

OUTDOOR SURVIVAL PRIORITIES

FIRST HOUR / FIRST NIGHT CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to organize priorities during an unexpected outdoor emergency. Conditions vary, so adapt these steps to injuries, weather, terrain, daylight and available equipment.

FIRST 10 MINUTES - STOP, ASSESS, PRIORITIZE

- ☐ Stop moving long enough to think clearly and avoid making the situation worse.
- ☐ Check yourself and others for serious bleeding, breathing problems, fractures or other urgent injuries.
- ☐ Move away from immediate hazards such as falling rock, unstable terrain, severe weather exposure or wildfire danger.
- ☐ Determine your approximate location and whether someone knows your planned route or return time.
- ☐ Check remaining daylight, weather, clothing, water, shelter materials, signaling tools and navigation equipment.
- ☐ Decide whether staying put is safer than moving. Do not travel blindly just because you feel pressure to act.

FIRST HOUR - BUILD YOUR SAFETY MARGIN

- ☐ Treat urgent injuries and protect wounds as well as your supplies allow.
- ☐ Reduce exposure to wind, rain, cold, heat or direct sun. Add insulation before you become dangerously chilled.
- ☐ Choose a safe shelter location away from dead trees, flood channels, avalanche paths, exposed ridges and other obvious hazards.
- ☐ Make yourself easier to find. Use a whistle, signal mirror, bright material, light or other visible/audible signal when appropriate.
- ☐ Inventory your water. Identify the safest available source and plan how you will filter, disinfect or otherwise treat it.
- ☐ Protect your paper map and establish direction before traveling. Use a compass only if you understand the route and destination.
- ☐ Prepare fire-starting materials if fire is safe, legal and genuinely useful for warmth, signaling or water treatment.

BEFORE DARK - PREPARE FOR THE FIRST NIGHT

- ☐ Improve shelter before darkness makes construction harder.
- ☐ Insulate yourself from the ground using a sleeping pad, pack, dry vegetation or other suitable material.
- ☐ Put on dry layers early rather than waiting until you are already cold.
- ☐ Stage your headlamp or flashlight where you can reach it easily.
- ☐ Collect and treat enough water for the evening and next morning when possible.
- ☐ Keep essential equipment together: first aid, navigation, signaling, water treatment, fire kit and cutting tool.
- ☐ If using a fire, establish it before dark and keep it controlled. Never rely on fire when conditions make it unsafe.
- ☐ Create a visible signaling area if rescuers may be searching for you.

DO NOT WASTE EARLY ENERGY ON LOW-PRIORITY TASKS

- ☐ Do not make food gathering your first priority in a short-term emergency.
- ☐ Do not wander without a navigation plan simply to feel like you are making progress.
- ☐ Do not rely on unfamiliar wild plants or mushrooms for food.
- ☐ Do not depend on a single fire-starting method, electronic device or water-treatment method when backups are available.
- ☐ Do not let gear replace judgment. Shelter, location awareness, signaling and sound decisions usually matter more than gadgets.

Remember: The Rule of Threes is a prioritization framework, not a stopwatch. Immediate injuries and hazards come first, followed by protection from exposure, rescue/signaling, safe water and navigation. Food is usually a later concern in a short-term survival situation.

SURVIVAL PLACE BLOG | Practical preparedness. Skills before gadgets.