

Organize an Emergency Kit for Your Car

By Julie Lindsey

No matter how well you maintain your car or how safely you drive, there will be times when you face unexpected emergencies on the road. These days the most important item to have with you at all times is a cell phone. Even if you don't need a cellular phone for everyday use, it's smart to keep one charged and in an accessible place in your car. Most cellular phone companies offer discounted rates for customers who need a phone for minimal use.

Although responsible car owners carry the tools to change a flat tire, it's surprising how few actually take the time to prepare a roadside emergency kit. It is smart to carry an emergency kit all year long but it is even more important in winter when bad weather can wreak havoc with road conditions. Be prepared in case you are involved in an accident or stranded. Cell phones may not work in some remote areas and in-car alert systems such as OnStar may not work if the electrical system has a problem.

Find a container that you can easily store in your trunk or another storage area of your vehicle. A waterproof sturdy plastic box, milk crate or a duffel bag should include the following emergency essentials:

- 12-foot jumper cables
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Fire extinguisher (5 lb. ABC model)
- First Aid Kit (include different size bandages, gauze, bandage tape, antibiotic cream, antiseptic solution, ice and heat compresses, scissors, aspirin)
- Four 15-minute roadside flares
- Two quarts of oil
- Gallon of antifreeze
- Extra fuses
- Bottled Water
- Battery powered radio and batteries
- Blanket
- Assortment of flathead and Phillips screwdrivers
- Pliers
- Vise grips
- Adjustable wrench
- Tire inflator
- Tire pressure gauge
- Wheel chock
- Paper towels
- Ice scraper
- Chains (if permitted in the region)

- Four-way tire wrench
- Bag of cat box filler or rock salt
- Small rubber or folding shovel
- Cigarette lighter
- Pen and paper
- Emergency foods such as energy bars, granola bars, dried fruit, or peanut butter.
- A preprinted HELP sign
- Pocketknife or multipurpose tool knife
- Old rags or an old shower curtain (in case you need to spread it beneath the car)
- Old scarf, piece of rope or tie down cord
- Gloves
- Fluorescent safety vest
- Sturdy shoes
- Rain poncho

Many auto supply and discount stores sell prepackaged roadside kits that include the basic items listed above. They range in price from \$24 to \$50 depending on the size of the pack and the number of tools included. You can supplement the items in the ready-made kits with additional items you feel are important for your particular needs. If your trunk space is tight create a smaller kit that includes a multipurpose tool/knife, extra fuses, flashlight, tire inflator, rags, roadside flares, a quart of oil, small first aid kit, pen and paper, blanket, granola bars, bottled water and a HELP sign. A fluorescent safety vest can be a lifesaver if you have to push a car off the road in heavy traffic or make a repair on a narrow shoulder.

Don't just buy an emergency kit, throw it in the trunk and never look at it again. Familiarize yourself with the different tools and emergency items and learn how to use them. Check the bag a few times a year to make sure batteries haven't expired and to see if water and food items need to be replaced. Make seasonal adjustments such as adding extra gloves, hats, a shovel, and blankets in winter. In summer pack extra water, sunglasses and sunscreen in your kit along with a hat big enough to shield you from the sun.

Consider packing three smaller containers inside a larger one. One container should hold first aid supplies including bandages, tape, alcohol wipes, tweezers, etc. Another container should hold your car repair tools, flashlight, flares, liquid tire patch and other vehicle repair items. The third box should contain emergency supplies such as drinking water, granola bars; trail mix, a rain jacket, hat, extra shoes and socks. Label each individual box and label the larger box clearly so that all family members know what it contains.

Organizing a road emergency kit may seem like a big investment of time and money now but if you ever find yourself broken down on a lonely stretch of road, it can help you handle the situation calmly and with confidence.

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