

Examples of endangered persons refusing SAR help, delaying their call for help or hiding from help because of fear of a large bill.

First-hand accounts from emergency personnel involved and news reports
Updated November 2022

Climbers attempt self-rescue after dangerous accident

Boulder County, Colorado

Not long after the unprecedented media coverage of a search for missing skiers near Aspen, Colo., a climber accidentally rappelled off the end of their rope, and fractured his pelvis. Fearing the cost of a rescue as recently grossly mis-portrayed in the media, they did not call for help and tried to self-evacuate, resulting in additional injuries. Eventually the climbing partner went for help. Rescuers were exposed to added hazard and difficulty of having to perform the rescue in the middle of the night.

Climber hobbles 3,000' down mountain without rescue

Whatcom County, Washington

A climber from Canada descending Mt Baker had an accident at 9500', fracturing her ankle. Two nearby climbing physicians pronounced it likely fractured. When she asked them about a charge for rescues in the US, they told her it could be perhaps \$10,000. She decided she couldn't afford to be rescued. She took some pain medication, tightened up her plastic boot real tight and slowly hobbled down the mountain. Alerted by another climber with a cell phone, members of Bellingham Mountain Rescue met her at the 6500' level. When told that the rescue team doesn't charge for rescues she collapsed -- admitting to considerable pain. The US Navy used one of its rescue helicopters in this real emergency to train its crew to rescue marines, sailors, soldiers and airmen awaiting rescue in mountains anywhere they operate.

Man miles from shore refuses rescue from lake -

Utah County, Utah

A man and a woman were stranded in the water at night 2-3 miles from shore in Utah Lake. Either their boat sank or a watercraft quit. We found them at around 23:00, and as we pulled along the woman and prepared to help her into the boat, the man, twenty feet away, shouted "DON'T TOUCH HER!" It wasn't until he was assured that we didn't charge for rescue that he allowed us to give them a lift. Both were both coherent; hypothermia would have set in within hours and they likely would not have survived the night.

Victim says "I can't afford help"

Summit County, Colorado

A climber on the south side of Quandary Peak (14,270') got stuck. She called 9-1-1 and the on-call SAR team coordinator made contact with her by cell phone. She

repeatedly refused assistance and said she just "wants to be talked out of this area." This particular area of Quandary is quite dangerous and it was after dark when she called. After going back and forth with her for some time, the SAR coordinator finally asked why she didn't want help and her answer was "I can't afford it". Once he explained to her that there would be no charge she instantly changed her tune and SAR went in and assisted her out.

Snowmobiler first calls family, not 9-1-1, for help

Boise County, Idaho

A stranded snowmobiler called, first, his wife for help. She then called the SAR team. When the wife told her husband that she was talking to SAR, he told her to hang up. This was after recent media coverage of the local ski area charging for "out of area" rescues. After assurances that the SAR team does not charge, they finally asked for help. The marine/backcountry deputy that reported this instance said he is regularly asked by the reporting party if there will be a bill for SAR.

Man becomes hysterical over perceived cost of rescue

Los Angeles County, California

A rescue of a 20-ish man involved a technical rescue of 150'-180' to raise him up to a dam access road. The person was "borderline hysterical" because a county FD helicopter was present and he was afraid of being liable to pay for it. It was not until the rescuer with the person convinced him that there would be NO costs that it was safe to work with the victim on a 40°-70° slope.

Lost runner hides from SAR

Tucson, Arizona

A gentleman went for an evening run with his two dogs in the desert near his house. He had minimal clothing and took only a water bottle. He became lost and hunkered down with the dogs. One of the dogs ran off and was found by searchers, which led them back to the subject, who was now moving - to avoid searchers. The man said he heard searchers during the night; however he was

afraid he would be billed for the search, so he did not respond. The next morning he deliberately tried to avoid searchers while trying to sneak back to his house.

Overdue persons avoid SAR

Douglas County, Colorado

Two adult dirt bike riders were reported overdue after dark. A dirt bike passed a responding SAR team member on the highway, who turned around to follow the bike. The two pulled into the parking lot of a local establishment. Another SAR member was already there, briefing the proprietor. The rider was one of the two overdue persons. Somehow the two riders knew that SAR was en route; I'm guessing that when the riders got to a place with cell phone coverage, one of them called home and was told SAR had been notified. This rider rode back on a non-motorcycle trail in an effort to avoid SAR. He said that he was worried that he would be billed.

Missing woman tells SAR she is not the missing party Mt. Hood National Forest, Oregon

This search occurred right after Oregon passed a law allowing subjects of SAR missions to be billed. "Our assignment was to check beside the trail to the lake. On the way, we heard a radio transmission that a searcher thought he had found Linda. We thought it was over, but a bit later he reported that the woman he saw had never heard of Linda. The search continued and we prepared to head up the trail toward our search area. Before we got on the trail we were asked to hold our position, so we spent about half an hour talking and waiting for something to happen. Then we found out why we were put on hold. A dog handler had a positive find. He had spotted Linda who was trying to hide, then had to chase her down to talk to her. It seems that the first woman was indeed Linda but had denied it when asked. Only later was the dog handler able to get her to admit that we had found our quarry."

Women searches for husband by herself for hours, dangerous weather arrives

Mt. Evans Wilderness, Colorado

A newly married wife dropped off her new husband for some high altitude hiking and he failed to return to be picked up. She said on their way to the mountains, they had joked about which of their bank accounts would pay for "the \$10,000 rescue" if anything happened to him. Instead of calling for help, she drove the road for three-four hours looking for him, worried about the bill she anticipated. She finally called, but the search began late at night and by then the peak was enveloped in clouds. Just driving to the scene was extremely dangerous. Searchers had visibility of a just a few feet and risked walking off the top of 600' cliffs.

