

Oct. 29, 2006, 11:03PM **OUTDOORS**

## **Take the time to be prepared for unpredictable moments**

New technology offers right stuff in time of need

By **DOUG PIKE**

Copyright 2006 Houston Chronicle

Technology continues to spread its luxury around the neighborhood and throughout the backcountry in ways that make outdoors activity safer and more enjoyable. Even in the middle of nowhere, it seems, people willing to pay for it can have electricity delivered to their doorsteps. And once that switch is thrown, there's no end to what can be hauled into camp to make the place homey.

From microwave ovens to satellite television, outdoors camps are getting "softer." We're addicted to the juice that fuels those appliances — but the day always comes when it's not there. No matter what causes the lights to flicker and fail, none of us likes to be left in the dark, literally or figuratively. If there's a storm, we want to know when it will strike and with what force. If we're on the trail, we want to get back to camp or home safely. And if we're injured in an accident, we want to get cleaned up and patched up pronto.

Not long ago, batteries fueled our radios and flashlights in emergencies, and first aid came in a box the size of a foot locker. Now, portable power is at our fingertips, literally, and a medical kit capable of tending to almost any problem short of tonsillitis will fit in a glove box or backpack. Latest among useful gadgets to catch my attention are those in the growing family of lights and radios that require no batteries. Instead, they're fitted with hand cranks, like old kids toys, that generate the electricity to run them.

### **Power up**

Life+Gear's ([lifegearcompany.com](http://lifegearcompany.com)) 6-in-1 Personal Safety Device is about the size of an early cell phone and includes a cell phone charger, which is the communications equivalent of air or water. The device also packs a low-energy consumption LED flashlight, signal flasher visible to a half-mile, emergency FM radio, compass and even a 130-decibel siren in case you tire of screaming for help. Cost is about \$40, batteries not necessary.

If you're not in organ-grinder mood when the lights go out, stuff a solar-powered flashlight ([solareagle.com](http://solareagle.com), [earthtorch.com](http://earthtorch.com)) in your pack. Leave it outside by day, and you've got a reliable light source through the night. These things start around \$20.

Even if you're headed into a cave, it's a good idea to pack a first-aid kit any time you leave home and to add a survival kit if you'll be deep enough into the woods that you couldn't crawl out in an hour on a broken leg. Select a first-aid kit based on how many

people are in the group and how long they'll be on their own: The bigger the party, the greater the risks.

Skill and experience play roles in the selection process, as well; choose accordingly.

Adventure Medical Kits ([adventuremedicalkits.com](http://adventuremedicalkits.com)) offers a complete line of first-aid packs, several of which are built for specific outdoor activities such as hunting or fishing. They're great for deer camps or bay houses, and contents are organized for fast retrieval. Cost ranges from just a few bucks for essentials to more than \$100 to watch over a major expedition.

Life+Gear recently introduced its new Life Pack, which combines a generous selection of first-aid items with survival-related gear such as a multi-tool, thermal blanket, poncho and whistle. That bundle of security is going to cost you about \$70. It's bulky, too, bigger than you'd want strapped to your back for a long hike, but comprehensive.

If my survival were on the line, I'd want some fishing tackle in the sack, and Adventure Medical Kits' new, pint-sized Pocket Survival Pack has it. In addition to small hooks and split shot — you're not trophy fishing, after all — there's also a swivel, which could be sharpened to serve as a hook if you lost the originals but otherwise serves no purpose.

## **Survival essentials**

Also in this pack are such common-sense survival essentials as duct tape, safety pins, fire starter, wire, scalpel blade, heavy thread, whistle, mirror — and waterproof instructions on staying calm so you can get the most out of everything else in the pack. Cost is about \$40, and this one fits nicely into the cargo pocket on a pair of shorts or the side pouch in a backpack.

There's a long list of items any of us might drop into a pack or glove box, any of which seems essential at the moment but has no value in a pinch. Next time you shuffle through the duffel, make room for a wind-up radio, a flashlight that doesn't need batteries or a survival kit.

Emergency gear is like insurance. Buy it and carry it in case you need it, then hope you never do.

*Doug Pike covers the outdoors for the Chronicle and hosts Inside the Outdoors from 6-9 a.m. Saturdays on 790 AM. [doug.pike@chron.com](mailto:doug.pike@chron.com). Copyright 2006 Houston Chronicle*