

E **EMERGENCY** **ssentials**

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Preparing For **Power Outages**

BY JIM COBB

As the weather starts to warm, we typically see an increase in stormy weather. Along with the thunder and lightning comes the threat of losing power. While an argument can be made that our society has become entirely too dependent upon electricity, few would argue that the sudden, unexpected loss of power can sometimes be more than merely inconvenient. Fortunately, most power outages last only a few hours at most. However, that's not always the case. Just as an example, a friend of mine lost power during a bad storm a few years ago and it took over two full weeks for it to be restored.

Lighting

One of the first things you'll want to reach for when the power goes out is a flashlight. Sure, lighting might not be a big issue during the day but Mother Nature tends to not worry all that much about making things convenient for us. What I recommend is to stash one flashlight in every room of your home. These need not all be expensive, high-end lights either. For the children's bedrooms, I'd encourage you to purchase dynamo (crank powered) flashlights. Let's face it, kids are kids and they will play with any flashlights you put in their rooms. Using the dynamo ones, you don't risk finding dead batteries just when you need the light the most.

In addition to flashlights, a headlamp or two may prove to be rather useful. They've come a long way over the years. The modern ones are LED and very lightweight and comfortable to wear. Headlamps come in very handy when washing dishes or performing other chores.

I also like to have a stash of candles on hand. They don't require batteries and are incredibly cheap. You can often find great deals on them during holiday clearance sales. Does it really matter to anyone if the candle you're burning in July has a picture of Santa on it? As with any open flame, though, use caution and common sense.

Of course, lanterns and oil lamps are beneficial, too, provided you have fuel for them as well as extra wicks, just in case. Personally, I'm rather fond of the UCO brand lanterns. The UCO Micro Candle Lantern uses small tea lights, which are very inexpensive, and puts out quite a bit of light.

Food

Short-term power outages pose very few problems when it comes to feeding your family. Worst case scenario, you have a dinner consisting of crackers, peanut butter, cheese, and such. However, if the outage goes from hours to days, you might run into some issues, both with food prep as well as with refrigerated and frozen foods going bad.

Most people have a gas or charcoal grill sitting outside. These work even in the dead of winter, though admittedly cooking burgers when the temperature is below zero isn't a lot of fun. You can cook more than just meat on them, too. Your normal pots and pans will work just fine, provided you keep the heat turned to medium or low and you keep any plastic handles away from the flames.

How To Determine If You Lost Power While On Vacation



Take a plastic water bottle out of your recycling bin and fill it about halfway, then stick in your freezer, right side up. Once the water is completely frozen, turn it upside down and leave it in the freezer. Any time you return from vacation, check that bottle. If power was lost long enough to melt the ice, you'll know it. If that happens, toss the food in the freezer into the garbage.

Camp stoves, even patio fire pits or plain old campfires, will give you the means to heat up a can of soup or water for coffee. If you're not familiar with cooking over an open flame, though, I'd suggest doing a few practice runs ahead of time. Preparing a meal over a campfire is a bit different than using your normal stove top.

As for refrigerators and freezers, keep the doors closed as much as you can. This probably means keeping your teenagers out of the kitchen completely as they seem to be incapable of making a quick decision when looking in the fridge. Provided the food in the freezer doesn't thaw completely before power is restored, it should be safe. Should the power outage show no signs of coming to a halt any time soon, you might consider cooking up as much of the food as you can before it goes bad.

Another thing I recommend is keeping a couple of coolers on a shelf in the garage and a few frozen water bottles in the freezer. If keeping food cold becomes a serious issue, you have a short-term solution at the ready. Even if you don't have a cooler, keeping the frozen water bottles in the freezer will help keep things cool longer.

Short-Term Power

Generators can be great to have on hand, provided you know how to hook them up properly and you have fuel to run them. There are two basic ways to use a generator. The simplest is to use a long extension cord and run your necessary appliances and such off of that. Not a bad idea, provided you're not plugging every single gadget and doodad you own into one cord. If you have a fairly large list of things you want to keep running during a power outage, a better solution would be to have an electrician do some magic and install a dedicated circuit and a transfer switch. Basically, he or she will route your necessary outlets through a separate circuit. When the power is running, you'll not see any changes. If the power goes out, though, all you'll need to do is plug the generator into an outlet outside your home, start it up, then flip the transfer switch.

A distinct drawback to generators, though, is the noise. While you might not be bothered too much by it, if you have neighbors nearby, they'll know rather quickly that you have power when they don't. Expect knocks on the door from them, with pleas for help with charging phones and laptops, storing food in your refrigerator, that sort of stuff.

Another option worth considering is investing in a small portable solar panel system, such as those sold by Goal Zero or SunJack. These are great for charging phones and tablets. With the right accessories, you can also power up rechargeable batteries. What I do is keep one of these panels propped up in a window at home all day every day. It has a small battery pack attached to it, which is kept charged by the panels. Then, if the power goes out, I know I'll have at least some amount of electricity available to charge my devices if need be.



Don't forget about entertainment when the lights go out. A simple box and some crayons can lead to hours of fun for the younger set. For older kids, this would be a great time to teach them the basics of whittling, knitting, and other useful hobbies.



Entertainment

I know it sounds frivolous but it pays to think ahead for ways to keep boredom at bay, especially if you have children. For many families, if the TV and Internet are no longer viable options, people don't really know what to do with themselves. You can pick up a few board games for pennies on the dollar at rummage sales and thrift stores. Even a couple of decks of cards can help the time pass quickly. For the younger kids, craft supplies can prevent many a parent's headache. In our home, we have a rather large collection of books, which is great for the readers in our family.

Power outages happen all the time. While most of them are perhaps just an annoyance at best, there are occasions when the lights won't come back on for several hours, perhaps days or even weeks. Almost all of the preparations we've discussed require little investment, whether we're talking time, money, or energy. Yet, they'll all be very welcome when the power goes out.



