

Survival Priorities

Knowing priorities in an emergency lets you start to work immediately and without confusion. Below are listed the logical steps you should take. Later, each item will be studied in detail.

1. **Positive Mental Attitude.** As attested by those who have survived wilderness emergencies, a positive mental attitude may be the most essential element in survival.
2. **First Aid.** If an injury is life threatening, such as rapid loss of blood, first aid becomes the most important thing to do.
3. **Shelter.** Extreme weather conditions, too hot or too cold, make finding or building a shelter of top importance. At such times even painful but minor injuries must wait until shelter is available. This is even more urgent if night is approaching.
4. **Fire.** Often, along with shelter, you will need a fire for warmth and signaling. Fuel should be secured and the fire started before dark.
5. **Signaling.** When you have taken the first steps in dealing with the emergency, you will need to prepare rescue signals.
6. **Water.** Under all circumstances, water is essential. You can live only a few days without it. Finding water is even more urgent when the weather is hot and dry.
7. **Food.** A person can live several weeks without food; it does not rate high as a survival priority.

Preparing for the Wilderness Adventure

There are several basic items that always should be carried in your emergency kit, even though the trip may be only a short hike from the road to the lake:

Instant Body Shelter

If a sudden storm dumps rain or snow, you need to protect yourself from the dampness and cold immediately. Even in summer unexpected storms happen, especially in mountainous areas. A big heavy-duty plastic bag, the 7-bushel size, is one of the best instant shelters you can have. It takes up little space and weighs only a few ounces. When a storm breaks, get out of the wind, make a hole in the bag just large enough to get your face through, squat down and pull the bag completely down over you.



A plastic tube tent is another good instant shelter. Aluminum-coated emergency blankets or suits are available. Just be sure your head is covered, and there are no gaps to allow your body heat to escape. The combination of an emergency blanket and a plastic bag over it will protect the wearer from severe weather. Later, when conditions improve, more permanent shelter can be found or made.

Fire-Starting Materials

There are a number of choices of fire-starting materials. Waterproof, strike-anywhere matches; a butane lighter; a metal match and 0000 steel wool; flint and steel; a bow drill; a candle; chemical heat tabs; or small pieces of pitchy wood are helpful. An excellent combination for your basic kit would be a butane lighter and several heat tabs. Put them in a can such as small bandage strips are sold in, seal the lid with adhesive or electrical tape, and you have a fast, efficient fire starter system, even in damp weather.

Signaling Devices

Your fire is a signaling device. Others include a whistle, flares, distress flags, a mirror, flashlight, and dye markers for boating emergencies. At least, your basic kit should contain a whistle and mirror. For overnight trips you will have a flashlight in your camping equipment.

First Aid Kit

You can buy a small first aid kit, or working with your counselor, put together one of your own. In either case, know what each item is for and how to use it.

Carefully assembled, your emergency kit will be surprisingly compact and lightweight. It should be small enough to carry in your jacket pocket. For simple day hikes, a day hiker backpack is ideal. You can stow your emergency kit in it, and carry food and other items as well.