



## Vehicle Safety Kit

As winter approaches it is time to prepare a vehicle safety kit. In the high country of Colorado you should keep a kit in your car year round, but winter is the most critical time. You may also need snow tires, new windshield wipers and fluid, anti-freeze, heater/air conditioner service, recommended scheduled tune-ups, etc.

A vehicle safety kit is crucial to have on hand for breakdowns and unusual weather conditions. It is always good to keep essential supplies in your car in case you get stranded for a few hours or even a few days.

Your kit should contain the basic essentials such as water, food, and warmth. After these basics are included you can add other necessities such as an emergency light, first aid items, tools and other accessories.

**Water:** Drinkable water is the most important item in the kit. Most people can actually survive days without food, but your body will dehydrate without water, leading to organ failure and death. We take the abundance of water for granted when things are normal, but in an emergency it becomes critical. Water is also useful for washing wounds and for sanitation. Water can also be helpful if your car overheats. Because of the limited space in automobiles, storing water must be in small packages. Water is available in small drink boxes (8.45 oz.), in pouches (4.2 oz.) and in various sizes of plastic bottles. Storing your water in a small cooler will help keep it at a useable temperature most of the year.

**Food:** If your car breaks down and you're many miles from any town or store, you will want to have food in your kit to ensure you retain enough energy to stay warm and think clearly. It is very difficult to store food in your car because it is exposed to extreme temperatures, both hot and cold, and the food, if perishable, is likely to spoil or freeze. The best thing to store in your car is high calorie food bars. These bars come in packages of 2400 calories and 3600 calories. They can be exposed to extreme temperatures, taste good, and won't leave you thirsty. The bars help activate the salivary gland and reduce your demand on emergency water supplies. They also expand in your stomach so you feel full, but because of their high calorie count must be consumed with care.

**Warmth:** You may have plenty of food and water, but if you're cold you'll feel miserable and be less likely to stay alert. Especially in the winter provisions for staying warm is a must for an emergency car kit. Provisions for providing warmth include six to 20 hour warm packs, wool blankets and emergency bags and blankets. For shelter from the rain, include a poncho or other rain gear. A large heavy duty trash bag can be used for an emergency poncho by cutting or tearing holes for arms and your head, this will also help you retain body heat.

Warm packs are excellent for quick, concentrated heat. They can easily be inserted into pockets, shoes and gloves.

Wool is one of nature's warmest fibers even when it's wet. A wool blend blanket is also a good choice as it affords the warmth of wool along with ease of care, softness and durability synthetic fibers provide...

Emergency blankets and bags are lightweight and fold to pocket size. They're made of a reflective material which reflects up to 80% of your radiant body heat to help keep you warm.

**Light:** It's important to always keep a flashlight in your emergency car kit. LED lights have a much longer battery life than conventional flashlights and are essential for emergency car kits. Be sure to keep charged batteries in the flashlight so you aren't left in the dark. Other lights that could be useful in your auto emergency kit are light sticks, emergency candles with a wide base and waterproof matches.

Light sticks last for 12 hours and are safe for children. They are visible up to one mile away, and they are non-toxic and non-flammable.

Emergency candles or liquid paraffin candles are long-lasting, reusable, odorless and smokeless. A wide base adds stability which helps prevent accidental spills which is especially nice for the car. Also, be sure to keep waterproof matches in your emergency car kit so you can light it.

**First Aid Items:** If injury occurs, every second counts because help may be hours or days away. A first aid kit allows you to assist with injuries until help arrives. Keep items such as pain relievers, sterile pads, alcohol prep pads, bandages, soap, gauze pads, and tape. You may also want to include tissues, toilet paper, safety pins and ace bandages. **All of these items will come in handy when you are in need of first aid on the road.**

**Tools:** Consider tools such as a multi-purpose knife and a collapsible shovel for your car. A shovel may come in handy if you are to get stuck in the snow or mud. A multi-purpose knife provides many different tools in a small amount of space. A basic tool kit and a roll of duct tape are also good items to keep in your car.

**Other Accessories:** Road flares may also be useful in your auto emergency kit, but they should only be used for a warning signal, and should NEVER be used for light. Once a road flare has been lit, make sure you set it on a non-flammable surface. The byproduct from the fire drips to the ground and may cause a fire if it lands on flammable material such as grass, or if there is a gas leak. Extreme care must be used because the fumes are noxious and must be used only in a well-ventilated area.

There are a number of pre-packaged emergency car kits available on the market, or you can customize your own. If you are purchasing a pre-packed kit remember that you may need to customize your kit according to your needs (medications, glasses, etc.) Keep your kit in a compact case so it fits easily in your trunk or under a seat.

As you prepare for the winter, remember to stock your car with an emergency car kit. When that snowstorm causes you to be stranded, you will be grateful you took the time to think ahead. The more conveniences you include, the better your situation will be.

The following tips will be helpful if you do become stranded in your vehicle. It may be helpful to print these tips and keep them in your vehicle.

## **If you become stranded in your vehicle**

1. Under no circumstances should you leave your vehicle unless you are **ABSOLUTELY** sure where you are and how far away it is to get help. If you have an infant or small child (or children) with you the best idea is to **STAY** with the vehicle and wait for help.
2. Use your cell phone to call 911 and also contact friends, family or neighbors for help. Make sure several people are looking for you! Sometimes you can send and receive text messages even if you do not have voice cell phone coverage.
3. If it appears that traffic on the road you're on will be minimal, light two flares and put them at each end of your vehicle to flag attention to your disabled vehicle. Flares also indicate that a person is present with an incapacitated vehicle.
4. Put on extra clothes and cover with blankets to stay warm. Don't open car doors except to get your emergency equipment. Conserve the heat inside the car and be very mindful of your activity.
5. Do not run the engine continually, particularly if the exhaust pipes are buried in snow or are otherwise obstructed. Carbon monoxide poisoning is a risk in a running, stationary car. If you start to feel sleepy, open a window briefly to provide fresh air.
6. If you have a full or near full gas tank, you can run the engine and heater for about 10 minutes per hour while you are waiting for help. A full gas tank also reduces condensation in the tank, which can lead to the fuel system freezing.
7. Consume any emergency food supplies sparingly. Particularly in rural areas, it could be much longer than you anticipate before help arrives, especially if there are blizzard conditions.