The Get Home Bag

A vital component of **READINESS**

By JIM COBB

For most people, home is where you will want to be during a crisis. That's where you have the bulk of your supplies and where you'll find the assistance and support of your family and possibly your neighbors. But, what if disaster strikes when you are away from home? Many of us spend several hours each day at our jobs, which are often located a considerable distance from our homes. Adding in commute time and errands before or after work, we're gone for upwards of nine or 10 hours a day. Odds are about even as to whether a crisis will occur while we're away as opposed to when we're safe at home.

The Get Home Bag (GHB) is an important part of your overall disaster readiness plan. Simply put, it is a portable collection of supplies and gear, designed to get you from Point A to Point B, on foot if necessary. The GHB is not a "run off to the woods and live off the land" type of survival kit, nor is it intended to meet your needs indefinitely. Instead, the focus is on having just what you'll need to get you home or to another safe location in the event you cannot easily drive your normal commute.

What goes into the Get Home Bag?

There are several categories of supplies that need to be included in the GHB:

- Food
- Medical/First Aid
- Communication
- Water
- Hygiene
- Tools
- Shelter
- Navigation
- Security



As we talk about each of these categories in detail, it is important to bear in mind that the GHB must be light enough for you to carry for long periods of time. One of the most common mistakes when assembling a GHB is overloading the pack or bag. Therefore, each and every item added to the GHB must be carefully considered as every ounce counts.

Food

You aren't going to be preparing any five-course meals while you're trekking home, so skip the jars of home canned venison chili. Focus on food items you can eat on the go. Stick with things like granola bars, protein bars, dried fruit, nuts, and hard candy. Most of us are already carrying surplus calories around our waistlines, so there's little need to plan for large meals. The goal is simply to reduce or eliminate the rumbling tummy.

If you figure the length of your journey will require at least one night spent in the field, you might consider adding a couple of simple heat-n-eat foods, such as ramen noodles. This, of course, will require you to also have cooking and eating implements with you, which could be as simple as a small mess kit like those carried by Boy Scouts from coast to coast. The thing to remember, though, is almost all foods like this will require water in the cooking process, which cuts into the supply you'll have for staying hydrated.

You might consider adding a small fishing kit or a few animal snares as well. However, hopefully you'll be on the move most of the time, rather than sitting and waiting for a bite.

Water

Water is an essential component of life. While the old you really don't want to be a test case. The problem, do about that. You can't make it lighter or less bulky, it is pounds. While picking up a gallon poses little problem and carrying it for miles on end may wear you out.

To satisfy your hydration needs, you have a couple of with you, figuring approximately one gallon of water per some water with you but also have in your GHB the during your journey. Two liters of water, split between in the weight of the bottles themselves. Having multiple water in at least one of them at all times.

For filtration and disinfection, there are a number Berkey, Katadyn, Aquamira, LifeStraw, and Sawyer being water bottles with the filters built right in.



adage says you can survive three days without water, though, is water is heavy and there's nothing you can what it is. A gallon of water weighs a little over eight for many people, coupled with all your other gear

different options. You could carry all of your water day of travel. Or, and this is my preference, carry means to filter and disinfect additional water found two bottles, will weigh about five pounds, figuring containers gives you the ability to carry potable

of portable devices on the market today, with the most well-known brands. There are even

Shelter

This category encompasses everything that will help protect you from the elements. Hypothermia is a very real threat, even in mild weather. It is important you have a way to keep yourself warm and dry. Clothing is your first line of defense. If your job requires you to dress in suits or skirts, I highly recommend you have a change of clothes in your GHB. You will appreciate having durable, comfortable clothing for your hike. Be sure to have a pair of shoes or boots, as well as at least one pair (preferably two) of thick socks. What I've done is set up a separate small bag with a complete change of clothes and a pair of hiking boots. This bag sits alongside my GHB. Should I end up having to start trekking home on foot, the first thing I'd do is change into my travel attire, leaving my business clothes behind. I also keep one extra pair of socks in my GHB, just in case I end up having to wade through high water and my feet get soaked.

Most people who live in areas of the country that experience seasonal swings in temperature likely already have jackets, hats, and such on their person when they leave the house during cold weather. However, I suggest keeping an extra hat, pair of mittens or gloves, and other similar items in your GHB during those times of year when they'd likely be needed.

A couple of good quality emergency blankets, sometimes called space blankets, will go far toward keeping you warm and dry, particularly if you stop to rest for the evening. I do not suggest purchasing these from discount retailers or dollar stores, as you'll find the quality severely lacking. You need emergency blankets that are durable and aren't going to fall into shreds the first time you open the package.

Along those same lines, consider purchasing a small folding poncho. They weigh next to nothing and if the rain is pouring down, they will help you keep at least reasonably dry. In a pinch, you could use a heavy-duty garbage bag, cutting a hole for your head and two more for your arms. Garbage bags can also be used to carry gear or laid flat on the ground so you don't end up with a wet behind after sitting.

Some folks who expect to travel quite a distance include a small tent or at least a tarp in their GHBs. This is a judgment call. Doing so adds considerable weight and bulk to the pack but having a tube tent or a tarp could be very beneficial if you'll be spending more than a night or two on the road.

No matter where you live, a wide brimmed hat and sunglasses will certainly prove useful if you're traveling on foot. Sunscreen and lip balm are also highly recommended. Around here, the mosquitoes come large enough to qualify as low-flying aircraft so insect repellent is also a must.

We also include fire-starting gear in the shelter category. These supplies include strike anywhere matches, a ferro rod, butane lighters, and ready-to-light tinder such as dryer lint or cotton balls soaked with petroleum jelly. Be sure to have at least three different ways to light a fire, just in case something gets lost or breaks.

Medical/First Aid

You will likely not need a ton of medical supplies but you should have at least a small first aid kit, stocked with adhesive bandages, gauze wrap, pain relievers, antacids, anti-diarrhea medication, moleskin for blisters, and perhaps a tweezers for splinters. The idea isn't to be able to perform open-heart surgery, but just to get you home in one piece.

