

## **A CHECKLIST FOR SAFETY: The 10 Essential Categories**

To ensure that you can deal with an emergency and spend an unforeseen night in the backcountry, experts from The [Seattle] Mountaineers<sup>1</sup> advise you to carry the following at all times while traveling in the wilderness:

[ ] **NAVIGATION:** This incorporates the first two items of the old list: **map** and **compass**. Both still are mandatory, along with the knowledge of how to use them. The map should be topographical and carried in a waterproof container, such as a large, zipper-lock plastic bag. Climbers and other off-trail travelers might also carry an altimeter plus a GPS unit. Glacier travelers sometimes use wands to mark routes.

[ ] **INSULATION:** This category used to be listed as **extra clothing**, but it now includes inner and outer socks, boots, underwear, pants, etc. Your insulation should allow you to survive the worst conditions you can realistically expect. In winter, that means a blizzard. Your clothes should not be cotton, which steals your body heat when wet and increases the risk of hypothermia. Instead, use wool layers. If you insist on using synthetics such as polypropylene and nylon, wear at least one layer of wool next to your skin—it's much safer in the event of fire. This category also includes full rain gear—pants and jacket. Curious fact: A hat provides more warmth for its weight than any other piece of clothing.

[ ] **ILLUMINATION:** The category is the same as the old one, although many hikers these days are using headlamps with light-emitting diodes (LEDs) rather than traditional flashlights with bulbs. LEDs do not throw a beam as well as traditional flashlights, but they're lighter and do not burn out batteries as rapidly. Some models include both bulbs and LEDs. Carry extra batteries to be safe, and if you use a flashlight, carry an extra bulb.

[ ] **COMMUNICATION:** Did you leave your **itinerary** with someone who will know to get a search started if you don't return on time? Can you signal others in your party (or someone else nearby)? This means carrying a **whistle**. Can you contact outside help, in an emergency? Depending on your circumstances, this could be by walkie-talkie (GMRS) radio, cell phone, personal locator beacon, lightweight pistol, etc.

[ ] **HYDRATION & NUTRITION:** You can live for days without food—but not long without water, and dehydration can sneak up on you. Always carry at least one **water bottle** per person, and it's a good idea to pack iodine tablets to treat additional water, or carry a filter. Carry at least enough **food** for an extra day and night in the woods. It should require no cooking and store well: granola, jerky, nuts, candy, dried fruit, biscuits, etc.

[ ] **SUN PROTECTION:** This is critical in the mountains, especially on snow. **Sunglasses** should provide ultraviolet protection; dime-store cheapies may not be worth a dime on snow. **Sunscreen** should be rated at least SPF 30. If it sweats off, apply more. Skin cancer can kill.

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<sup>1</sup> with a few add-ons, simplifications, and comments by Philip Kollas, CROC

[ ] **FIRST-AID SUPPLIES:** Taking a first-aid course is a great idea, especially mountaineering-oriented first aid. That way you'll know how to properly use your first-aid supplies—and the few medicines you should carry. Note: Experts say many prepackaged first-aid kits are inadequate; build your own based on your own abilities. I carry a small (1/2-oz) bottle of New-Skin liquid bandage, which can multitask (replaces moleskin; protects cuts & scrapes).

[ ] **FIRE:** This used to include **matches** in a waterproof container, and those are still good. But many climbers and hikers now carry at least two disposable **lighters** instead. This category also includes **fire starter**, such as candles, fire paste, canned heat, or my favorite: Vaseline-soaked cotton balls (stored in a sealed plastic container)—cheap, light, compact, and effective.

[ ] **REPAIR KIT AND TOOLS:** This category replaces the simple **knife**, which still is essential but now available in a **multitool**, in reasonable weights. The small pair of pliers on many multitools can be unbelievably useful. Include some **cord or light rope**. Depending on what you're doing in the wilderness, you may include safety pins, spare pack clips, cable ties, and good old duct tape. A quaint tradition of some hikers is to wrap a few feet of duct tape around their water bottles.

[ ] **EMERGENCY SHELTER:** If you're carrying a tent, you're covered. On day trips, you should at least pack a **space blanket**, in addition to your rain gear. Other options are plastic tube tents or two extra-large plastic **trash bags** (cut a hole for your head in one of them).

And the infamous 11<sup>th</sup> Essential: Toilet paper!

Some references (no, they don't all say the same thing):

<http://www.backpacking.net/ten-essl.html>

[http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/getaways/216076\\_essentials17.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/getaways/216076_essentials17.html)

<http://www.scoutingmagazine.org/issues/0403/d-outs.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten\\_Essentials](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Essentials)

<http://www.backpacking.net/Jims-10-Essentials.html#top>