

BFNO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

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Declaration of Intent

The BFNO wants to encourage its members **to organize their activities in an environmentally friendly manner**. By doing so the BFNO strives to contribute to the needed dialogue between leisure and environmental policy. This dialogue should result in a project on '**recreational joint management**'.

The BFNO is a non-profit professional association of outdoor sports companies

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General

For lack of founded scientific study and documentation on the frequently used concept of 'capacity of use' in the context of nature versus recreation, a more general and pragmatic approach is needed.

The BFNO environmental protection system is based on practical information gathered from:

- ◇ Belgium: the 10 rules of the code of conduct of the BFNO outdoor sports entrepreneur ¹
- ◇ The Netherlands: - the VeBON project "Safety and Green space" ²
- Leisure Foundation, Environmental protection: Guide for the leisure sector ³
- ◇ New Zealand: the "Environmental Care Code" and the "Water Care Code" ⁴
- ◇ United States: the "Leave no trace" project ⁵

The BFNO environmental protection system suggests a number of 'points for special attention' to limit the '**impact**' on the environment caused by outdoor recreation. In this context impact implies **noise and water pollution, soil compactation and eutrofication** (the enrichment with nutrients for example by leaving leftovers). The focus also lies on the so called '**social impact**', behaviour that jeopardises the (nature) experience of others.

Elements like respect for property and respect for the natural environment in general also form part of the term 'social impact'.

¹ www.bfno.be : non-profit professional association of outdoor sports companies in Belgium

² www.vebon.nl : Association of outdoor companies in the Netherlands

³ Kerstens. C. & Rens. P., Milieuzorg: Handboek voor de recreatiesector, Stichting Recreatie, Den Haag, 1995

⁴ www.doc.govt.nz

⁵ www.int.org

Overall the BFNO environmental protection system holds to the premise that environmental protection relates more to attitude and respect for nature and fellow man, than to laws and regulations.

1. General: environmental protection system

In this chapter we describe a number of points for special attention relating to the environmental aspect of the programmes on offer. The BFNO starts from the idea that for an outdoor sports programme to be environmentally friendly, the approach has to **take all points of special attention into consideration**. An organization must also be able to **justify and document** its environmental policy.

The BFNO does not imply the list below to be exhaustive. We like to point out that an 'environmentally friendly' programme takes more than a mere consideration of each of the mentioned points for special attention.

1.1. Documentation legislation environment and recreation

- ◇ Belgium
 - federal laws
 - regional decrees & ordinances (Flanders / the Walloon region, Brussels capital – region)
 - byelaws
 - other
- ◇ Abroad
 - per country / region in which you operate, gather as much relevant documentation as possible

1.2. Participants

Documentation is available for the participants on:

- regulations and/or agreements that are to be fulfilled
- the possible impact of the planned activity and how the participants can contribute to limit the impact
- respect for the (nature) experience of others

1.3. Guidance

- ◇ Information: the guides are regularly updated on the actual state of affairs
- ◇ Training: the guides are encouraged - within reason - to take a training course in environmental issues.

1.4. Environmental problems report

- ◇ Description of the stated problems
- ◇ Follow up of the reported problems

1.5. Environmental 'task group'

- ◇ Appointment of group members
- ◇ Appointment of a person responsible for environmental issues (foresee in time and means)
- ◇ Report

1.6. Miscellaneous

2. Terrain and permanent facilities

The large variety in terrains (forests, fields, beaches, quarries, caves, rivers...) and facilities used impede the draw up of a separate and detailed list of points for special attention for every possible site.

The BFNO, however, lists a number of points for special attention it considers necessary to **be taken into consideration** in order to obtain a **sustainable environmental policy**.

Obviously items can be added. This is indicated with the word 'other'.

2.1. Terrain

If private terrains (or rented terrains) are used, inform and document yourself as much as possible on local regulations, agreements and sensitive issues. You can gather information from the local environmental departments.

- ◇ Lay-out and maintenance
 - Lay-out of (a foot)-path
 - Road marking
 - Drainage (percolation of rain water, erosion)
 - Location of :
 - permanent sports facilities
 - picnic areas
 - campfire pits
 - camp sites
 - sanitary facilities
 - waste containers
 - other
 - Other

2.2. Facilities

If permanent facilities are used (on private or rented terrain), inform and document yourself as much as possible on the use of sustainable (maintenance) materials. You can gather information from the local environmental departments. If permanent facilities are constructed, take account of the local regulations and building permits.