If you have prescription medication you must take on a regular basis, include enough doses in your GHB to last you for your trip home.

Hygiene

While one day without brushing your teeth won't kill you, being able to keep reasonably clean will help prevent illness and infection. In your hygiene kit for the GHB, include a travel size toothbrush and toothpaste as well as a small wash cloth and bar of soap. Hand sanitizer should be used after going to the bathroom and it can also double as a fire starter, due to the alcohol content.

There are natural alternatives to toilet paper but most of them are substantially less than ideal. Remove the cardboard tube from a roll of toilet paper, then put the roll into a plastic bag and crush it flat to save space in your pack.

Navigation



Depending upon where you work and how far it is from home, this category may not be absolutely necessary. I mean, if you work 10 miles from home, you probably know each and every route blindfolded. Even so, a compass and a map of the area can help prevent you from getting turned around should you need to deviate from your normal routes due to storm damage, road closures, or other reasons.

Communication

Being able to send and receive information can be vital during a disaster or its aftermath. Of course, the ubiquitous cell phone is likely the first and best option. But, plan ahead for the possibility you can't get a signal, your battery dies, or the phone is lost.

While pay phones are few and far between today, they are still out there if you look carefully. It is a good idea to keep in your GHB a list of important phone numbers as well as some loose change for making calls. Remember, if your phone dies or is lost, you won't be able to access your contacts list so have those numbers written down.

There are many different models of small crank-powered radios on the market. Most of them work very well and will allow you to listen to news broadcasts and keep abreast of developments related to the crisis.

Given that we have no reliable way of predicting the future, try as we might, it is conceivable that you may have a need to signal for help. Perhaps you are injured and need assistance or you get turned around in the woods and can't find your way out. The sound of a whistle carries much further than shouting, plus you won't lose your voice. A signal mirror works well, during the day only, of course. At night, a glow stick can be activated and tied to the end of a length of cord, then spun around to create a large circle of light that can be seen for quite a distance.

Security

This can be a tricky category, but I do believe you should have some method of defending yourself, just in case. For many people, the method of choice is a firearm, typically a handgun. If you decide to go that route, please do everyone a favor and seek out training on the proper use of the weapon.

Other options for security include pepper spray, stun guns, and batons. I do not recommend relying upon a knife for defense unless you have received the proper training in its use. Otherwise, you are far more likely to have it taken away from you and used against you.

Tools

In this category, we have a few different odds and ends that, while perhaps not strictly necessary for survival, sure make life easier. First and foremost is a good quality knife. This is not an area where you should skimp and buy something cheap. You want a knife that is sturdy and that will retain a sharp edge. Remember, you are more likely to be injured using a dull knife than a sharp one. With that in mind, consider adding a small knife sharpener as well.

A multi-tool, such as those produced by Leatherman or Gerber, is very useful. It is one of those things that, once you have one, you'll wonder how you got along without it.

A flashlight or headlamp will be very welcome after the sun goes down and you are still on the road. Be sure to have at least one set of extra batteries. There are, of course, crank powered flashlights available, which will save you from needing the batteries.



Duct tape is also highly recommended. It has a million and one uses, including patching rips in clothing. Wrap several feet of it around a pencil to cut down on the weight and bulk of carrying the whole roll. Cordage is important as well. I suggest paracord, due to its strength. Paracord consists of several thin strands of cord covered in a fabric sheath. If need be, you can remove one or more of those smaller strands and use them separately, increasing the total footage of cord you have available to you. What I do is take an old plastic gift card and cut a notch at each end. Then, I wedge one end of the paracord into a notch and wrap the cord around the card several times, then slipping the end into the other notch. This keeps the cord from getting tangled in my pack.

Another highly useful item is a shemagh, also known as a headscarf. You've probably seen our military forces wearing these in the Middle East, as that is where this item originated. The shemagh is a square piece of fabric, usually around three feet on a side. It has many uses, such as wrapping it around your mouth and nose to protect against dust and debris or dampening it and placing it around your neck to cool down. In cold weather, it can be another layer of warmth. In a pinch, you could even wrap a few items inside it and carry it hobo style at the end of a stick.

One last item to consider, and this doesn't neatly fit into any of the categories, is something inspirational to you. A few photos of your family or a small religious text of your choice may help give you extra motivation when the going gets rough.

How do I carry all this stuff?

There is a reason why I saved this discussion for after the listing of contents. I highly recommend you first determine what needs to be carried in your GHB, then go out and find a suitable pack or bag for it. Frequently, people will buy the pack first and then either find it is too small or, and this is far more common, they will buy a pack that is entirely too large, then feel compelled to fill it.

The ideal for most people is going to be a backpack. By carrying your supplies on your back, you free up your hands. Plus, it is less fatiguing to carry your gear on your back than over your shoulder or in your hands.

The pack should be well made and durable. Avoid the cheap ones you'll find at back-to-school sales, unless you simply cannot afford anything better. The shoulder straps should be padded and a waist belt is a bonus. It is very important to field test the pack after purchasing it. Load it up, strap it on, and walk around for at least a couple of hours. It should be comfortable and not so heavy you feel like a pack mule.

A great idea would be to visit a camping store, such as Gander Mountain or REI, and talk to an employee there about backpacks. They can recommend certain styles of packs based on your body shape and other factors. You need not necessarily spend a couple hundred dollars on a pack, but by taking their recommendations into account, you should be able to find something more affordable.

There are also a number of "sling packs," which are basically one strap backpacks. The strap runs across your body, from shoulder to opposite hip. Provided you don't weigh them down too heavily, these can be a great option.

Avoid anything along the lines of a rolling suitcase or duffel bag. These just aren't made for use on anything other than a hard, smooth surface like pavement. What will end up happening is you'll need to pick it up and carry it over rough terrain and these sorts of cases just aren't very light to begin with, let alone loaded down with your supplies.

How do I maintain the Get Home Bag?

