

SAR Preparation

by Walter Picket

Experience has shown the best, fastest, way of preparing for a mission is to pack the gear into stuff sacks & then the stuff you will "need" into the rescue pack with the rest going into a duffle bag. Keep them together. A good idea to save time is to mark on the stuff sacks what the contents are along with your name & phone number. Gear like carabiners can be marked with colored plastic tape. Sorting gear after a mission goes much faster & easier when equipment is marked.

When the pager goes off, take your rescue pack & duffle bag. Use a checklist to avoid leaving something behind. Immediately after the mission, check, clean, restock & repack the rescue pack & duffle bag as soon as possible. when you get to rendezvous or Base camp, find out from the Operations or team leader what the situation is & repack the rescue pack by transferring the unneeded item out of the pack & into the duffle bag or vice versa very quickly. Sometimes you can get an idea of what will be needed by the terrain, the weather & by listening to a rescue radio or scanner on your way to the mission.

A quick way of finding out what is needed on a mission (because each one is different) is having answers to the following five considerations:

1. Time in the Field.
2. local Resources
3. Resupply
4. type of mission
5. Operational Pressure

With these questions answered, it will be easier to answer what to take & what to leave behind. Let's look at each consideration individually:

1. Time in the field- this question could be answered by you rather than the mission. you might have to be out in the field at a certain time so you can make it to work or other engagements. The callout can also dictate by how you go in to complete your mission. A technical evac can take longer than a walkout evac from the same place. The time of day can make a difference too. A callout at 5 pm in the spring can mean you'll may be getting back to your vehicle after dark.

2. Local Resources-What is the availability of water, shelter or food in the area you'll be operating in. an example is if you're hiking by a running stream. Why carry extra water when it's available right there. Maybe bring along a water filter & purification tablets. Another example would be if you are involved in a search for a child in an urban area, Do you need a full rescue pack? Why carry extra food when there is a convenience store around the corner?

3. Resupply-This is an iffy. You could very easily resupply if you make arrangements with Base Camp or the person who will pick you up at the end of the trail to take you back to Base Camp. It's something to think about.

4. Type of mission-This is almost self-explanatory. If you're on a medical team, you're carrying medical gear. If you're a 2nd Response team, you might be carrying additional medical

gear the med team needs or you've got the stokes, backboard, blanket bag, or tech gear. if you're carrying that, then you can take as little personel gear as needed, but enough to be effective.

5. Operational Pressures-This can be a simple hike to Hutches Pool at night for some fisherman who are late getting out or a search for an 8 year old lost in the mountains when it's snowing. Weather, temperature, & time of day play a big part in this component.

Of course these considerations don't answer all the little details. experience can answer those, but these guidelines can help you keep the pack weight down.

Packing it All Together.

There is another consideration-packing in such a way that if you happen to lose anything, you will still be able to survive & be effective as a rescuer. One of the best ways is never to leave your pack. even if it is just off the road, you should take your pack with you. The other way is having "levels" of distribution for your equipment so that if you do leave your pack behind somewhere, you won't feel completely naked. these levels are:

- Equipment carried on the person
- Equipment frequently needed
- Equipment carried in the backpack

Equipment Carried on the Person

This is where pockets come in handy. Considering shorts, pants, shirts & jackets, you will probably havce several to play with. try to develop a set routine as to what goes in which pocket. A rule of thumb for the sort of gear carried on the person is "an item critical to survival." This could include items like:

Whistle	Compass	Watch
Waterproof matches	pocket knife	Signal mirror
Notebook/pencil	Flashlight	handkerchief
Trash bags	small first aid kit	emergency food

Other items that can be critical to a Wilderness SAR mission is a pocket mask, exam gloves, a radio, & maybe some J-tubes. It doesn't seem like a tall order, but keep in mind, that if you become separated from the rest of your team, you will still have enough to keep going. You could also become separated from your pack & find the victim.

Equipment Frequently needed

Vests, pockets & add on pockets to your pack play a big part in this level. Once again, try to establish an organization & a routine in laying it out. An example is a G.I. canteen & cover or maybe a nalgene water bottle & a nylon water carrier that fits easily on the hip belt of almost any packs. This way, you can drink water without having to stop & take off your pack. there are several

different types of belt pockets & shoulder pouches on the market that can hold frequently needed items within reach. these items might include:

Chemical light sticks
Trail tape
Flashlight
Sunglasses

Lip balm
sunscreen
Insect repellent
Personel medications (if any)

Equipment carried in the backpack

finally, we get to all those extras & backup supplies you'll need to keep going for the duration of the mission. it's amazing how much a pack will hold if you pack it neatly with everything in it's place, Remember, the most essential items should be more accessible (like the first aid kit & BP cuff). One thing to watch out for is the odds & ends on the outside of your pack. not only can you look like a transient looking for a home, but all those items tend to rattle, fall off, or get caught in branches & bushes. each time you stop for a break or an overnight bivy, take the time to replenish water, food, etc, any thing that you've consumed on the move. that way, you'll gradually lighten your pack while maintaining your effectiveness as a Wilderness SAR member. Keep in mind that it is a good idea to pack non-waterproof items in waterproof bags.

Don't be afraid to ask other members what they carry, how they carry it, or what they carry on certain missions. Any members will be happy to answer your questions.