

What do you do when you're on a remote side channel of the flooded Yukon River and your rudder suddenly falls off? It's nothing you'd ever expect, but you can get through numerous situations and obstacles if you have packed a solid emergency kit.

Photo by Mark Johnson

That's gonna' leave a mark!

**Packing the Perfect "Oh Sh!t" Outdoors Emergency Kit;
What you need when things go *seriously* wrong!**

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As paddlers and campers, hikers and bicyclists, hunters and fishermen, we're all fortunate that our passions take us to some of the most beautiful places in the world - whether those are close to home or half way around the globe.

But what happens when problems arise, whether it's a freak accident, injury or perhaps a forest fire? I've encountered all of these situations, and they have absolutely changed the way I think and operate when outdoors. Real-world preparation to get safely back home is critical to our ongoing enjoyment of the sports we love.

The list that follows on the next page can - *and should* - be modified for your particular sport. This is a list of what I now take on the water when I paddle, and I also use most of this gear when car camping. When hiking or bicycling, this list is cut down for both content and weight.

When paddling, I take my emergency kit gear in one dry bag, and the first-aid kit with its additions in another. For stripped-down kits, you can put a number of items in a Nalgene water bottle or the large prescription medication vials. Keeping this gear dry is crucial, and having something - even a small barebones kit - is better than carrying nothing at all!

The Outdoor Kind's 'Oh Sh!' Emergency Kit Contents

A few disclaimers: The list that follows isn't exhaustive, but it provides some food for thought when preparing for your next adventure. If we have listed a brand-name item, it's because we've had good luck with it or it's highly recommended by people we respect. And just to be clear, we haven't been paid by the manufacturer of any item here to include it on this list or in my presentations.

Key Safety Gear taken on *all* paddling trips:

- Personal Flotation Device (PFD)
- Pea-less whistle, flashlight, and river or dive knife
- Lighter and Waterproof Matches or Fire Starter
- Leatherman or a high-quality multi-tool
- *At least* 1-litre Nalgene of water & CLIF Bar(s)
- Garmin InReach satellite communicator
- Fully-charged smart phone
- Survival blanket or contractor's garbage bag
- Buoyant rope and paracord
- Spare paddle*

HOLDING IT TOGETHER:

- 1 roll Duct Tape (We use Gorilla 'White' if paddling locally, or "Mil-Spec" on more remote trips)
- 1 vial super glue and 1 small roll of wire
- 1 tube Lexel sealant
- 1 bag of various size zip ties
- 1 bag of Nite Ize Gear Ties (For *unlimited* uses!)
- Your choice: Metal binder clamps, clothes pins, or safety pins (or some combination thereof)
- Nylon camps straps and bungee cords
- 2 nylon tie-down boat straps

STAYIN' ALIVE:

- 1 pack Katadyn Micropur water purification tablets
- 1 foil survival emergency blanket or large contractors garbage bag
- Waterproof matches with extra striker(s) or a Fire Starter ferro rod striking tool
- 1 headlamp w/ fresh batteries, w/ extras, depending on location and duration of trip
- A glow stick (or two)
- Mosquito headnet and/or repellent

COMMUNICATIONS:

- 1 ball point pen, 1 grease pencil, 1 small pencil, and 1 or 2 Sharpies
- 1 half-pack of Post-it notes in Ziploc plastic bag

ODDS & ENDS:

- 1 bag of miscellaneous size Ziplocs/garbage bags
- 1-2 replacement clips for dry bags & camp straps
- Fluorescent trail-marking tape
- Carabiners of various sizes
- Assorted kayak hardware (nuts, bolts, etc)
- Bear spray (It works for *numerous* animals)

To be Added if Camping:

- 1 Tent Repair Kit, including tent-pole repair section
- 1 Kenyon K-Tape repair tape for ripstop
- Sleep pad valve & repair kit

Campfire Safety Gear:

- Gerber E-tool folding shovel (also for "cat holes")
- 20L Sea-to-Summit Kitchen Sink (holds 5 gallons)
- Generic 5-gallon plastic bucket

First-Aid Kit additions, if not already included in yours:

- Sunscreen and lip balm
- Aloe Vera gel or a burn gel
- New-Skin Liquid Bandage & Polysporin ointment
- Corticosteroid creme & Benedryl, *if safe for you*
- Pepto-Bismol, Imodium, and TUMS, *if safe for you*
- Ibuprofen or Acetaminophen, *if safe for you*
- Saline solution (not eye drops, *unless needed*)
- "Tick Key" tick remover (It really works!)
- Moleskin
- A Sam Splint
- Phys Therapist's Tape or Veterinary "horse wrap"
- Better quality tweezers & nail clippers
- Several tampons or maxipads
- Glucose or a bag of Skittles (if you're diabetic or people in your group *might be*)
- *Your personal prescription medications!*

This gear list is just a starting point to think about real-world safety. Your sport, location, and the time of the year you venture out can demand a significantly different set of skills, tools and first-aid items. You also need to consider your overall skill level and health condition. That's why you definitely should talk with experienced outdoors enthusiasts - *and your physician about the first-aid information on this list.*

You can also take some great classes to learn more about bush craft, paddling skills, hunting safety, first-aid and CPR, to name just a few. Several organizations, like Wilderness Medical Associates International or NOLS, also offer some great courses specifically on Wilderness First Aid or five to eight-day courses to become a Wilderness First Responder.