At least a couple of times a year completely unpack the GHB and inspect all of the contents. Check expiration dates on all the food items and change out any stored water. Any batteries should also be rotated out and replaced with fresh ones. Carefully examine the pack and gear for wear marks and other signs of deterioration.

What I do is to add GHB inspection to the list of things you do when the clocks change, right along with testing your smoke detectors. In the fall, you could add the cold weather gear we talked about in the Shelter section and remove it in the spring, should you wish to do so.

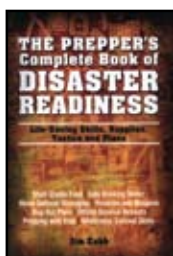
Consider the Get Home Bag as your lifeline to safety and treat it accordingly. Keep it with you at work or in your vehicle, so it is ready at a moment's notice. While it may turn out to be an item you never truly need, it is far better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it.



For More Information

Useful resources from the COUNTRYSIDE Bookstore

The Prepper's Complete Book of Disaster Readiness

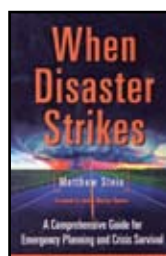


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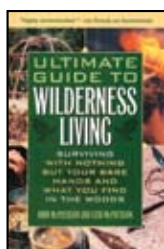


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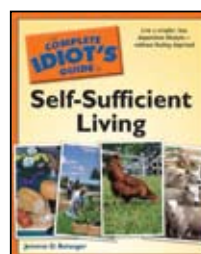


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DIY Vehicle Emergency Kits

By JIM COBB

Torrential rain, ice storms, engine breakdown, blizzards, flash floods—all of these and more could result in you being stranded on the side of the road for hours on end. Where I live in the upper Midwest, one of the first things someone does upon buying a car is store emergency supplies in the trunk. It really isn't a matter of *if* you'll get stuck somewhere, it is just a matter of *when*. Taking the time to assemble and store a small vehicle emergency kit could mean the difference between a possible tragedy and nothing more than an inconvenience.

You may have seen pre-assembled vehicle emergency kits for sale in any number of stores. They aren't too expensive but you get what you pay for when buying them. Often, the contents are poor quality and cheaply made, increasing the chances the items will fail when you need them the most. Personally, I have had wrenches from those kits bend up into pretzels under just moderate use and flashlights that won't turn on even with fresh batteries. It is a far better idea to assemble your own emergency kit using good quality products.

What Should Be In A Vehicle Emergency Kit?

Let's start with the tools and gear you'll need to get back on the road as quickly as possible in the event of a breakdown. A small toolbox can be purchased for just a few dollars. Fill it with:

- Socket Wrench With Sockets
- Pliers – Standard & Needle-Nosed
- Sharp, Sturdy Knife
- Duct Tape
- Multi-Tool
- Safety Glasses Or Goggles
- Work Gloves
- Flashlight Or Headlamp (With Extra Batteries)
- Screwdrivers (Slotted & Philips) – Various Sizes
- Combination Wrench Set (SAE & Metric)



Keeping with the repair theme, you should have a can of spray lubricant, such as WD-40, a bottle of diluted antifreeze, a can of Fix-a-Flat or the equivalent, and at least one or two quarts of oil.

Of course, a spare tire, along with a jack and tire iron, is common sense. Be sure to inspect your spare regularly to ensure it is properly inflated.

Remember, too, that even if you are unable to complete the necessary repairs yourself, someone who stops to assist you might have that knowledge and skill set but may not have tools with them. By having these basic tools on hand, you will be in a better position to help someone help you.

On the market today are several types of collapsible gas cans, made of durable plastic. Because they fold up, they take up very little space. If you run out of gas, grab it before walking to the nearest station. While many gas stations do have small gas cans you can borrow or purchase, Murphy's Law dictates that won't be the case at the station you visit. Never store fuel in your trunk long-term! That can lead to very bad things, such as explosions.

Moving on to survival and comfort items, first on the list is a blanket. I suggest using a wool or wool blend, rather than an actual "emergency blanket" like those sold by survival and prepper outlets. While those blankets work very well with trapping body heat, you'll probably find more comfort in using a soft fabric material to curl up into as you wait for help to arrive. A

fabric blanket can also serve as a cushion for your knees should you need to change a flat tire. A bottle or two of water and a few granola bars or other snack type food will keep you from adding hunger and thirst to your list of complaints.

While the odds are pretty good you'll never need to use them, I always suggest including fire making supplies in each and every survival kit you assemble. These items include one or two butane lighters, some strike anywhere matches, and a few fire starters such as tinder tabs or a pack of InstaFire. If you end up stranded for a substantial length of time, a small campfire can provide both light and warmth, as well as a degree of psychological comfort.

A complete change of clothes can be easily stored in a plastic bag and kept with your other gear. At a minimum, a pair of pants and an extra shirt should be included. If you accidentally spill fuel or other fluids on your clothes, or tear a giant hole in your pants, having extras to change into will be appreciated. Don't forget a knit hat and warm gloves as well, to help ward off chill.

If you are stranded someplace, it makes sense to have with you items with which you can signal for assistance. A brightly colored cloth or flag can be tied to your antenna, which is a universally recognized symbol indicating help is needed. Road flares are another great addition to the vehicle emergency

kit. A DIY approach to flares is to use a snaplight, also called a glow stick, and a length of cord. Activate the glow stick and tie it to one end of the cord. Grasp the cord about two or three feet from the glow stick and spin the cord in front of you. This creates a large glowing circle, visible for quite a distance. Of course, this is only suitable for use after the sun has set.

Last, but by no means least, is a car charger for your cell phone. This might prove to be the single most important component of your vehicle emergency kit. Many people forget to charge their phone regularly and you don't want to be looking at 5% battery level as you're desperately trying to get in touch with AAA.

Most of these items, if you don't already have them at home, can be purchased inexpensively if you shop around. Tools and the like are often found at rummage sales for pennies on the dollar, for example. I cannot stress enough, though, that quality is key. Don't go on the cheap for tools and such. If you are staking the safety of you and your family on the items in this kit, spend the money to get tools that will last.