- ◇ Use sustainable materials
- ◇ Be attentive for the 'environmental impact' of certain fixing techniques (for example circular fixtures can be baleful for certain tree species)
- ◇ Be attentive for visual pollution (for example loud colours)
- ◇ Be attentive for noise and light pollution (for example disturbance for neighbours)
- ◇ Provide sanitary facilities (sanitation!)
- ◇ Avoid and remove waste
- ◇ Other

3. Other aspects

The '**capacity of use**' of nature is the principle for organizing outdoor sports activities of the BFNO environmental protection system. The BFNO has no intent to produce a guide on general management. We do, however, want to formulate a few points for special attention that - according to relevance - can be studied in depth by the organisations concerned.

- ◇ Sports equipment
 - Use of sustainable sports equipment and material (for example polyester kayaks versus polypropylene ones)
 - other
- ◇ Rolling stock
 - Exhaust fumes
 - Oil leakage
 - Petrol storage
 - other
- ◇ Buildings
 - isolation
 - heating
 - other
- ◇ Administration
 - paper recycling
 - printers
 - other
- ◇ Other

4. BFNO environmental code of conduct

The environmental code of conduct based on the BFNO code of conduct⁶ on the one hand and on the American 'Leave No Trace' programme⁷ on the other hand. The BFNO environmental code of conduct not only wants to limit the 'impact' on nature by outdoor sports programmes but it also wants to contribute to the participants' awareness relating this matter. It has indeed been adapted to the Belgian/ European situation⁸. Footnotes refer to the ruling legislation in Flanders and/or Belgium.

The idea is that every organisation should implement this eight point programme in every activity and/or outdoor sports programme it organizes. It is a utopia to think this environmental code can avoid all impact on nature. Promoting 'sustainable outdoor sports programs' is nevertheless realistic.

4.1. Planning and preparation

4.1.1. In general

A thorough preparation of the activities limits the impact on the surroundings. Be aware of:

- ◇ The destination
- ◇ The time / saison
- ◇ The number of participants
- ◇ The equipment: a few examples to illustrate
 - putting up tents or tarps prevents the use of branches for making a bivouac
 - taking along sufficiently warm clothing reduces the need to build a fire
 - well secured equipment to a canoe avoids - in the event of capsizing - not only loss of material but it also restricts extensive search actions and bank revetment damages (erosion)⁹
 - Well-maintained and clean material limits the 'accidental' replacement of for example micro-organisms and seeds (caving, canoeing...)
 - always take along a small shovel and a few bin liners
- ◇ Emergency situations: because nature protection is not a priority in emergency situations, a well-considered plan can be a valuable contribution to 'nature protection'.¹⁰

⁶ This code of conduct is in use since the foundation of the BFNO (1989): www.bfno.be

⁷ www.lnt.org

⁸ Hovelynck J., Leave No Trace! Richtlijnen voor niet-vervuilend buitensporten (Guidelines for non – polluting outdoor sports), Tijdschrift voor Lichamelijke Opvoeding, BVLO, nr.2, 2002, pp. 19-23.

⁹ Art. 7 of the Decree by the Walloon Government of 30.06.1994 (BS 09.08.1994) stipulates the mooring places along the Walloon rivers. A lot of insecurity has risen on the validity of several additional decrees by the respective consecutive Walloon Ministers since 1994. Minors (and their guides) however may raft and moor anywhere!

¹⁰ Hovelynck J. (Red), De Rijck L., De Ruytter D., Nold J. & Smulders H. (2001). Naar een kwaliteitssysteem voor programmaveiligheid in de natuursportsector? (Towards a quality system on programme safety in the outdoor sports sector?) Vlaams Tijdschrift voor Sportbeheer, ISB, nr.168, 2002, pp. 27-31.

4.1.2. In practice

- ◇ Be aware of local regulations and sensitive issues
- ◇ Be prepared for extreme weather conditions, dangers and emergency situations
- ◇ Timing: avoid periods of large concentration of crowds (holidays)
- ◇ Limit the number of participants
- ◇ Repack the food: limit waste
- ◇ Use maps and compass instead of all sorts of artificial marking (paint, flags...)

4.2. Hiking and camping on a sustainable surface ¹¹

4.2.1. In general

Soil compression resulting in erosion is a phenomenon that occurs when the same route is used excessively. A possible impact can be avoided or limited by avoiding erosion sensitive terrains.

