

LEAN-TO SHELTER

SITE SELECTION & BUILDING CHECKLIST

Use this quick-reference checklist before and during construction of an emergency lean-to. Adapt the shelter to weather, terrain, available equipment and local regulations.

1. CHOOSE THE SITE FIRST

- ☐ Look up: avoid dead limbs, leaning trees, unstable rock and other overhead hazards.
- ☐ Look down: avoid depressions, dry washes, stream channels and ground where water could collect.
- ☐ Look around: avoid cliff edges, exposed ridges, avalanche paths and other terrain hazards.
- ☐ Choose reasonably level ground with natural protection from prevailing wind when possible.
- ☐ Stay far enough from streams and shorelines to account for rising water.
- ☐ Check whether shelter construction or collection of natural materials is permitted.

2. USE WHAT YOU CARRY BEFORE IMPROVISING

- ☐ Use a tarp, emergency bivvy or other carried shelter before spending hours recreating the same capability from natural materials.
- ☐ Keep paracord or utility cord available for a ridgeline, tie-outs and basic shelter setup.
- ☐ Use a headlamp before darkness makes site evaluation and construction harder.
- ☐ Keep cutting tools controlled and use them only for appropriate camp tasks.

3. BUILD A SIMPLE, STABLE LEAN-TO

- ☐ Establish a stable ridgeline, ridgeline or high anchor before adding the roof.
- ☐ For a natural shelter, place smaller supports close enough together to hold roofing material.
- ☐ For a tarp lean-to, secure one edge higher and angle the opposite edge toward the ground.
- ☐ Keep the shelter only as large as necessary for the people and equipment needing protection.
- ☐ Angle the roof steeply enough to shed expected rain rather than collect it.
- ☐ If using natural roofing, overlap material from bottom to top so water tends to run over the layers.

4. INSULATE FROM THE GROUND

- ☐ Remove sharp objects and obvious hazards from the sleeping area.
- ☐ Create a dry insulating layer between your body and the ground.
- ☐ Use a sleeping pad, emergency bivvy, dry vegetation, spare clothing, pack or other suitable insulation.
- ☐ Do not assume a roof alone will keep you warm.

5. BEFORE YOU SETTLE IN

- ☐ Recheck the shelter for unstable branches, supports or loose materials.
- ☐ Confirm wind and drainage have not changed as weather develops.
- ☐ Keep first aid, water, navigation, signaling and lighting equipment within reach.
- ☐ If using a fire, confirm it is legal and safe, maintain adequate separation, and never leave it unattended.
- ☐ Improve weak areas before darkness or worsening weather makes the work harder.

QUICK REMINDER

A shelter is successful when it reduces exposure without creating a new hazard. Site selection, wind protection, rain shedding and ground insulation matter more than making the structure look impressive.