



For all road race marshal specialties, everyone needs to be prepared for what the weather may hold. "The Well Prepared Flagger" was written decades ago, edited a touch over time, and is still applicable in preparing for a race weekend. Use this as a checklist for the weekend and... Let's Go Play With Some Cars!

## The Well Prepared Flagger

Becoming a novice race worker you will need only a few basic items. Some clothing, some training and the desire to participate in a great sport.

The rewards are many, although not always tangible. There is great racing to be witnessed, social activities at each event, good friendships to be made and cherished over the years; and maybe even the thanks of a driver (or two) whose life you may have saved, or at least made easier, during the day. Most of your reward will come from within. The pride of accomplishment and the knowledge that you will gain from the relationships that you build.

Flaggers are responsible for providing their own uniform and personal equipment. Creativity abounds, but safety is the first rule of the day. Preparedness is the second. And with those two rules accomplished then rule number three comes naturally – Have fun.

### WHAT DO I NEED TO BRING

Prepare for working a turn station as you would prepare to attend a picnic. When attending a picnic:

- You should tell someone you plan to attend.
- You must pack certain items for a successful picnic.
- You may have to park far from the picnic site and carry those items.
- You should be prepared for the elements.
- You should consider the possibility that your fellow picnickers may be less prepared.

**CLOTHING:** The turn worker "uniform" is referred to as "Whites." White is recommended because it's easy to spot. For your first event, any 100% cotton light colored long sleeve shirt and pants will do. Long sleeves are not required, but are highly recommended. All of your outerwear should be of 100% cotton. Cotton "breathes" allowing for good ventilation and, more importantly, when exposed to flame, cotton is slow to burn and will not melt against your skin, as a synthetic will. Stay away from the synthetic/cotton combinations, even 40% of a shirt melted to your skin will be painful. All pants should be full length – no shorts, cargo shorts or capris. All pants should be ankle length for safety purposes. Look for white jeans, cotton khaki's and painters pants. A good source for 100% cotton pants is the famous "Duck Painters Pants" which can be found at Home Depot and Lowe's. For shirts, you will also see variations on the turn ranging from long sleeved white t-shirts, short sleeved white t-shirts and button down shirts. Remember the key is to find white, 100% cotton shirts. Button down shirts are a



little harder to find, with the old worn button down collared “Oxford Cloth” shirts being the ticket. The reasoning for long sleeved shirts and t-shirts is simply an added layer of protection for your skin.

Simple enough...until you get to a station and witness the many “shades” of white being worn there. You will find that some of what you’ve been told are strict rules will be personally interpreted. You won’t be kicked off a corner for wearing blue Levi’s, but the safer you play the safer you stay. Remember these guidelines are created to ensure the highest degree of safety for all workers.

**SHOES/BOOTS:** Here is an area where you will see a number of different interpretations, with one thing that will remain the same – whatever shoes or boots you choose, they must be closed toe. Even in the hot weather, no sandals or flip-flops. PERIOD. The recommended footwear on a turn is boots with leather uppers and soles resistant to petroleum products, which provide good gripping on paved surfaces. Some discussions may be started at any gathering of workers by mentioning steel toe boots, or whether tennis shoes are, or are not, correct footwear. High topped boots do provide extra protection from many hazards, such as hot pipes on the side of a Corvette being pushed, or low lying briar bushes on the way to the portable latrines (aka “green rooms”). Let the wearer beware! Dress your feet for the terrain and elements, just as you would the rest of your body.

**WORKER/FLAG MEETING:** For all workers, getting to the worker meeting as early as possible is strongly recommended. Being early allows new people the opportunity to meet some of the others before everyone splits up to their assignments. If there is one consistency from track to track, it is the workers enjoy talking about what they do. Observe other workers, their clothing and gear. Ask questions. A good first question is to find out who the Flag Chief is and introduce yourself as a novice (you WILL be welcomed), and pose more questions. Remember the only stupid questions are the ones you don’t ask and should have asked.

Assignment to turn stations will follow an informal meeting and other announcements. Generally the worker’s meeting schedule allows only 10 to 20 minutes to get to your turn and set up the station. That’s a major reason to be prompt and ready.

**THE CORNERS (TURNS) and THEIR PERSONNEL:** On the turn, you will be working under a Turn Marshall (TM). The TM has all of the responsibilities of a Flag Chief with the geographical limits of their turn station. Also on the turn will be a Communicator who is responsible for the transmission of information between the station and Race Control (aka Base Communications). Two workers will be safely positioned in a manner to man flags, giving them the ability to communicate to the drivers via the flags. Any additional workers will fill the role of response. Members of the crew will rotate, working each position on the turn, with the exception of the TM who holds that position the entire day. You will be buddied up with veterans to observe and to be observed for a period of time. Again, it is important to ask questions. It proves that you are observing and attempting to gain more knowledge. That is always an encouragement to the rest of the team at a turn station.



