hikes outside of the Sierra Club.
- The Ventana Chapter Senior Saunters, based in Santa Cruz, has lost all but one of its leaders, and she is conducting all of her walks outside of the Sierra Club.

- The entire Utah Chapter outings program is conducting their events totally outside of the Sierra Club.
- The Las Vegas Sierra Club Group of the Toiyabe Chapter has indicated that they will be holding all of their outings outside of the Sierra Club.
- It was difficult to recruit and retain outings leaders under the pre-COVID rules. The new rules make it virtually impossible to do so.

Summary

For the above reasons, the Santa Cruz Group of the Ventana Chapter of the Sierra Club, urge the Board of Directors to review the risk reduction process regarding the Medical Form that was presented to the OAGT. We ask that you consider modifying the July 6 COVID protocols to remove additional burdens on our Outings leaders. We specifically request the removal of the Back-Country Day Hike Medical Form, and the dedicated Safety Management Plan requirements for local day hikes. Outings are often the first in-person contact non-members have with the work the Sierra Club does and many activists have started off by attending an outing. By discouraging leaders from conducting outings the Club closes off this source of new environmental activists.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Micah Posner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Micah" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Posner".

Micah Posner
Executive Committee Chair