Coniferous forests are less vulnerable than deciduous forests, dry subsoil is less vulnerable than humid subsoil, and a flat terrain is less vulnerable than a steep slope...¹² Movements are best made on less sensitive surfaces like rock, gravel, dry grass, snow.

These considerations also apply when looking for a camp site. It is, moreover, recommended to look for a camp site with sufficient drainage because it makes digging trenches around the tents unnecessary.

4.2.2. In practice

- ◇ A sustainable surface relates to existing paths and camp sites, rock, gravel, dry grass and (sufficient) snow.
- ◇ Protect the bank revetment: camp at least 60 metres away from lakes and rivers.
- ◇ Good camp sites are found, they are NOT made. Altering the surroundings is not wanted.
- ◇ In crowded areas:
 - Only use existing paths and camp sites
 - Always walk in line, even when it is wet and slippery
- ◇ In humid areas:
 - Spread the use (in space and time) to prevent the formation of new paths and camp sites
 - Avoid areas where 'impact' already starts showing

¹¹ In Belgium camping is regulated according the Law of 30.04.1970 on camping (BS 06.01.1971) and elaborated in the Royal Decree (KB) of 29.10.1971, altered by the (KB) of 26.05.1978 (BS 30.09.1978)

¹² Either in Flanders, the Walloon Region and the Brussels capital – region it is compulsory by decree to stay on the existing paths (Flanders: Forest decree of 13.06.1990 (BS 28.09.1990); Walloon Region : decree of 16.02.1995 (BS 11.05.1995); Brussels capital - region: ordinance of 30.03.1995 (BS 23.06.1995).

4.3. Leave no waste

4.3.1. In general

In principle, waste is always removed. Leaving behind 'biologically decomposable' material (for example leftovers) does not implicity have to be a problem were it not that:

- ◇ Animals often dig it up with the risk of being contaminated
- ◇ The concentration of large quantities of leftovers – certainly nearby water – makes eutrofication of the soil and water most likely.

Waste reduction, avoiding spillage while cooking, eating or dishwashing, are points for special attention. It is furthermore useful to take along several bin liners. All efforts are in vain when a bin liner tears.

Sewage and excrement are in general two kinds of waste that are difficult to be removed.

The best way to remove excrement is to dig a 'toilet hole'. This hole should at least be 20cm deep and located at a minimum distance of 70m away from any water. You should also take account of the natural drainage of the terrain.

Tampons en sanitary towels must be removed. They cannot be buried. Not only are they hardly biodegradable but the chance they are being dug up by animals is most likely.

It is recommended to pour water polluted with detergents and soaps into the 'toilet hole'. Water from washing the dishes that contains a lot of food rests is best strained. Later, the food rests can be taken along with the regular waste (eutrofication). Finally, the use of biodegradable soaps is recommended¹³.

4.3.2. In practice

- ◇ Whatever you take with you; take it back. Check the camp sites and picnic areas for waste and leftovers.
- ◇ Human excrement is buried at a minimum depth of 20cm and at a minimum distance of 70m from water, paths and camp sites
- ◇ Tampons and sanitary towels are always removed from the site
- ◇ The water used for washing oneself and washing dishes is 'filtered' after use and poured into a hole at a minimum distance of 70 m from any natural water. Only use biodegradable soap and detergents.
- ◇ Remember to take along enough bin liners and a small shovel

4.4. Do not take away anything

4.4.1. In general

Any presence causes a degree of disturbance in a strict sense. The disturbance of nature caused by 'accidentally' passers - by is however not selective and consequently in the long term less devastating.¹⁴

Deliberate disturbances like selectively gathering flowers and leafs (composing a herbarium) or disturbances caused by bird and/or nature observation are much more devastating.

Studies show that in Belgium for instance the decrease in numbers of the Long – winged harrier is caused by the frequently disturbance of nests by bird watchers¹⁵.

¹³ Relevant to this topic is the amusing booklet by Meyer Kathleen written in American English, **How to shit in the woods**, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 1989

¹⁴ Make sure, however, not to be the one hundred and first 'occasional passer - by' in a short period.

¹⁵ Kesteloot E., Perturbations caused by human presence, in: I.U.C.N., p. 237-243, 1967

In our region gathering stalagmites and stalactites (caving) is a known form of damaging nature.