Injured paraglider spends hours sliding down mountain to avoid expected SAR bill

Weber County, Utah

A paraglider was trying to land at his home but was caught in a downdraft that drove him into the mountainside. He sustained significant injuries that could become permanent spinal disabilities before reaching a hospital. He was afraid of being charged for SAR and had some friends come up to help him slide down (he was unable to stand). Repeated calls to his cell phone were required before he was willing to believe that SAR would not bill him and that he should allow SAR to come to his assistance. He was approximately 1000' above the nearest houses and 2 miles back, yet he was going to attempt to slide down scree slopes and work his way through thick oak brush in an attempt to avoid a SAR bill. In the process a rescue that could have been done in the daylight was not started until just after sunset adding significant challenge and risk to the rescuers.

Afraid of a bill, family holds back information about missing father

Mt. Evans Wilderness, Colorado

During the early hours of a search for a high-altitude hiker, a SAR mission leader interviewed family members, by telephone, to gather information used to develop the search plan (a standard "subject profile"). During a telephone call back from the missing man's wife, he overheard her teenage son caution his mother to "not tell them about the other time Dad had to be assisted by SAR" because he thought "SAR would categorize his father as 'irresponsible' and he would be billed for the search." Such information is valuable, because it tells the search planners what actions the missing person had taken in a previous emergency. The man was eventually found deceased, having suffered a fatal fall.

Injured man's companion feigns ignorance because of fear of bill

Douglas County, Colorado

SAR was dispatched to a report of an injured bicyclist "somewhere" on the Indian Creek Trail system. A SAR member was sent to a campground to monitor its three trail heads for the trail system. A bicyclist was soon dropped off at the campground and the SAR member, in a uniform shirt and with SAR insignia on his truck, asked the man if he had been bicycling on the trails, explaining that SAR was searching for an injured biker. This person said that yes, he had been with the injured party and helped evacuate him to a house. SAR then tried to get as much info as possible including the address and where the patient was taken; SAR command said over the radio something to the effect that the "fire department, Air Life

and rangers are also out searching." The SAR trail monitor radioed back that the bicyclist, who heard the radio message, said all he knew was that he helped take an unknown, injured rider, to a house with an unknown address nearby. From there an unknown Good Samaritan offered to take the injured rider to an unknown hospital. When SAR team ATVs, using red and blue strobes, arrived the bicyclist stated "I'm not the one who called 911, so I don't want to be charged or get a bill for having search and rescue and everyone else respond." SAR again explained no one would be charged or receive a bill from them. It turned out the bicyclist was actually the injured rider's partner. He eventually supplied the name of the injured rider, the name, address and phone numbers of the person -- who they did know -- who took him to the hospital and the name of the hospital.

Group of hikers delays call for help for hours – King County, Washington

<http://www.kirotv.com/videos/news/lost-hikers-spend-night-on-trail/vcTsK/>

Climbers delay calling for help despite bad weather, insufficient clothing and equipment

Boulder County, Colorado

Three climbers rappelling off the Third Flatiron around sunset in late January, 2013, became stuck when they pulled their rope from one of the anchors and it became stuck while they were still about 200' off the ground.

"After the rope got stuck we attempted to free it ourselves, and then asked for help from nearby climbers. When neither of those solutions worked we discussed calling for help for probably 90 minutes," one said. Rain started to fall, and despite being stuck 200' off the ground and not having appropriate clothing and equipment for the now dark, cold, and rainy conditions, the climbers still delayed in calling for help. Rescuers later learned the stuck climbers were college students who feared that they could not afford to pay for the costs of the rescue. The stuck climbers had assumed that rescuers would charge for services. It is likely that if the climbers had not delayed a call for help, the technical access to the stuck climbers would have been achieved in dry conditions which would have been a safer climb for rescuers and become a faster rescue.

American tourist delays rescue call for fear of fee Vancouver, British Columbia

<http://www.nsnews.com/news/american-tourist-delays-rescue-call-for-fear-of-fee-1.2326288>

An American tourist near Vancouver, British Columbia, delayed calling for help, because "He understood that he could be charged for the call and he was hesitant for anyone to call 911, originally. Eventually he realized he needed the help and he had someone hike out and call." After summiting Crown Mountain, the tourist, who was already exhausted at this point, twisted his back coming down and could not carry on. Hikers passing by offered to call 911 once they reached cell reception again, but the man refused at first.

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Climber texts friends for rescue

Boulder, Colorado

http://www.dailycamera.com/news/boulder/ci_30256024/epic-sure-climber-recounts-night-stuck-boulders-second

A recently-new resident of Boulder became stuck on a ledge on the Second Flatiron, his third climb of the world-renown rock faces abutting the city. His texts to other climbers were unanswered so he spent the night standing on a two-foot ledge. So why didn't he call 911 sooner? "I thought there would be an outrageous fee" to be rescued, he said. But as (Jeremy) Cadwell found out, that's not the case, reported the Boulder Daily Camera.

Dirt biker says he'll walk out with broken arm

Summit County, Colorado

A dirt biker called 911 after hitting a tree on the Tenderfoot trail network in Dillon, Colorado, and said that he probably had a broken arm. He told the dispatcher that he was in a lot of pain, but that he couldn't afford the cost of a rescue so he would walk out on his own. Upon being told that the rescue would not cost anything, he changed his mind and asked for assistance, and the Summit County Rescue Group responded on ATVs and transported him out. Had he tried to walk on his own, especially with his dirt bike, it is possible he would have aggravated his injury or perhaps caused new injuries.