

## WHAT IS A MERIT BADGE?

A Scout earns a merit badge when he completes a series of required activities that relate to a certain topic, as approved by an adult Merit Badge Counselor who has been certified by the local BSA council.

Boy Scouts earn merit badges for many reasons: for fun, to learn new skills, and to try something they have never done before. Some merit badges are required for rank advancement. These are called the "Eagle Required" badges. They must all be earned in order to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout, and a Scout must earn a certain number of Eagle required badges as he progresses through the higher ranks after First Class.

## HOW DO YOU EARN MERIT BADGES?

In general, there are three ways:

- 1) At Boy Scout summer camp.
- 2) With a group – as when a merit badge counselor from the troop offers the opportunity to work on a merit badge together as a group.
- 3) With an individual merit badge counselor who may or may not be associated with the troop (preferably with a buddy).

At Troop 356, we recommend that scouts pursue all these methods of earning badges. It is important to make use of merit badge counselors that the scout does not yet know, as it is a good learning and growing experience to develop a working relationship with new adults. Also, for the same reasons and to avoid the possibility or perception of conflict of interest,

Troop 7356 discourages Scouts from working with a parent or immediate relative as a sole merit badge counselor.

## **A message to Scouts...**

Each Scout's merit badge path is unique. Even though the "Eagle-required" badges are common to all Scouts working towards and/or achieving the rank of Eagle, the "elective" badges are up to the individual. Perhaps more importantly, the experience of working with an adult Counselor is also an experience that is unique for each "sash".

Just as it is a good idea for the boy to work on badges in areas that are of interest to him and/or in areas that he would like to explore a possible interest, it is ALSO a good idea for the Scout to work with a variety of counselors so that he learns how to interact with adults having different skills and styles of communication.

For each merit badge experiences as a youth, you will find that you will learn about new topics by completing the merit badge work and find out that some of these topics will become interesting to you as a result.

In a similar way, you will learn a lot from working with different counselors. Each counselor represents a new opportunity for learning and for a potential relationship on which to build.

Troop 356 encourages its Scout members to follow this practice. We find that those boys who work on badges outside their comfort zone and with adults outside their immediate community benefit more fully from the program than do those boys who tackle the badge through friends and family members

## BSA TROOP 356

## WORKING ON MERIT BADGES

and

## WHAT IS A BLUE CARD?

The form is titled "APPLICATION FOR MERIT BADGE" and includes the following sections:

- Information for Applicant:** Contains instructions such as "A merit badge application can be approved only by a registered merit badge counselor" and "You must wear a buddy with you (buddy system) at each meeting with the merit badge counselor".
- Information for Counselor:** Contains instructions such as "Merit badge applications must be signed in advance by the applicant's unit leader" and "The Scout must have his buddy (buddy system) in attendance at all instructional sessions".
- APPLICANT'S RECORD:** Includes fields for Name, Address, City, and a section for "is registered" with checkboxes for Boy Scout, Varsity Scout, and Explorer.
- COUNSELOR'S RECORD:** Includes fields for Name, Applicant, and Unit number, along with checkboxes for Troop, Team, and Pack.
- Signature and Date:** Fields for the applicant's and counselor's signatures and dates.
- Barcode:** A barcode with the number 7 30176 34124 8.
- Notes:** A note at the bottom states "NOTE TO BOY SCOUT, VARSITY SCOUT, OR EXPLORER: Retain this copy for your permanent records." and another note suggests the counselor keep the record for at least 1 year.

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## **WHAT IS A BLUE CARD?**

For some Scouts, a Blue Card is about 50 tiny pieces of blue paper found crumbled up in the filter of the family clothes dryer. While many of these Scouts will tell you that the stuff you find in the clothes dryer filter is great for starting a campfire, it is not much good for anything else.

No matter its other uses, the Blue Card is the official record for earning a merit badge.

Blue Cards become **really** important when you apply for the rank of Eagle Scout. One of the requirements for advancement to Eagle is to produce all the Blue Cards for your merit badges. If your blue cards are nowhere to be found, now is the time to get organized!

## **RULES OF THE ROAD FOR MERIT BADGES AND BLUE CARDS**

### **1. Get a Blue Card**

When you decide to earn a merit badge, ask The Scoutmaster for a Blue Card. **This is the first step before you begin anything else!**

Every Blue Card has three sections with 2 sides. Fill out the information on the section "Application For Merit Badge."

Have the Scoutmaster sign where it says, "Signature of Unit Leader."

### **2. Find a Merit Badge Counselor**

Every merit badge has a counselor to help you earn the badge you need. The Scoutmaster will have the list of all the Merit Badge Counselors. If you are working on the badge at home and not through a group or at summer camp, ask one of them to give you a list of counselors to contact, to find one

who can work with you and whose schedule fits yours. **YOU** must call the counselor, not your parents (they're not working on the badge – you are!).

Call the merit badge counselor **before** you start the merit badge. You cannot call them and tell them that you have completed the requirements if they have not already agreed to work with you on the merit badge; the counselor is responsible for working with you to be sure that you have completed the requirements, and must know that you are ready to start first.

After you have found a counselor, get the merit badge book or check out the requirements on the web at [www.meritbadge.org](http://www.meritbadge.org)

Bring your Blue Card (signed by the Scoutmaster) when you see your Merit Badge Counselor. ***It is good to work on a badge with a buddy. When you meet with the counselor, have your buddy attend with you. If a buddy can't go, have a parent attend with you but not sit in on the session (this is BSA policy).***

### **3. Be Organized**

As you work on a merit badge, keep your Blue Card in a safe place.

A great way to be organized is to use a loose-leaf binder with plastic sheet holders (baseball card holders) to hold the blue cards.

### **4. Now You're Done (well, almost)**

When you complete the requirements for a merit badge, your merit badge counselor will sign the Blue Card. Make sure that you have them sign in two places on the Blue Card, where it says, "Signature of Counselor." The

merit badge counselor will keep their section of the card and give you the other two sections.

You should have the "Applicant's Record" section and "Application for Merit Badge" section. Have one of the Scoutmasters sign the "Applicant's Record" portion and initial the "Application for Merit Badge" section.

### **5. Hand in the Blue Card**

Hand in the "Application for Merit Badge" section to the Troop Advancement Chairperson. Keep the "Applicant's Record" section of the blue card (more about this below).

### **6. Receive Your Merit Badge**

The Advancement Chairperson will keep the "Application for Merit Badge" section.

At the Court of Honor you will receive the merit badge stapled to a white card. The white card doesn't matter. It just makes it easier for us to hand out the merit badges at the Court of Honor.

### **7. Put Your Blue Card in a Safe Place**

***The "Applicant's Record" is the most important piece.*** Remember the binder? The one with the plastic sheets? This is where you should keep your blue cards.

When you need to prove that you completed a merit badge, the only thing that counts is the **BLUE CARD!** We can always buy a new merit badge if it is lost, but it is much more difficult to replace a Blue Card. So take this advice: **DON'T LOSE YOUR BLUE CARDS!** Oh, and don't keep them somewhere that might result in them ending up in the dryer . . . those kind of blue cards are called "lint."