With the exception of the spare tire and jack, just about everything could be stored in a plastic tote, keeping it all in one place. Personally, I went to my local dollar store and purchased a laundry basket for this purpose. It works very well at preventing everything from getting scattered all over the trunk.

Taking the time to assemble and store a vehicle emergency kit will serve well to get you back on the road with a minimum of hassle and a maximum of safety. Be sure to inspect your kit on a regular basis, at least a few times a year. Doing so will ensure the emergency items will be there when you need them.



BEFORE You Start Your ADVENTURE



Know the Importance of Basic Wilderness Survival Gear

By JIM COBB

This is the time of year when families begin planning summer vacations. Quite often, those trips involve spending some quality time out in the forests and such, enjoying Mother Nature in all her splendor. Unfortunately, this is also the time of year when we begin hearing stories about lost hikers and campers, folks who took a wrong turn and couldn't find their way back to the trail. Usually, these lost souls are rescued within a day or two. Sometimes, though, it becomes not a rescue but a body retrieval. The reality is this: any time you are heading out into the forest, even if only for a half-mile hike, you should carry with you a few survival items with you, just in case.

SIGNALING TOOLS

While most folks today have a cell phone strapped to their hip or in their pocket, there are many areas where signals don't reach. Shouting for help will likely only give you a sore throat. The human voice just doesn't carry all that far in the woods. It can also be difficult to pinpoint if it is heard. A far better plan is to keep a loud whistle on a lanyard around your neck. It is best if the whistle has no moving parts, such as a pea rolling around inside. In cold climates, your breath will condense and freeze inside the whistle, possibly causing some problems with sound. The whistle should also be plastic rather than metal. When the temperatures plummet in winter, your lips could freeze to a metal whistle.

Patterns of three are universally recognized as signals for help. For example, three short blasts on the whistle or three rifle shots. A glow stick, sometimes called a snap light, is a great signaling tool at night. Tie the light to a length of cord, such as a shoelace. Activate the light, then spin it in a circle in front of you. The glowing circle can be seen for miles, provided, of course, you are at the top of a hill or otherwise in a clear area.

FIRE-MAKING SUPPLIES

Having the tools necessary for building a fire is critical. Fire will keep you warm, dry you out if you've gotten wet, and light up the night. There is a strong psychological element at work, too. Sitting in front of a fire will help you to relax and feel better about your situation.

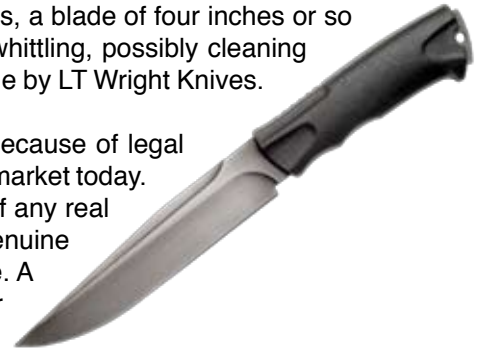
Personally, I like to have at least two different ignition tools with me when I'm out hiking. Three would be better but two should suffice. Good choices include strike anywhere matches inside a waterproof container, butane lighters, and ferrocerium rods with strikers. I tend to favor butane lighters and ferro rods. Both are capable of lighting hundreds, if not thousands, of fires. Ready-to-light tinder is also recommended. Yes, there are many natural sources of tinder, such as seed pods and plant fluff of all kinds, but you cannot always count on finding it when it is most needed. What I suggest is keeping a small container of cotton balls soaked in petroleum jelly in your pocket. If you can find one these days, an old 35mm film canister works great.

Building a fire is a skill that should be practiced regularly. It is not something that comes easily to many people. We do a lot of campfires in our backyard and I like to have my kids each practice using ferro rods and such. They get a kick out of it and they're learning valuable skills at the same time.

KNIFE

A knife can be your most valuable survival tool. It need not be a giant “Rambo” knife, complete with builtin compass and hollow handle. In fact, I’d steer you away from any of that sort of nonsense. You have two basic choices, fixed blade or folder. I prefer fixed blades as they tend to be far stronger than most folding knives and the last thing I want in a survival situation is to have my knife fail. For most camp chores as well as survival tasks, a blade of four inches or so should suffice. You’re not using it as a machete, you’re just making feather sticks, whittling, possibly cleaning small game and such. For my money, you can hardly go wrong with a GNS knife made by LT Wright Knives. Another, but more inexpensive, option is the Condor Bushlore.

However, you may not want to carry a fixed blade knife on your belt, whether because of legal restrictions or because of comfort. There are many high-quality folding knives on the market today. There are also a ton of cheap, knock-offs that will likely fall apart after the first day of any real world use. Look for recognizable brand names like Kershaw, Gerber, or Buck. Genuine Swiss Army knives are also good quality. Knives should be kept as sharp as possible. A dull knife is a far greater danger to you than a sharp one. Learn how to sharpen your knife and always take the time to touch up the edge after you’ve been using it.



COMPASS

A compass might be all you need to self-rescue, provided you’ve done a bit of homework first. Take a look at maps of the area where you’ll be hiking or camping. Get to know the lay of the land a bit, especially where roads and such border the area. For example, let’s say you’ll be staying in a county-owned campground with hundreds of acres of wilderness. If you know that U.S. Highway BB is on the north end of the grounds, Highway 87 is on the west side, Silver Lake is to the south, and the Banff River is to the east, you shouldn’t have much trouble finding help if you have a compass telling you which way to go. Of course, that’s also a pretty simplistic example. The idea is to have a reliable way of figuring out which way is north so you can better orient yourself and make a decision on which way to travel. If you spend enough time out in the wilderness, you’ll soon just sort of know which way you’re facing. But, even if you’ve reached that point, put a compass in your pocket to double check your intuition.

