

Search and rescues often come with a bill

By Jimmy Tobias, *Outside*

In 2012, 59-year-old Ed Bacon attempted a solo hike through New Hampshire's White Mountains. While in the backcountry, on a windy, rain-drenched day, he tried to jump onto a rocky ledge, dislocated his artificial hip and found himself incapacitated in the wilderness. He was stuck, so he did what you're supposed to do: he called for help.

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, which runs search and rescue in the state, mobilized fast. It sent 50 people, mostly volunteers, to his aid. After a nighttime operation in rough weather, they delivered him to safety. He was unharmed, save for an injured hip and a bad scare.

That's where you might expect the story to end, but not in Bacon's case. Shortly after his ordeal, he received a bill for more than \$9,300. The state said he owed big money for the mission that saved him.

New Hampshire is not the only state where hikers, climbers, and other outdoor enthusiasts can be hit with hefty bills for search and rescue (SAR) services that save their lives. At least six other states have controversial laws that enable officials to recover SAR costs. Some of those laws are broad, and just about anybody can be forced to pay. Others are narrow, and you've got to do something reckless to get a bill. In any case, many SAR providers across the U.S. believe the prospect of forcing individuals to pay out of pocket for help in times of crisis further threatens the lives of the people in danger.

Other states can charge for search and rescue under limited conditions. Colorado and Vermont can bill people who travel

out of bounds at ski areas, and Idaho can charge hikers who venture into areas closed to the public. Sheriffs in California, meanwhile, can charge an individual's county of residence for a mission that costs more than \$100.

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