



VOLunteers in ACTION: Raising Awareness For Volunteer Fire Fighters”

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Good Practice from Ovar Forma

1. Title of the activity or event

“Forest Walk” – (“Caminhada pela Floresta”)

2. Objectives/aims expected by this action

- a) Create awareness for the need to preserve nature and the environment;
- b) Alert to the importance of preventing forest fires;
- c) Raise awareness for the negative impacts on natural resources;
- d) Recognize and value the environmental heritage;
- e) Encourage good practices;
- f) Promote respect for nature and forest protection;
- g) Foster good practices that reduce the risk of forest fires;
- h) Transmit to the population a feeling of responsibility, security and trust in the security forces;
- i) Encourage the participation of the population in forest walks.

3. Target group (or groups)

Local population from the 18th districts in Portugal.

4. Description of the activity (methods, materials, human and physical resources, timing, etc.)

This initiative aims to mark the International Day of Forests by promoting a forest walk in the 18th districts of Portugal. The event is organized and promoted by GNR (Republican National Guard) and its environmental section – SEPNA (Protection of Nature and Environment Service), counting with the support of the municipality councils and its civil protection agents. In some cases, the local companies and industries associate themselves with the event by sponsoring it (this can include, for instance, personalized t-shirts related to the forest walk).

This is a one-morning time event, with a maximum length of 15km's and 4-hour duration, and in some districts, more than one trailer option is provided, so the participant can choose which trail he/she wants to do. This is even more important when children are also taking part (recommended: 4 km's).

In some districts, during the event, a tree is planted as a symbolic gesture to make people aware of the importance of protecting and preserving our forests.

Apart from the transversal and national rules for the event, each GNR and SEPNA has the possibility to be creative in the organization of the Forest Walk in their own district. In some cases, for instance, an optional get-together lunch is made available by the promoter for the participants.

5. Steps for the implementation (operative steps to implement the good practice)

1. It is under GNR and SEPNA's responsibility to identify the best trailers for the forest walk. Some important issues are considered such as the incline and steep conditions. Along the way, it is also chosen a resting place so people can stop for a bit, have a drink and/or eating snacks. These are generally not provided by the organizing committee, so each participant needs to bring along their own consumables.
2. The event is publicly announced through local media channels (newspapers, radio, etc.). Internet is used as a powerful tool for dissemination. Personal invitations are also sent to mayors, public service managers/heads, civil protection agents, producers' associations and forest owners in order to give a greater expression to the message that the event aims to convey.

3. Registration procedures vary depending on the districts – some have implemented a Google Form registration method (e.g. Guarda) whereas others used telephone calls (e.g. Valença). For safety reasons, the maximum number of participants per district was fixed at 300.
4. The promoter identifies the necessary material and human resources accordingly to the number of registered participants.
5. People gather on the previously identified meeting point, from where the forest walk will start.
6. The participants are always accompanied by the GNR and SEPNA in order to guarantee that no one is left behind or gets lost.

6. Impact of the good practice and evaluation of the results achieved

SEPNA's official numbers from 2016 reveal that all over the country a total of 2600 people participated in the "Forest Walk". 28 initiatives were organized, 369 agents and 88 police cars were involved, corresponding to a total of 132 hours dedicated to the event.

In 2020 and 2021 the event was/is cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

7. Conclusions

The "Forest Walk" is a very popular initiative that is nationally organized in March each year to mark the International Day of Forest. The global aim is to recall people of the importance of protecting the natural environment and adopting good practices that help preventing forest fires. With this, people are encouraged to participate in forest walks, which is also highly healthy beneficial and can also have a deterrent effect. The local communities get involved and recognize the value of our environmental heritage and the need to protect it as well as feel closer to the security forces, increasing their sense of security and trust in GNR and SEPNA.