The cultural heritage also deserves respect (ruins, dolmen ...).

4.4.2. In practice

- ◇ Show respect for our heritage: looking at historic structures and artefacts is good practice, touching them is not allowed.
- ◇ Leave stones, plants and flowers undisturbed.
- ◇ Do not touch 'abandoned' young animals.
- ◇ Avoid the introduction and/or transport of 'habitat foreign' species for example by washing the caving gear and equipment, by cleaning canoes and kayaks...
- ◇ Do not build any structures. Do not dig any trenches.

4.5. Limit the impact of a (camp) fire

4.5.1. In general

Fire is a special issue. Lighting fire is forbidden in many places¹⁶. Nature friendly camping implies the use of a special camping stove.

In places where lighting a fire is allowed, however, it is advisable to re use existing fire pits. The surrounding of a fire pit is often heavily trodden: take that into consideration regarding the aspect of soil compactation.

Points for special attention are the use of brush wood in the strictly needed amount, the complete combustion of the wood and the spread of the completely cooled down ashes. If possible light a fire on an inorganic surface. Inorganic material (for example sand) is found in riverbeds for example. Make a sand plateau on which you build and light the fire.

Once the fire is fully extinguished the sand including the ashes can be returned to its original spot. If you build the sand plateau on a piece of canvas you can - once the fire is extinguished - remove the sand and ashes without leaving any trace on the surface.

4.5.2. In practice

- ◇ Camp fires can have a permanent impact on nature. Using light weight burners for cooking and candles for illuminating is recommended.
- ◇ Instead of making a new fire pit it is advisable to re use an existing one
- ◇ Limit the use of fire wood to the minimum. Only use brush wood.
- ◇ Make sure the wood is fully combusted. Extinguish the fire complete and spread the ashes.
- ◇ By preference build a fire on a sand plateau

4.6. Respect fauna

4.6.1. In general

What goes for plants and flowers also goes for animals. For animals the focus lies on the one hand on a minimal disturbance of their habitat and on safe keeping their health on the other hand. Contact with human waste (for example faeces and sewage) often causes disease in animals. Artificial forage must also be avoided.

¹⁶ The rural legislation book dating from 7.10.1886 (BS 14.10.1886) and adapted on 08.14.1969 (BS 25.06.1969), imposes fines and prison sentences from 1 up to 15 days for 'lighting a fire in a field at a distance of less than 100m from housing, forests, heather, orchards, hedges, grain, straw, haystacks or places where flax is left out to dry'.

In practice

- ◇ Observe from a distance. Do not approach and/or rout
- ◇ Never feed the animals
- ◇ Protect game and your own food supply by keeping it safe
- ◇ Always hold your pets on a leash; it is even better to leave them at home
- ◇ Take account of the breeding seasons, hibernation...

4.7. Respect for other people active in nature

4.7.1. In general

Due to a growing interest in nature experience and in recreation in a natural environment, more and more conflicts rise between the different 'users'. More than making laws and regulations, mutual respect and understanding are elements that may contribute to a better (nature) experience for all those involved.

Notwithstanding the approach, 'outdoor recreation' and 'nature experience' are social phenomena that will have to be taken into consideration. Mankind has his proper place in nature.

4.7.2. In practice

- ◇ Respect the nature experience of other people.
- ◇ Be polite and give the correct right of way.
- ◇ Picnic and camp not too close to existing paths.
- ◇ Avoid being loud, using flashy colours, forming too large groups...
- ◇ Clear no longer needed signs.
- ◇ Inform - if necessary - other people active in nature of the planned activities.
- ◇ Respect the language, customs and habits of local inhabitants.
- ◇ Respect all property (private and public) and obtain the necessary permissions.

4.8. Guidance and training

4.8.1. In general

Since the BFNO was founded (1989) the focus has lain in the need to work with qualified guides. Practicing sports in nature accompanied by a guide ensures that the participants will live by the BFNO environmental code of conduct. There is a growing need for the guides to be trained in environmental protection issues.

4.8.2. In practice

- ◇ Make sure the guides can follow an adapted training.
- ◇ Continuously guide the participants during the activities.
- ◇ Always brief the participants on the regulations and/or agreements that must be respected.
- ◇ Inform the participants of the possible impact of the organised activities and of ways to minimise this impact
- ◇ Always brief the participants on the respect for (nature) experience of others.