

EMERGENCY

GEAR FOR YOUR VEHICLE

By Jackie Clay

We've all been there: you're driving down the road and suddenly, without warning, the truck just stops. Or during the worst snow storm of the year, you hit a rough drift and slide into the ditch, miles from a living soul. Aside from that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach, you're all alone. Helpless?

No! Sure, such scenarios are scary and inconvenient, but they don't have to be as life-threatening as they frequently are. Carrying a little emergency gear in the vehicle just makes good common sense.

And it makes just such emergencies bearable. Just as everyone knows it's sensible to carry an inflated spare tire, a jack, and lug wrench for your vehicle so it won't get stuck, carrying emergency gear for you and your family's safety and comfort makes just as much sense.

A good flashlight with fresh batteries is a must in every vehicle. We carry ours under the driver's seat and check it frequently to be sure the batteries are in good shape. Nothing is more miserable than having some sort of trouble in the night and being in the dark.

Carry as much emergency gear in your vehicle as you can conveniently. If you have the room, carry a gear box, such as we have under the shell of our pickup. It's large enough for a sleeping bag for each member of the family, a change of warm socks, a warm jacket, a small bow saw, a

small propane stove and cartridge, candles, a few butane lighters, a pan, and other gear. Most vehicles will provide room for nearly this much emergency gear in a trunk or other little used cargo space.

Every vehicle should have at least one warm blanket in it. Even during the summer. At night, or during a rain, it can get cold without the heater to run periodically.

A few warm clothes, tucked in a dust-proof bag in the trunk, can be a life-saver, especially in wet or winter weather. Be sure to have something for all members of the family.

Heat, in the form of a candle or propane stove or lantern, is a good idea. Be careful when using a candle, as they can easily be knocked over inside a vehicle, causing a flash fire of toxic fumes. But even a smallish candle can provide enough heat to keep a family from freezing to death inside a vehicle that is disabled. It will also provide light to attract the attention of

rescuers and help prevent the vehicle from being struck by passing traffic or a snowplow.

When using any form of heat, whether it be from starting the vehicle from time to time to keep warm or a candle, be sure to crack open a downwind window, preventing carbon monoxide poisoning. This odorless toxic gas has killed hundreds of stranded motorists, silently, without warning.

A means to make a fire is a must. The fire can draw attention to you if you need help, it can cook food and can keep you warm. Fire starters can range from butane lighters to wind-proof matches to a flint, magnesium, steel kit. This last is the best.

Always carry vital motor and radiator fluids, as well as a gallon jug of water in the trunk. These include anti-freeze, brake fluid, transmission fluid and, most important, motor oil. For the lack of a quart of oil, you could blow the engine. And it could be a



long walk to "civilization," especially knowing you face a \$1500 engine job.

Stick a good shovel in the trunk. If you don't have room for a full sized shovel, cut the handle off one to fit, leaving as much of the handle as you can, or use a folding Army shovel. The new Army issue folds down to 12 inches. A shovel could save your butt if you get stuck in snow or mud.

Likewise, always carry a set of jumper cables. You can usually find someone willing to give your dead battery a jump, but he doesn't always have his own cables.

A basic tool box is essential. Simple tools, such as a couple of screwdrivers, an adjustable wrench, a pair of channel lock pliers, wire cutters, a battery terminal cleaner, hammer, electrician's tape, and duct tape can save the day. Even if you don't know much about auto mechanics, a knowledgeable passer-by may be willing to help, if he has the tools.

In this vein, be sure you have a box of assorted fuses tucked away in the glove box. Something as simple as a blown fuse may disable a vehicle. (One tip here, if you are lacking a correct sized fuse, rob a like sized fuse from something non-essential, such as the radio, replacing it when you get to a service station.)

Have drinking water with you at all times. This can be that gallon of water in the trunk, but if it is, change it from time to time, keeping it fresh. People have died from lack of water, and not always in southwestern deserts.

A fire extinguisher is a good addition to a vehicle's emergency gear. I've had a van I was driving catch fire without warning. Luckily a fire extinguisher was handy. All that burned up was the wiring under the hood. Check the fire extinguisher at least twice a year, to make sure it is charged.

Carrying a good, moderate sized first-aid kit is essential. Many of our little emergencies happen periodically. The kids skin a knee, your husband gets a steel sliver in his hand, you burn your arm checking the radiator.

Nothing earth-shattering, but, at the time, emergencies nevertheless.

Find a sturdy, flat plastic box that will fit under the seat and fill it with common sense first-aid gear: assorted adhesive strips (cuts, scrapes, blisters, etc.), eye drops, a needle and tweezers to remove slivers, antibiotic ointment, Betadine or iodine, a roll of two-inch gauze and gauze squares (sterile), burn ointment, aspirin, Tylenol, and anti-diarrheal tablets. Tailor your kit to your family's lifestyle. Make it comprehensive, but not bulky.

A little "survival" food, tucked in a bag or box in the trunk or under the seat, is a great idea. We certainly won't starve without a few meals, but I, for one, would rather have a little something to munch on than to go without. This is especially true during times of duress. This survival food can be high energy bars; small cracker and cheese or peanut butter packages; pop-top foods such as chili, stew, wieners, MREs (military meals ready to eat), dehydrated fruit slices, etc. The main thing is to choose foods that are not affected by heat/cold, will not go stale quickly, and will provide energy and satisfaction.

Now don't laugh, but toilet paper should be in every vehicle. Yep, you can do without it, but wiping on stick-sand rocks is one aspect of my Native American heritage that I don't want to return to. Besides, toilet paper can be used to start a campfire, wipe the oil stick when checking the oil, staunch minor bleeding, clean up messy kids, and blow your nose.

A transistor radio, especially one of those little ones that is both solar-powered and rechargeable with a built-in crank, would be handy to keep track of weather and/or riots. And don't forget snow chains for winter.

I'm sure, with these hints, you can think of things you'd like to include in your family's personal vehicle emergency kit. No two families are the same in their needs, but the point is to be ready for the unexpected, then relax and enjoy life. Δ

ON YOUR PERSON

On your person you should carry some or all of the following:

- means to make a fire, whether it's a butane lighter, wind-proof matches, or better yet, one of those pocket-sized magnesium and flint and steel tools such as you find sold at the Preparedness Expos.
- pocket knife or Leatherman type tool with can opener, pliers, screwdrivers, saw, tweezers, etc.
- vital medical prescriptions
- emergency money

Also wear proper footwear, not sandals. If you wear the new popular "fanny pack," you can carry more, such as a tiny fishing kit, consisting of hooks, line, and sinker placed in a film canister. Also some granola bars, a garbage bag (raincoat), and a tiny flashlight. Some people even carry a gun in their fanny pack.

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