# How to ‘Be Prepared’ in 2023

I was a Boy Scout. Since 1907 the motto of the global Scouting program has been, "Be Prepared". Yet the 2023 Scout Jamboree was woefully unprepared for a myriad of severe weather-related issues that befell it in South Korea in early August.

First, prior to the opening of the Jamboree, torrential monsoon rains caused widespread flooding, landslides and significant damage in South Korea. 43,000 scouts from 158 countries, mostly teenagers, arrived at the jamboree campsite built on land recently reclaimed from the sea. Long before the event's start, critics raised concerns about bringing that many young people to a vast, treeless area lacking protection from the summer heat. The Jamboree is a camping / getting back to nature event and the Scouts sleep in tents – no air conditioning.

Years of planning went into this massive affair that takes place every four years. The situation at the Jamboree was front-page news in the South Korean press. Following the flooding, a punishing heat wave caused thousands of scouts to leave the coastal campsite midway through the Jamboree. Hundreds of participants have been treated for heat-related ailments as South Korea grapples with one of its hottest summers ever.1

South Korea raised its hot weather warning to the highest level for the first time in four years, with temperatures around the country hovering between 35 and 38 degrees Celsius (95 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit). Wet bulb, or ‘feels like’ temperatures were much higher due to high humidity. At least 19 people have died in South Korea this summer from heat-related illnesses.2

Finally, the World Scout Jamboree ended early due to an approaching typhoon. Organizers called for the government to "urgently" help with efforts to send tens of thousands of children back to their homes around the world before the typhoon made landfall.

"The World Organization of the Scout Movement received confirmation this morning from the Government of the Republic of Korea that due to the expected impact of Typhoon Khanun, an early departure will be planned for all participants," the scout governing body said in a statement.3

### How Do We Prepare for a Barrage of Unprecedented Events?

Being prepared in 2023 is a lot more complicated than it was when I was a Scout. Since the Jamboree there has been the deadliest wildfire in US history on the Hawaiian island of Maui. A wildfire that local officials seem to have been unprepared for.

Why? Because our climate crisis has changed our natural world. It no longer behaves in the manner we are used to. Our infrastructures weren’t designed for the rapidly changing climate we find ourselves in. As I write this, there’s a hurricane headed for the desert southwest. That has never happened before. Nobody living in the desert has flood insurance.

In a New York Times article, a reporter interviewed Greg Tormo, a real estate agent in Palm Springs, as he was filling bags from a sand pile in front of a fire station. Although Mr. Tormo was grateful for his sandbags, he was worried how effective they would be in protecting his home from flooding.

“I think everyone is trying to do the right thing to prepare, but no one really knows what the right thing is,” he said.

Carl Armstrong, who has lived in Palm Springs since 1989, was in an altogether different state of mind. As he filled sandbags, he summed up his feelings about the coming storm in one word: “Bewildered.”4

I remember earning merit badges as a scout. I learned how to tie knots, how to sail a small boat, how to select a camp site… skills like those. So I researched whether there are now merit badges for severe weather events and climate science.

There are. There is a [Weather Merit Badge](https://www.scouting.org/merit-badges/weather/), a [Sustainability Merit Badge](https://www.scouting.org/merit-badges/sustainability/) and an [Environmental Science Merit Badge](https://www.scouting.org/merit-badges/environmental-science/). All of these are useful. They are a good start, but they aren’t enough.

Climate Literacy is a fundamental skill like reading, writing and arithmetic that should be mastered by every human on Spaceship Earth. It should be taught in every classroom in every school around the world starting with pre-K. Children should be taught to respect and protect nature, and to understand that everything is interconnected… that nature (including climate) touches everything. It’s one vast, incredibly complex system that we are a part of.

Yet even that is not enough. In unprecedented times, we all need to be vigilant, highly adaptable and flexible… able to modify our behaviors as the weather and the environment rapidly change around us. We have to mitigate and adapt at the same time. We have to constantly anticipate and prepare to stay out of harm's way (from flash floods, fires, extreme heat, storm surge and more).

My advice to the Scouts re their next Jamboree – carefully select the venue. Maybe focus on the southern hemisphere because August is their mid-winter. Or consider changing the timing. Kids are out of school during the summer months. Maybe that needs to change. We need to get creative.

1 <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/south-korea-presses-world-scout-jamboree-heat-forces-102040834>

2 <https://www.voanews.com/a/south-korean-jamboree-to-end-early-over-typhoon-warning/7214370.html>

3 <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/09/world/asia/typhoon-khanun-weather-south-korea.html>

4 <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/19/us/hurrricane-hilary-palm-springs.html>