Speaking of education, it's a good idea to know how your gear works before going into the field. Read about it, test it, and become thoroughly familiar with it before you go. You also should take only critical gear and medications, sunscreens, ointments, etc., that you already have used *before* venturing further afield. You don't want to learn the hard way that your new tent has a defect or you're allergic to a certain medicine or lotion in the middle of the wilderness!

If you found this handout online or at our booth at an outdoors show, you missed some background info that I talk about in my presentations regarding my approach to safety (based on my doing *everything* wrong at some point). In these talks, I also discuss the reasons why certain items are included in my kit and the ways in which I use them. You'll find some of that information on our website (<http://theoutdoorkind.com>), and I'll share some additional information below. Of course, your views on all of this may vary but here are some overall considerations:

1. No matter what outdoor activity you enjoy, *always* carry a good first-aid kit and keep it in a waterproof container!

I have used Adventure Medical Kits for years and highly recommend them for both quality and affordability.



It sounds cliché, but a good first-aid kit literally can be the difference between life and death in an emergency. Note how this Adventure Medical Kit is laid out (at right). Items are separated into pockets to make finding what you need much faster and easier. These include categories such as "Stop Bleeding Fast," "Medication," and "Instrument." In an emergency, quick response time is everything so this set-up makes great sense.

2. Think "redundant systems." There's duplication on my list because sometimes a critical piece of gear fails. *Always have a backup for critical gear.* In some cases, it's easy to just take two of the same item. At other times, you might carry a multi-tool that has a backup item you need. Just remember - it's generally true that the more "multi-use" and complicated a piece of gear, the more likely it is to fail. For example, smart phone navigation apps are great...till they don't work. Or your phone dies. Or you drop it in water. Consider a dedicated Garmin inReach satellite communicator (with its SOS feature) instead. Or go old school and bring a compass, plus a topographical map or possibly a printed Google satellite map with mileage scale. All of these items are small, reliable, and don't add much weight to your kit. And all are absolutely invaluable should you have a problem!

3. You are *never* packing these kits for you alone. For example, your friends may have forgotten to bring their kits on a trip and they need help. Or worse, maybe they need more of a specific item than what they have in their kits in an emergency. If you're solo adventuring, meanwhile, you may come across someone who's injured or has lost their gear and desperately needs your help. Nothing will make you feel better than helping others when they need it the most!

4. The three most dangerous words in the English language are 'I'm just gonna...' If this quote sounds like I'm over-reaching about a safety issue, let me say this: It's *not* my quote. It's what an army survival trainer told Chad Willemsen, The Outdoor Kind's fire and safety advisor. Why did he say this? Because if you say you're *just* going to do something, you're downplaying the seriousness of it. And it's easy to fall into that habit, particularly when you're doing some activity in your own backyard. I once said, "I'm just gonna' sneak in a quick solo trip on the lower Wisconsin River." One severed ACL, an unpleasant surgery and long recovery, as well as \$51,000 of medical bills later, I realized it wasn't such a little thing. Have fun out there, but remember that there is *always* risk involved and plan accordingly!

5. Last, but not least, *always* be concerned about fire safety. I listed three great items for campfire safety on the kit list. A Gerber "E-tool" shovel not only will help you tend or put out a fire, but it can also be used for digging a "cat-hole" in the woods. (Those "unbreakable" plastic backpacker's trowels? I broke one, four days into a 15-day trip, and will never go into the backcountry without my Gerber E-tool if I'm paddling or a metal trowel if I'm hiking.) I also highly recommend the Sea To Summit Kitchen Sink. It's a small, portable nylon water container that holds 20 litres (about five gallons). It's tough, lightweight, folds down very small, and is easily stored. Expand it, fill it up from a stream or lake and you can put out a fire or be ready if the fire escapes your rock or metal ring. Canoeists and car campers also can purchase an inexpensive five-gallon plastic white bucket and lid from any home improvement store. You can stow gear in it for your trip, then take the equipment out at camp and fill the bucket with water. *Always* be careful with fire!

Fire Prevention Tips!



Illustration at left from the Province of Alberta's excellent campaign to prevent forest fires.

- Put your hand down *near* fire to be sure it's out!
- Do not just bury a fire in the sand. It may not be out!

I hope you find this information useful, particularly at the start of so many sports' most active season. While considerable effort has been made to provide accurate information in this article, its author and The Outdoor Kind, LLC, take no responsibility for any errors or omissions. There is some risk involved in all outdoor activities, and ultimate responsibility for safety lies solely with the individual participant. Educate yourself, talk with experts, and make decisions that avoid any unnecessary risk. And have the best time of your life out there!

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