

Scout Warns His Neighbors: Turn Around Don't Drown

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Nearly half of all flood fatalities occur when people drive into floodwaters. They cannot tell how deep the water is or the condition of the road under the water. Most vehicles can be swept away by less than two feet of water. This photo was taken in the Town of Campbell, New York, where Boy Scout Michael Hitchcock undertook a project to warn motorists about the risk of driving on flooded roads. (Photo credit: Noel Sylvester)

How can 30 gallons of coffee save lives? It took a lot of hard work, but Boy Scout Michael Hitchcock used the money he raised at rest area coffee breaks to warn the public about the dangers of driving through flooded roads. For his Eagle Scout community project, Mike made 39 “Turn Around Don't Drown” signs that he presented to the Town of Campbell and Steuben County, NY.

This project resulted in:

- ☛ 2 aluminum flip signs that fold down between floods and will be permanently located at repetitive flooding sites in his home town,
- ☛ 2 portable aluminum signs mounted on wheel rim bases that can be moved as needed,
- ☛ 35 temporary vinyl signs that can be easily deployed where they are needed during a flood and rolled up for storage when not in use, and
- ☛ 6 stands for rollup signs.

All of the signs provide the same warning: **FLOODING AHEAD TURN AROUND DON'T DROWN**. They meet the Federal Highway Administration criteria to be official Incident Road Signs. The NOAA National Weather Service developed this design for their “Turn Around, Don't Drown” campaign, warning people of the hazards of walking or driving a vehicle through floodwaters.

What did it take to make this project happen?

- ☛ Carrying the sign project from initial idea to final design, Mike learned a bit about how government works, meeting with: Town Code Enforcement Officer, County Engineer, County Emergency Services Director, Town Highway Superintendent, State Department of Transportation, and a City Sign Shop.
- ☛ Mike raised \$3,018.15 in donations by conducting two coffee breaks at an Interstate rest area. In addition to soliciting food and supplies from local businesses, Mike had to obtain permission from both the State Department of Transportation and State Department of Health. At the coffee breaks, Mike distributed Turn Around Don't Drown fliers, talked to people about flood hazards, and gave away refreshments – 30 gallons of coffee, 600 hot dogs, 15 gallons of lemonade, and many pounds of popcorn.

- ⤴ Additional donations were raised by giving away donuts, bagged snacks, and baked goods at a church event and a community yard sale. A Turn Around Don't Drown jingle played in the background until Mike received a donation conditional on turning off the "music."
- ⤴ Additional funds were donated by local flood warning volunteers and Environmental Emergency Services (which operates the Chemung Basin Flood Warning Service).
- ⤴ Mike and fellow scouts learned how to install rivets and spent numerous hours assembling signs and sign stands.
- ⤴ The total project value (excluding volunteer labor) was \$4,050.59, all of which was donated.
- ⤴ Once the signs were complete, Mike formally presented ten signs and stands to the Campbell Town Board and 29 rollup signs to the Steuben County Legislature.
- ⤴ In addition, this quiet 16-year-old submitted to several interviews, resulting in local newspaper and television coverage.

These Turn Around Don't Drown signs will no doubt save lives. The National Weather Service honored Mike Hitchcock with a Special Services Award for the first project of its type in New York State or the Susquehanna Basin. In accepting the signs on behalf of the county, Francis Gehl, Chair of the Steuben County Legislature said, "This is an Eagle Scout Project that will last forever."

Nice work Mike – Thank you!



asked why he chose flood signs for his Eagle Scout project, Mike Hitchcock explained, "Water can pick up a car and actually take it out to the river. And you can pretty much get trapped in your car." (Photo credit: Janet Thigpen)

NEVER walk or drive on flooded roads. STOP! Turn Around Don't Drown.

- o The roadbed may be washed out.
- o You can lose control of your vehicle in only a few inches of water.
- o Your car may float – vehicles can be swept away by less than 2 feet of water.
- o As little as 6 inches of swiftly moving water can knock you off your feet.
- o Do not drive or walk around a barricade. Turn around and go another way!

Eighty percent of flood deaths occur when people drive or walk into floodwater.