

Choosing exercise in smoke

“I can see and smell the smoke in the air again today. Is it healthy for you to exercise in it or not?”

Whether that voice is the one in your head, or the voice of a family member or friend, the question is an important one.

How do we best decide?

We could spend a significant block of our time researching online advice, wind direction forecasts, current daily air quality test results and how to interpret those test results.

But that act may either burn up our allotted time for such exercise, or possibly miss the window of less smoky or “good” air.

When a running buddy texted me last Saturday about a possible fourteener to run Sunday morning, all of those thoughts went through my mind. Do you recall how bad the air was here in Montrose last Wednesday evening? Many friends, acquaintances and patients reported the onset of headaches, eye irritation, throat irritability, and/or low motivation and mild depression from that smoky episode.

Neither myself nor the other runner was interested in running if the fire smoke was going to be as bad as it had been last Thursday. But what if our local air conditions were to improve by Sunday sunrise?

The smoke from hundreds of fires now in northern California continue drifting our way, even if the Grand Junction and Glenwood Springs fire smoke temporarily gets blown elsewhere.

There is a big difference in air quality between “today, I cannot see Mt. Sneffels” from Montrose to “today, I cannot see Flat Top.” So how else does a person compare degree of risk? The Air Quality Index (AQI) is how. It is a measure of the number of very small particles in a certain volume of air.

These small particles are worth measuring, because they can get breathed so deeply into our lungs that they can inflame lung tissue. This can damage our heart’s ability to pump and our lungs’ abilities to deliver us oxygen for our brain and muscle cells.

Our U.S. government’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) posts this AQI, updated each hour. Just go to airnow.gov. Then type in our ZIP code. The data from the air monitoring station at Montrose Regional Airport will display in a bar graph.



Outdoors

By John T. Unger



In a remote place like this, the cell phone in your pocket may be your only link to help in the event of an emergency. Make sure you know how to use it correctly in the backcountry. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

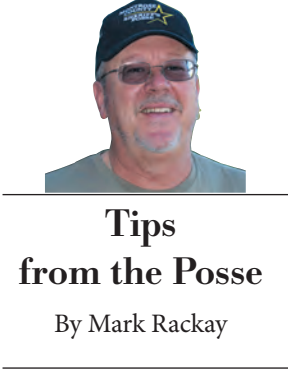
The cell phone in your pocket

About three years ago, I wrote an article about using your cell phone as a survival tool. That article has definitely made it around the block. I have seen it published in papers all across Colorado and thought it was probably time to discuss phones and their usefulness in outdoor emergencies once again.

To start with, I hate cell phones on a personal level. Used to be I could escape work, life, school, kids and reality by disappearing into the woods. Then some guy invented a ball and chain that you have to drag around with you every time you want to get away. I cannot even hide from my wife anymore, all thanks to the cell phone.

On a more serious note, cell phones have changed the face of search and rescue missions. Hours and days have been shaved off response times and because of the GPS in phones, locating lost and injured people has become easier. The quality, battery life and features of the new phones are constantly improving.

When you have an emergency, forget all the



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

#77 and 112 nonsense you have read about. Most of that is simply outdated or an internet rumor. When you need help, call 911. You are sending signals through the air to a tower. The tower may or may not be near your location.

The Federal Communications Commission requires that all wireless carriers must be able to pinpoint your location for the 911 dispatchers, but the rule is coming in phases and there are exceptions. Wireless carriers are required to complete 911 calls, even when the phone is not activated. Any phone that turns on is capable of making a 911 call.

We live in a rural area, meaning there are fewer cell towers. The fewer the towers, the more difficult it is to pinpoint a loca-

tion. This “wider area” means we may only get GPS coordinates for a “general” area.

I don’t turn in my old phones anymore when I upgrade. I keep them charged occasionally and throw one in the glove box of the truck. Since it is no longer activated, all it can be used for is to talk with 911 but it is like having an extra around in an emergency.

Your 911 call often lands in a regional center. A dispatcher in a far away city may answer. To get help immediately, let the dispatcher know immediately where (as close as you can describe when in the woods) you are calling from and the nature of your emergency; police, fire, injury, etc.

Many of us leave the cell phone in the vehicle or even at home because they assume there is no service in the mountains. While it is true that coverage is sketchy at best in many areas, the cell companies are improving and expanding coverage every day.

Start the trip with a fully charged phone. You can top off the charge in the vehicle on your way to

the starting point of your adventure. Then, keep the phone off. Having a phone on and searching for service will drain the battery prematurely and there is no sense wasting power searching for service when you don’t need it.

Try to store the phone close to your body and under layers of clothes during cold weather. Keeping the battery warm also helps to conserve the power for when you need it. Think how your car battery behaves in the cold. When you park the car in a heated garage, the battery retains power better and does not waste all those cold-cranking amps.

Dispatchers have the ability to ping your cell phone for a location. A ping tracks the location of a cell phone by tracking the last signal. A signal is sent out to the phone and then the carrier is able to track the location of the phone through cellular tower triangulation. Again, this works well in a big city because of the number of towers, but not so much when you are up in the mountains.

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Just before the August drought, runner Jacob Torrey is seen jumping a San Juan stream. (John T. Unger/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)



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