WATER

Always have a water bottle with you. It doesn’t matter if you keep it on your belt, sling it over your shoulder, or carry it in your hand, just be sure to have a full bottle of water with you when you hit the trail. Dehydration can sneak up on you, especially when hiking in hot weather. Stay hydrated as best you can and take frequent breaks when the temperature spikes.

Several companies now offer water bottles that have a robust filter built right in. This is an excellent option as it gives you the ability to refill from natural sources, such as rivers and lakes, without having to worry about giardia and other nasty stuff that can make you very sick. Never drink directly from natural sources of water. Even absolutely crystal clear water can harbor bacteria and such. The last thing you need is to add stomach upset to your list of woes.

SHELTER

Hypothermia is a very real danger and it can set in during even relatively mild temperatures. An emergency blanket is small enough to fit into a pocket and can quite literally save your life. They are made of a thin plastic material that reflects heat. Originally developed by NASA in the 1960s, hence the name “space blanket,” they quickly found use among hikers and campers. To use an emergency blanket properly, it should be wrapped around the body, but loosely so as to allow for dead air space between the blanket and the body. Your body heat, trapped by the blanket, will warm that dead air, which in turn will keep you warm. These blankets can also be used to create shade if the problem is too much heat rather than not enough. SurvivalResources.com sells the Sportsman Hooded Blanket, which is an emergency blanket with a hood and hand pouches built right in for use as a poncho.

With the exception of the water bottle, everything else should easily fit into a pocket of your pants or jacket. We’re not talking several pounds of gear, just a few ounces. But those mere ounces could mean the difference between a tragic news story and a cool story you can tell friends and family later.

One last thing: Any time you are headed into the wilderness, whether for a half hour hike or an overnight trip, be sure someone outside your party knows where you’re going, when you’re leaving, and when you should return. If you don’t check in with them at the appointed time, they should alert the authorities.

The reality is this:

Any time you are heading out into the forest, even if only for a half-mile hike, you should carry a few survival items with you, just in case.



DIY Solutions For Off-Grid Cooking

By JIM COBB

Quite often, utility services are among the first things to go in the wake of a disaster. Tornadoes, blizzards, even just a bad thunderstorm can all result in power lines going down, hopefully just for a few hours but sometimes it can take days before the lights turn on again. A few years ago, a friend of mine had a bad ice storm hit her area and it took three full weeks before power was restored.

If you have a wood stove, of course, cooking while off the grid poses little trouble at all. For those who do not, though, this can pose some problems. When the microwave oven and the electric stove top aren't options, how will you heat water for coffee or warm up a can of soup? Sure, if you have a patio grill you're probably still in business rather easily. You do realize you can cook more than just a rack of ribs on a grill, right?

However, if you lack a propane or charcoal grill and also don't own any sort of camp stove, you may need to get a bit creative when it comes to cooking.

Campfire Cooking

Anyone who has done so knows the almost mystical quality of food cooked over an open fire. Even the humble hot dog just seems to taste so much better, doesn't it? A backyard campfire is surely a great option for off-grid cooking, provided you have the fuel and location for doing so. If you live in an apartment or condo, this might not be the best solution for you. For those who want to explore this option, I would encourage you to get some practice doing so now. There is just as much art as there is science to campfire cooking.

Patio Fire Pits

In recent years, it seems almost as though a law were passed that requires any homeowner who has a patio to purchase a fire pit for it. These come in all sorts of sizes and configurations but, really, all they amount to is a campfire on your patio or deck. Again, as with campfire cooking, these fire pits require fuel and a bit of finesse when preparing the food. Something that makes cooking much easier is the addition of an old grill grate to the fire pit. If you or someone you know replaces their grill, save the grates. They work very well when stretched across the top of the fire pit, making it much easier to place pots of soup and such over the fire.

DIY Brick Rocket Stove

If you have ten dollars to invest in the project, you can assemble a quick and dirty rocket stove that works very well. Rocket stoves, whether they are DIY or store-bought, are all essentially the same. They have a small combustion chamber at the bottom and a chimney of sorts for updraft. They are a great option for off-grid cooking because they use far less fuel than campfires or patio fire pits. For this project, you'll need 20 small bricks. Not cinder blocks or anything fancy, just twenty plain bricks. Patio pavers work great. You do not need to purchase special fire bricks for this project. The fire temperatures you'll reach will be far less than what could cause a brick to explode. You can find suitable bricks at any garden store and they should cost less than 50 cents per brick.

You'll need to cut one of the bricks in half. This is much easier than you might think. Simply score the brick with a file, then use a hammer and chisel to break the brick along the scored line.

Find a flat spot in your backyard for the stove. You can do this right on the ground or on your patio, though I'd suggest you not place it on a wood deck. Start by laying the first four and a half bricks like layer 1.

Your next layer will look like layer two. Please pay close attention to the placement of the other half brick you have. Then, layer three.

And, finally, the fourth layer.

You should have three bricks left over, right? Place one of them at the opening in the front of the stove to provide you with a shelf on which you'll place fuel for the stove. The fuel consists of small twigs and branches, about the size of a pencil or maybe a hair thicker. As I always recommend when you're building a fire, gather plenty of fuel and have it ready before lighting.

What I do is place a small handful of tinder, such as dryer lint, at the bottom of the combustion chamber. Feed a few twigs in through the front and drop in a lit match. The tinder should light easily and start the fuel burning within a couple of minutes. As the fire builds, feed in more fuel until the fire is hot.

Then, place the last two bricks on top of the stove, on either side of the chimney, like layer five.

This provides you with a stand for your cook pot. If you were to place the pot directly over the chimney, you could smother the fire. If it is fairly windy, you could angle those upper bricks a bit to create a windscreen.

With a strong fire burning, it shouldn't take much more than maybe five minutes to bring a pot of water to a rolling boil. Just be sure to continue feeding the stove so the fire doesn't get too low.

