

Winter Outdoor-Survival Tips

If you're the type of Idaho outdoors enthusiast who likes to go off the beaten path, it's important to check and double-check that you are adequately prepared for the "what ifs." Some of this country's greatest outdoors people live in Idaho, yet even an experienced person can find himself in some kind of an unexpected situation.

ALWAYS BE PREPARED

Saint Alphonsus would like you to remember these tips as you venture outdoors this season:

Signaling for Help

When you decide to stay put and wait for rescue, prepare help signals as soon as possible. The international emergency sign for distress is three of any signal: three shots, three blasts on a whistle, three flashes with a mirror, or three fires evenly spaced.

If you're near an open space, walk an "X" in the snow, grass, or sand. Make it as large as possible so that it can be seen easily from the air. Placing branches, logs, or rocks along the "X" will make it more visible. Do not light signal fires until you hear an aircraft. Adding green boughs, preferably pine if available, to the fire will help create smoke.

Personal locator beacons (PLBs) send out a personalized emergency distress signal to a monitored satellite system and are a highly effective and internationally recognized way to summon help in a life-or-death situation. When you buy a PLB, you must register it with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Shelter

Build a shelter. The best is a nylon tarp shelter as it will protect you from wind, rain, and snow. Insulate the floor of the shelter with pine boughs, if available.

Avoid contact with cold surfaces (the ground, rocks, or snow). Wrap your body in a thermal foil blanket. This will maintain a temperature of 60° F inside the wrap even when the outside temperature is -10° F. Limit your physical activity to conserve energy.

Remember, once you have a shelter, fire, and your signal prepared, you can focus on water and food.

COPING WITH EXTREME WEATHER

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is one of the most common and dangerous risks to outdoorsmen. Hypothermia is often induced by cold, wet conditions such as rain, snow, sleet, or immersion in water.

Hypothermia can be prevented by dressing in layers of clothing that draws moisture away from the body (no cotton) and water-repellant outer garments by avoiding potentially dangerous weather conditions, and by drying out as quickly as possible when you get wet. High-calorie foods, such as chocolate, peanuts, or raisins, provide quick energy that helps your body produce heat.

Frostbite

Frostbite occurs when tissue freezes. The best prevention is to keep all extremities covered and plan ahead to avoid severe weather. If you're caught in extremely cold weather, pay attention to your head, fingers, toes, ears, and nose. Wear a face cover if the temperature is below zero degrees Fahrenheit. If you experience any symptoms of frostbite, seek medical treatment immediately.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Improperly working camp stoves and lanterns, as well as wood and charcoal fires, can produce lethal carbon monoxide. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, dizziness, weakness, and difficulty in breathing. The victim's skin can turn red, and he or she can lose consciousness. Get victims into fresh air immediately and keep them lying quietly. Prompt medical care is essential.

Broken Bones

You can assume someone has a broken bone if pain lasts more than a few minutes, moving the injured area is difficult, or there is swelling in the injured area.

If you have to transport the victim a long distance, it's best to immobilize the joint above and below the break to prevent further injury and relieve pain. Don't try to straighten the limb—splint it the way you found it. For a broken foot, remove the shoe and tie a pillow or thick padding around the foot.

Chest Wounds

A bullet striking the chest can cause a sucking chest wound—a deep, open wound of the chest wall that allows air into the chest cavity.

All chest injuries are very serious and need immediate medical attention.

To respond immediately to a chest wound:

- Use the palm of your hand to cover the wound until a bandage is located.
- Cover the wound with sterile gauze, a clean cloth, plastic, or foil.
- Make sure the wound cover forms an airtight seal.
- Hold the gauze in place with a bandage or tape.
- If the victim has trouble breathing, remove the bandage and replace it quickly.
- Transport the victim to the hospital.

Moving an Injured Person

Moving a victim with a back or neck injury should be left to paramedics or other emergency medical professionals since permanent damage could result from improper handling. If a victim must be pulled to safety, move him or her lengthwise and head first, supporting the head and neck. Keep the spine in alignment.

Keep Your Wits About You

"People who can keep their wits about them after an accident and believe they will survive and then work toward that goal have a greater chance of being rescued and saved than those who panic and lose hope that they will be saved," states outdoors enthusiast and Life Flight Nurse, Tim Rawlings.

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