

# 911, when cell phones are not an option!

Training and having the proper communications tools are key to having a good outcome





On Wednesday August 7, 2019 an SBBCH member was thrown from her horse while on a pack trip with other BCHI members in the Frog Lake area of the Bolder White Cloud Wilderness. Many of the members on this trip had attended one or more [Wilderness First Aid training](#) opportunities and their training kicked it. It was quickly determined that the BCH member had suffered a major trauma with possible injury to her head, neck, back and pelvic regions. It was obvious that advance medical treatment was called for and air evacuation was her best option.

*Accident → [inReach\[SOS\]](#) → [GEOS Response Center](#) → [Idaho State Comm's](#) → [Life Flight dispatch](#) → Advanced medical help arrives*

#### [inReach Webinar – What Happens When You Trigger an SOS?](#)

You plan to avoid emergencies, but they do occur. In this instructional webinar led by Chip Noble, senior product manager at Garmin, and Emily Thompson, emergency operations manager at GEOS, we discussed what happens when you trigger an SOS. We also covered the SOS functionality on inReach devices, how the IERCC at GEOS coordinates a rescue response and steps you can take to help aid in your rescue.

## Communication is critical on a backcountry trip

### Next generation satellite beacons

One of the members of the trip was carrying a Garmin inReach Mini and activated its SOS function. Soon she was texting the [IERCC center](#) giving them details of the accident. The IERCC in turn contacted the [Idaho State Communication Center](#) who took over the coordination of the case.



### Emergency Locator Beacons with bi-directional texting

The [GEOS International Emergency Response Coordination](#) Center (IERCC) is the only global Search and Rescue Coordination Center for Satellite Emergency Notification Devices (S.E.N.D.). GEOS is proud of the work we have done locating people in distress no matter where they are. This is accomplished through our global partnerships with SEND providers, our technology, and our broad reach to official Search and Rescue (SAR) Agencies around the globe! Our operations team never stops until the mission is done and that is why GEOS has successfully coordinated the rescues of thousands of people in need in over 170 countries.

[Idaho State EMS Communications Center](#) or more commonly known as State COMM, is a 24/7 emergency communications center located in Meridian, Idaho. State COMM is a Component of the Bureau of EMS and Preparedness, Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Welfare.

State COMM provides emergency dispatch and communications for EMS, Idaho Transportation Department, Fish and Game, Hazardous Material incidents, Public Health emergencies, AMBER Alerts and many other situations and scenarios.

Contact: 800-632-8000 / 208-846-7610 / 877-554-3367 [IdahoEMS@dhw.idaho.gov](mailto:IdahoEMS@dhw.idaho.gov)  
Or Channels 1 & 2 on the Squaw Butte Radio's

[Radio Procedures & Etiquette](#)

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Or: As stated by NAIC (The National Association of Insurance Commissioners), the **average** air ambulance **cost** for a 52 miles trip falls somewhere between \$12,000 to \$25,000 per **flight** which can reach as high as \$6 million depending on the medical equipment and maintenance.

[Evac Helicopter](#) [LF1](#) [LF2](#)

## **Know before you go on backcountry trip- some Helicopter details**



### **Question: How high can a helicopter go to pick you up?**

The landing zone was at 8,900 feet and before they landed, they circled for an hour burning off fuel and even with that reduced weight, they needed to leave a crew member on the ground to get the bird back into the air. It sounded to me that 9K seem to be about the maximum before they need to consider a different model. I know on Mount Hood they call in national guard Black hawks, which according to google can fly at 15K and I assume land at around 13?

**Answer:** Most helicopters have a hover ceiling of between 15K-20K. There are many variables that are in play anytime a helicopter does a flight like that. The biggest one tends to be temperature but there are a few more. If that flight was done on a different day with a different crew, they may have been able to lift off with all crew members on board. Here are a few of those variables: Temperature, Crew weight, patient weight, density altitude of the LZ, winds, and fuel on board. Fuel on board is one that can be played with a little bit, but they still have to have enough fuel to reach their destination plus 20 minutes of flight time for reserve.

Since we've been going through the hottest part of the year, I'm guessing it was pretty warm that day, therefore the density altitude was much higher than the pressure altitude of 8900' thus limiting the aircraft performance at that location. Combine that with the other factors and you have the scenario that took place.

You mentioned Blackhawks. Even they have to deal with the same issues but on a much larger scale. A Blackhawk may have had no problem doing this flight, however, the approval from local military channels may very well slow the process even if it is approved. This is a question than can be addressed local military commands. In the area this flight took place there are two Helicopter Air Ambulance (HAA) companies. HAA programs throughout the world use different types of aircraft so there may be a significant difference in the performance of one aircraft over another. This is a question that should be asked of any flight program conducting training with BCH members.

The issue that came up on this flight can happen with almost any helicopter landing to a hot high Landing Zone (LZ). Although there are helicopters out there that would have done this flight without a problem, they are much larger and much more expensive. Cost of an aircraft is always a factor for HAA companies.

At least one of the companies in this area is in the process of getting new aircraft partly because of this type of scenario.

## **Some thoughtful words and learnings**

On Fri, Aug 9, 2019 The SBBCH member wrote:

I can't express how thankful I am for you and all of the ladies! I never felt worried or afraid. All of their first aid training kicked in and they did everything right. If they hadn't, I would have been a lot worse off than I am. Thank you all for saving me from something that could have changed my life forever.

### Lessons Learned:

1. Accidents will happen and you need the knowledge and tools to evaluate the situation and if necessary, contact outside assistance no matter where you are.
2. Get advanced first aid training that will allow you to evaluate the injured and provide appropriate care until they can be evacuated to the trail head or in this case directly to a care facility.
3. Carry multiple ways to communicate, Cell phones, inReach or Spot devices, forest service channeled radios.
4. Know how your communication devices work and what you need to tell a communication center like, 911, State Comm's, IERCC.
5. Stay cool and think each step through, but don't over think, you need to act.
6. Travel with people who have similar training and discuss what should be done if an injury or such event occurs.

I would like to acknowledge all of the Squawbutte BCHI members involved on this pack trip for how they handled things. Way to go ladies! Also, thanks to Rob Adams- SBBCH Projects coordinator and Ron Fergie, SBBCH President for researching information and/or preparing this article.

Sharing this Educational article with all BCHI members and BCHA may help to keep someone else safe out there. Incidents like this, can happen anytime in both the front and back country. It is how we prepare beforehand, both mentally and physically, that can and will make a difference.

Stay safe and hope to see you on the Trail!

Marybeth Conger, BCHI Education Chair