The beauty of this DIY rocket stove is you don't need to have a permanent home for it. Just have the bricks stacked in the corner of your garage or shed until they're needed. A downside, though, is that the stove isn't insulated so you aren't going to have complete combustion of the fuel. This means that, over time, the chimney is going to fill up with charred fuel remnants. In other words, you aren't going to be able to cook a ton of different things, one after another, without emptying the charred sticks. However, this setup works great for heating water for coffee or cooking a pot of canned stew.



Brick Stove Layer 1



Brick Stove Layer 2



Brick Stove Layer 3



Brick Stove Layer 4



Brick Stove Layer 5

Buddy Burner

This one has been around for quite some time and many a Cub Scout has built one or a variation of it. A buddy burner is simple to assemble, with all of the components readily available in the average home. You'll need corrugated cardboard, a tuna can, and some old candles or crayons.

If for some reason you don't have a tuna can, any can of similar size will work, such as for cat food or canned chicken. Start by cutting the cardboard into strips. The strips should be not quite as wide as the can is deep. The cardboard should be cut across the corrugation, so when you look down at the long edge of each strip, you see all the "holes" of the corrugation.

Next, begin wrapping those strips around the inside of the can. Start at the outer edge and work your way to the middle, adding strips until the can is completely full of cardboard.

Now, you need to melt wax for the burner. Old candles and crayons work very well. I've found one of the easiest ways to do this, without damaging any of my cookware, is to place a small pot on the stove, filled with a couple inches of water. Bring the water to a gentle boil. Fill an old soup can about halfway with broken crayons (paper removed) and/or pieces of candles and put the soup can in the water. Use a twig or stick to stir the wax as it melts.

Once the wax is fully melted, carefully pour it over the cardboard, working from side to side and front to back to completely cover and fill each of the corrugated holes. Once the wax has cooled and hardened, the buddy burner is ready for use.



A buddy burner, made from a tuna can, cardboard and wax.

To light it, strike a wooden match and hold it just above the wax, until you see the wax start to melt. Then, lay the lit match right on the wax. Within a minute or two, you'll see a strong flame as the wax burns. To cook over the buddy burner, you'll need a couple of bricks to hold your pot above the flame.

To douse the flame, simply place a piece of aluminum foil over the burner and hold it down along the sides of the can.

What is nice about the buddy burner is you can use it indoors, unlike the other methods outlined earlier. All the buddy burner really amounts to is a large candle. If you find the wax is starting to run low in the burner, simply add more once it has cooled down.

Altoids Tin Alcohol Stove

Altoids tins are almost, though not quite, as useful as duct tape to us preppers. We find all sorts of uses for them, from mini survival kits to candles. Here, we're going to use one for cooking. You'll need an empty Altoids tin, some perlite, a piece of window screen, and denatured alcohol.



Start by filling the tin with perlite, up to just below the rim of the tin. Perlite is commonly available at any garden center and is a soil amendment. Here, it is being used due to its absorbent qualities. Some folks like to pick through the perlite and use just the larger chunks for the stove. I've never had an issue just pouring some direct from the bag, without sorting through it first.

Next, cut a piece of window screen to fit over the top of the perlite. Round the corners a bit and cut it so it just slightly overlaps the tin's edges. The screen should be metal, not plastic. A piece cut from any old window screen you have sitting in the back of the shed should work nicely. If you don't have any available, you can buy a small window screen repair kit and use the patches from it for this project.

Place the screen over the perlite and use a popsicle stick or similar item to tuck the edges down between the tin and the perlite.

The fuel for this stove is denatured alcohol, available at any hardware store. In a pinch, you can use the fuel additive HEET or even rubbing alcohol. However, those tend to be "dirty" fuels and you'll notice more smoke than if you used denatured alcohol. Pour about three tablespoons of fuel right over the top of the perlite and screen. After sealing your fuel container and moving it away from the stove, just to be safe, drop a lit match on the screen. The flame will be mostly blue and might be difficult to see at first. Just a few tablespoons of fuel will be enough to bring water to a boil.



Cut some metal window screen to fit.



Once your bricks are layered insert the perlite-filled Altoids container.

As with the buddy burner, you'll need a couple of bricks or something to raise your pot above the stove for cooking.

You can smother the flame by flipping the lid closed. However, this does result in unburned fuel staying inside the tin. While that shouldn't be much of a problem, personally I like to just let the stove burn off any remaining fuel. Bear in mind, too, that it is only the liquid fuel that burns, not the perlite.

This is the stove I keep in my primary survival kit, along with a small plastic bottle of denatured alcohol for fuel. I've found it works very well in many weather conditions and is much easier than trying to get a campfire going in the rain.

Even if you have a patio grill and/or a camp stove, it is best to plan multiple ways to cook food during a grid-down emergency. Whenever possible, strive for at least three ways to accomplish a basic survival goal.

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On The Road Again (Hopefully)...

Staying Safe While Traveling Involves Planning and Stocking the Right Supplies

By JIM COBB

For many, summer means vacation. Even homesteaders need to get away once in awhile. Here in the United States, many families opt for the good, old-fashioned road trip. Even with today's gas prices, it is often cheaper to drive than it is to fly. For my family of five, unless I were able to find an absolutely stellar deal on airfare online, it would cost me around a thousand dollars or so to fly us all to one of the Disney resorts and back. Personally, unless I'm in a hurry to get to my destination, I much prefer driving to flying anyway. We live in a beautiful country and I like to take the time to see as much of it as I can. One of the goals on my bucket list is to drive from Chicago to Los Angeles, following as closely as I can old Route 66.

When we talk about travel safety preparations, our focus is on getting us back on the road in the event of a breakdown as well as keeping us safe and secure if we're stuck for a while. First and foremost, we need to have a way to call for help if needed. If you don't already have a cell phone, consider investing in an inexpensive "pay as you go" one. Either way, your phone should have the ability to make calls, send texts, and go online. This gives you options for communication. In some areas, you may find that while you can't get a strong enough signal to place a phone call, you'll still be able to send a text or get online and send a message through social media.

