

## Boot Safety

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An essential responsibility of CAP leadership is the health and safety of our cadets. This responsibility starts at the unit level. This circular has been prepared to assist unit commanders with that responsibility.

Every year Civil Air Patrol cadets attending Encampments and other cadet activities have a safe and rewarding experience. Encampment and activity staff members, both Senior Members and Cadets, are committed to providing the best possible experience for the individual cadet.

That said, cadet activities and, in particular, Encampment, are, by design, rigorous and challenging experiences that require cadets to be on their feet much of the day, often marching to and from various activities while wearing their BDU uniform. An alarming increase in the numbers of foot casualties has been evaluated and treated by the Encampment medical staff in recent years. **The primary cause of these injuries is the prevalence of newly purchased, improperly or partially “broken-in” footwear, in particular the combat boots worn with the BDU uniform.**

Foot blisters are caused by friction – the action of foot tissue rubbing for prolonged periods against the interior surfaces of shoes. This becomes more of a problem when moisture laden (i.e., “sweaty”) socks are worn unchanged over a period of days. When a cadet’s feet rub inside their shoes, blisters or “hot spots” will form. This is made worse by improperly fitting footwear and Cadets who wear dirty, unchanged socks, increasing this tendency for blisters to develop. If blisters go unattended for prolonged periods, the skin that forms the blister will break, which results in a raw, exposed and painful area. Such injuries are prone to infection and may or may not render the cadet incapable of marching with his or her flight. Since marching is an essential part of the Encampment experience, cadets are in jeopardy of not completing training requirements if they are unable to march and participate in encampment activities. (Cadets who are unable to complete the mandated 80% of encampment training requirements may be sent home, WITHOUT CREDIT. Complaints, concerns and questions about foot casualties resulting from wearing improperly fitted or improperly broken-in footwear will be referred back to the UNIT COMMANDER, i.e., the person with PRIMARY responsibility for this matter.)

At Encampment, cadets spend more time on their feet in BDU’s than they typically do at most home unit activities. They are often unaccustomed to spending this much time at their unit meetings while wearing boots. If their boots are partially broken in or worse, brand new, and the cadet is not accustomed to long periods wearing boots, the cadet may think their foot wear is sufficient to the task of Encampment. Younger cadets or cadets who are largely sedentary, are especially more susceptible to this problem.

In short, contributing factors that promote and exacerbate these injuries include:

- Improper foot hygiene
- Infrequent changing of socks
- Insufficient numbers of socks taken to Encampment
- Boots partially or insufficiently broken in prior to Encampment
- Improper fitting boots
- Cadets not accustomed to wearing boots for long periods
- Younger, less mature cadets who do not realize they are at risk.

Solutions to this problem include:

- Unit Commanders at all levels having visibility of this problem NOTE: Unit Commanders have the primary responsibility on this issue – activity and encampment

staff see the results of attention to or lack of attention to this problem, but the home Unit Commanders retain primary responsibility for prevention.

- Screen out cadets to not attend Encampment who do not yet have the physical maturity to participate in an event of this type
- Cadets, parents and unit commanders should ensure their cadet's boots fit properly prior to coming to Encampment.
- Cadets should purchase their boots at least two months in advance of Encampment. It is vital that they be purchased in the correct size – too small or too large will almost guarantee foot casualty problems. It should be stressed to all that Encampment is not the place to break in a new pair of shoes. An effective "breaking in method" consists of initial wear of boots, INDOORS, and UNPOLISHED for up to two hours at a time over two days. After checking for final fit, the boots should be returned if the fit is improper (wearing boots indoors during this phase allows for them to be returned). Once properly fitted, boots can be worn for increasingly longer periods, including outdoors, while watching for "hot spots" (referenced further in this circular). The objective is, over a two to three week period, to work up to eight or more COMFORTABLE wear hours per day. Boots can be polished during this phase.
- Wearing two pairs of socks decreases the chances of friction against foot tissue; instead the friction is transferred to the socks. Hikers, Backpackers, Outdoor enthusiasts and the Military have all known the value of this technique for years. An excellent way to accomplish this is through the use of commercially available Polypropylene "Sock Liners," which are available at most sporting goods stores. These are thin, synthetic fabric socks, usually white in color, that are worn inside of the boot socks (next to the skin). They have the added advantage of wicking sweat away from the skin. They can be hand washed daily and dry quickly, usually overnight. It is recommended that at least two pairs of sock liners be brought to Encampment.
- A precursor or warning of a Blister is a sensation known as a "Hot Spot." All Cadets should be briefed that this is a first sign of trouble, and that cadets need to alert their flight staff of this and do something different. Continuing to walk on this in the hope that it will resolve itself is a losing strategy. This may just mean changing their socks, cleaning their feet and resuming normal activity. It may mean using moleskin or some other commercial product that can alter the pressure points. This circumstance calls for knowledge, evaluation and intervention by trained personnel.
- All cadets will be mandated to change their socks twice daily, with mandatory physical inspections of all Cadets' feet by the Flight staff. The use of liberal amounts of foot powder, though often a personal choice, is encouraged as it further reduces friction and helps somewhat with the unpleasant smell. Some brands of foot powder also have antifungal properties, an added plus.
- Encampment Staff, both Cadet and Senior will be trained and refreshed in the content of this document prior to Encampment, in the form of a mandatory safety briefing.

Remember – oversight of cadet health and safety is a LEADERSHIP responsibility. That responsibility starts at the UNIT level.

Unit Commander's influence should play a major role in significantly reducing the instance of foot casualty problems at Encampment.