## **PREPARE A RACE WORKER BUCKET!**

The following items will provide you with a pretty complete worker kit. You won't need all of these things with your early exposure to working races, but you will observe that they can make your life a little easier and comfortable in the future.

**REFEREE TYPE WHISTLE:** They don't make 'em too loud! If they are secured on a lanyard, make sure it has a "breakaway" device, or notice the way that other workers attach their whistles. Anything dangling from you may be a hazard to your personal safety unless it breaks away easily.

**WORKER GLOVES:** Everything you will touch on a racecar can and will most likely be either hot or sharp. Most racing or emergency equipment suppliers offer several types and styles of gloves using a combination of nomex and leather. Bright red or orange increase visibility. Welding gloves are also an option.

**EAR PLUGS:** Racecars can be very LOUD. Many workers learn too late of the long-term effects of exposure to continuous loud noise (they're the ones that say "huh?" a lot).

**EYE PROTECTION:** Sunglasses and/or safety glasses. Wraparound styles provide additional protection to contact lens wearers. No matter what the weather, sand, dust, gravel, etc may be blown around so a pair of safety type glasses is not a bad idea. A good, inexpensive choice is the tinted safety glasses available at building supply and equipment rental centers.

**KNIFE and/or UTILITY TOOLS:** "Be Prepared" with a sharp blade, screwdriver and pliers. They come in handy and the Gerber utility tool is an excellent choice.

**HAT(S):** Temperature, peripheral vision, shading of the eyes and climate are considerations.

**RAIN GEAR:** Keep in mind what you may be required to do under "liquid sunshine" conditions. Avoid red or yellow raingear, which tends to look like flags to drivers.

**SUNSCREEN:** We always hope it's needed! Choose a higher SPF that is waterproof (in case of sweat). Sunscreen is not to be confused with tanning lotions.. "You will learn when you burn."

**LIP BALM:** To keep lips moist and avoid chaffing, even on wet days. Always chose a lip balm with a minimum of 15-30 SPF.

**BANDANNA:** Great neck protection from the sun. And on especially hot days, can be soaked in cold water and tied around your neck to cool off.

**INSECT REPELLENT:** Obvious reasons. Some tracks are notorious for their bugs.

**BASIC MEDICATIONS:** Aspirin, adhesive bandages, bee sting kit, Benadryl, EpiPen, etc.



**GARBAGE BAGS:** It's amazing the things you can do with them... and you can even put trash in them!

**ZIP TIES:** Throw in a few of each size. You may be surprised at the situations where they come in handy.

**RACERS TAPE:** Rated for at least 50 MPH. Quick "duct tape" will do. Another occasionally handy item to have around.

**DRY SOCKS:** You'll thank yourself someday for these.

**PLASTIC SHEETING or SMALL TARP:** Keeping some of your stuff dry on those "rained all day" events.

**SOMETHING TO PUT ALL THIS STUFF IN:** People in the Northwest know we get liquid sunshine from time to time. A sturdy 5-gallon plastic bucket (with lid of course – such as a painters bucket) is rainproof and also makes a handy seat. You'll note peoples buckets varying...as do they decorating styles adorning the sides of the bucket. Duffel bags and backpacks work well for other miscellaneous items that cannot fit in to the bucket.

Again it is important to observe your fellow turn workers and discover what they consider necessities of a turn station.

## **CLOTHING FOR ALL OCCASIONS**

### **HOT WEATHER:**

Be prepared for hot weather is more than just a matter of comfort. It can save you from heat exhaustion or worse.

Wear a hat! It provides head and neck protection from sunburn and shields the eyes. While mesh caps are cooler, be aware you may sunburn through them. Full brims offer more protection than baseball caps, but interfere with headsets.

Long sleeves are still highly recommended.

A bandanna can be dampened and worn around the neck to provide some cooling, or draped from the rear of your hat to provide additional sun protection. There are specialized neck wraps that can be chilled to provide a welcome rapid cool off.

A small spritzer bottle filled with water and tucked in the cooler can be used for a refreshing facial misting. Some have recommended adding a tiny bit of rubbing alcohol to the mixture to promote evaporation, but this may also wash off sunscreen protection.