I also highly suggest picking up a car charger for your cell phone. How many times have you picked up your phone to send a text, only to find you're on about 12 percent battery? A phone with a dead battery isn't going to be of much help to you if your car breaks down. If you spend a fair amount of time on the road regularly, you might consider signing up for a roadside assistance program. Many of the larger insurance companies now offer it as part of their auto insurance policies. AAA is another option, of course, one with many benefits for travelers. Do your homework, though, and make sure you completely understand what these programs will and will not cover. For example, while the program might dispatch a tow truck to your location, they will most certainly limit the distance for which they'll pay for the tow.

If you are planning a lengthy road trip, either purchase maps for the area or print them out from a website. GPS systems, for all the convenience they offer, are not perfect. While you're on the trip, take the time to teach your children how to read road maps and plot driving routes. This is a skill that is rapidly being lost due to the advent of GPS.

Any time you hit the road, you should have some basic tools and supplies with you, just in case. When assembling your tool kit, keep in mind that even if you don't know how to make basic repairs, someone else who stops to assist might have the skills but lack the tools themselves (see sidebar chart, "Vehicle Kit Musts").

THE FLAT TIRE

Probably the single-most common breakdown situation involves a flat tire. With that in mind, make it a habit to routinely check the pressure of your spare tire. If you've not used it at all, you might want to take out the jack and give it a test run. Some models can be a little tricky and it is better to learn how the jack operates from the comfort of your driveway than on the side of an interstate highway. In a pinch, Fix-A-Flat or a similar product can sometimes get you back on the road quickly but don't ever look at it as being a permanent solution.

THE DEAD BATTERY

Particularly in areas of the country that experience decidedly frigid winters, a set of jumper cables, also called booster cables, is a necessity.

I can't tell you how many times that I've been approached in a parking lot by someone who needed a jumpstart but didn't have cables. As with most things in life, there is a right and wrong way to jump-start a car. Start by attaching a red (positive) cable to the positive terminal on the working battery. Next, connect the other end of that same red cable to the positive terminal on the dead battery. Then, connect the negative cable to the negative terminal on the working battery. Right here

is where many people go wrong—connect the other end of the negative cable to a grounding point in the car with the dead battery, such as a bracket or a bolt, preferably a distance away from the battery. Start the car with the working battery and let it run for a minute or two, then try starting the other car. If it doesn't start right away, let it charge a bit longer and try it again. If it doesn't start within a matter of minutes, though, you likely have bigger issues than just a dead battery. Remove the jumper cables by reversing the procedure for attaching them.

WAITING FOR HELP

In the event you've broken down and it will be a while before help arrives, you and your family will appreciate the forethought you had to stash some supplies in the trunk, just in case. Nighttime even in the summer months can get a little chilly so keep a blanket or two on hand.

In our minivan, we have a small blanket stashed under each seat. We also keep a few snacks in a cooler. We only use the cooler because it is a handy storage container, not because we're trying to keep the snacks on ice 24/7. But we've also found the cooler to be useful if we come across a great deal on refrigerated or frozen foods but we're not headed directly home from the store. Snack items include things like graham crackers, dried fruit, and trail mix.

I don't recommend storing drinking water inside the vehicle for long periods of time, at least not water stored in plastic bottles. High temperatures, such as from the interior heating up in the middle of summer, can cause chemicals to leach from the plastic into the water. Either use non-plastic bottles or just grab a bottle of water when you leave the house. Children will need something to keep them occupied, too, as will the adults. Just a few bucks at the dollar store will net you puzzle books, pencils, perhaps a game or two. While we're thinking about supplies for our kids, let's be sure to include a change of clothes for the younger ones. You'll have to swap it out every few months, of course, given how quickly the children seem to grow. But every parent likely has at least one story about how a complete change of clothes became necessary for one of their children. If it hasn't happened to you yet, be patient because it will.

A brightly colored bandana or flag should be in your stash of emergency supplies. Tie it to the antenna or another location on the vehicle as a signal for assistance. Remember, too, that your vehicle is far larger than you and thus will be easier to see in bad weather. Unless the vehicle is damaged or located in a very dangerous spot, it is far better to stay with the car than to risk being hit while walking on the side of the road.

It sounds like an awful lot of stuff, I know, but all of those supplies, including the tools, won't take up too much space. I picked up a laundry basket at the dollar store and that works great for keeping everything together in the trunk of my car. Whether you're getting your kicks on Route 66 or just visiting Grandma Sally up north, make sure you have emergency supplies in the vehicle, just in case.

Vehicle Kit Musts

Your vehicle tool kit should contain:

- Wrenches (metric and SAE) or adjustable wrenches of different sizes
- Socket wrench with sockets (metric and SAE)
- Screwdrivers (slotted and Phillips) in varying lengths
- Pliers (standard and needlenosed)
- Hammer
- Flashlight (with an extra set of batteries)
- Duct tape
- Electrical tape
- Razor knife (a.k.a. box cutter)
- Extra fuses
- Work gloves
- Safety goggles



Note: While you don't necessarily need to go out and buy brand new, top of the line tools for your vehicle kit, you should avoid just getting the cheapest tools you can find. Often, you get what you pay for and the wrench you found for \$0.79 will bend into a pretzel the first time it encounters a stubborn bolt. If you can't afford decent quality tools new at the hardware store, hunt around thrift stores and rummage sales. Older tools are often of better quality than much of what is found in stores today.

About The Author

Jim Cobb



Jim Cobb is the owner and lead trainer for DisasterPrepConsultants.com. His articles on preparedness have been published in national magazines such as Boy's Life. You can find him online at SurvivalWeekly.com. His books include Prepper's Home Defense, The Prepper's Complete Book of Disaster Readiness, and Prepper's Long-Term Survival Guide. Jim lives in the Upper Midwest with his beautiful wife and their three adolescent weapons of mass destruction.

Watch for Jim Cobb's columns in every issue of COUNTRYSIDE.