**SUNSCREEN!** Bring a minimum of 15-30 SPF sunblock and lip balm and apply liberally and often.



The most important item in hot weather is to **DRINK LOTS OF THE RIGHT FLUID**. A worker's biggest enemy is dehydration. Coffee and soft drinks are not the best choices, as the caffeine in them tends to increase your fluid output. Water or sports drinks are much better. Don't wait until you feel thirsty – it may be too late. Start drinking first thing in the morning and regularly throughout the day. A good guide is if you're not going to the bathroom about every 2 hours, you're not drinking enough. Familiarize yourself with the symptoms of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Observe yourself and fellow workers for any signs of heat problems and take action promptly if symptoms appear.

#### **RAIN:**

Making sure you have rain gear in your race bag is the best way to prevent rain. Leaving it behind ensures that it will pour liquid sunshine at the earliest opportunity. White or clear is the preferred color for rain gear as it maintains worker visibility, but other light colors are acceptable. Blue is not suggested, but avoid red and yellow at all costs. Since corner working tends to be hard on rain gear, there are 2 approaches. The first approach is to buy a couple of the cheapest white or clear plastic rain suits or ponchos that you can find, consider them disposable items and plan on replacing them after each wet race. The down side to this approach is plain plastic traps body heat and can cause you to sweat profusely, quite often rendering you as wet as a light shower would. The other approach is to spend some bucks and get something breathable and more durable that will be more comfortable. Gore-Tex is great, but is rather pricey. Camping or outdoor recreation stores usually have a good selection. Check with the flag chief, that person may have sources for reasonably priced gear. Consider rain when selecting footwear. Spending a day with wet feet can be quite miserable. Some people have even packed a pair of rubbers in their bag (NO, not that kind you pervert!).

#### **COLD WEATHER:**

Cold weather is not something we have to deal with very often, but shivering bodies and blue lips tend to greatly reduce the fun quotient. Mobility is the key factor in selecting cold weather gear. Ensure you retain the mobility that may be required of you at your station. Don't bundle up so you look (or move) like the Michelin Tire Man.

*Fact: The majority of your body heat is lost above your neck!* Put away the mesh caps! For colder weather, a full-bodied cotton baseball cap will provide the top of the head with heat retention...so consider one with ear flaps. Cotton stocking caps work well providing warmth to both ears and head, but offer no shade for the eyes when the sun is out. Ski headbands can be worn with a cap, providing both ear warmth and a means to keep your hat on. If you are considering a ski mask, a much better head/facial covering combination is a race head sock (aka balaclava). If you're so inclined and cost is not an issue, buy if new...or beg off an old one off a racing buddy. Hooded outerwear gives protection to the back of the neck and the head, but greatly restricts side to side head mobility and vision. Hoods can be worn between sessions, but a hood worn (whether up or down) during a race session presents a "body hook" hazard. When working, remove the hood or tuck it inside the back of the cost.



Keep your feet warm and dry by considering wearing thinner thermal socks and/or 100% cotton in multiple layers. Boots should be well fitting and allow for multiple layers of socks while still providing good, comfortable fit. Weather conditioned leather outers work well.

Outer shell for colder weather often means finding garments that are hard to fit within the recommended requirements for corner working. Your outer shell should be warm, loose fitting enough to allow for “breathing” and layering beneath, fire protective, and a color suitable for ease of driver recognition without being confused as a flag. Layering thermal underwear in combination with 100% cotton undershirts and shirts, covered by a 100% cotton white workers coat (normally too large), should be adequate in providing warmth and protection. By the way, while nomex or proban underwear is good at fire protection, it’s not very warm.

Skin and lip protection is usually used during the warmer times of the year, but the effects of the cold and wind is very hard on the skin. Cold weather sunburns has to be considered, as most of us have been wintering indoors, subjected to only the ultraviolet rays given off by the TV reruns of last years racing. A good sunblock offers protection against sunburn and provides a moisturizer for the drying effects of the breezes. Both as sunblock and a lip balm are recommended staples for hot and cold weather.

Wear gloves! That sounds simple, especially since corner workers are supposed to wear them anyway. But cooler temperatures sometimes make innovators of us, with good reason. The roomy fit of welding gloves make them good candidates for being worn over a pair of warmer gloved... layering in other words. Also, consider purchasing hand and feet warmers, such as Little Hotties or HeatMax or Hot Hands (you get the idea). Warmers are great to put inside the boots and gloves when you’re out all day in the elements.

At the turn station, keep active and change positions frequently. Standing in one spot or position for a long period of time should be avoided. Drink plenty of fluid – water is still a great fluid, even in cold weather.

Coffee and drinks high in caffeine content are stimulating, but may increase fluid output. Hot drinks may produce the feeling of being colder than before drinking them, once the body has reduced the initial warmth of them, due to a “super cooling” effect. Familiarize yourself with the adverse effects of over exposure to the cold. Observe yourself and your fellow workers for those effects and take action promptly if symptoms appear.