



Urban Survival 101: The Go–Bag The Tools You Need In a Crisis

By Paul C. Scheib

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, all the normal systems that allow New York City to function were either partially or completely shut down. Telephone networks became overloaded and people could not make calls to loved ones. Many of the buses and trains stopped running. Finding a cab was impossible. Hospitals were overwhelmed with the injured and dying. The people living and working all over Manhattan were in such shock life all but stopped.

I will never forget the images of desperate people streaming over the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges desperate to escape the devastation. Many were hurt by falling debris and covered by the acrid dust that came from the buildings' collapse. Some limped because their business attire was not meant for walking long distances. All of them were hungry, tired, and frightened from the day's events.

There were 2,819 people killed in New York City that day. We don't know how many people might have survived if they had received medical attention earlier. And we can never know the extent of the hardships people suffered because the everyday systems they relied on failed.

If you are in the wrong place at the wrong time, you cannot avoid the consequences of natural or man–made disasters. However, you can be prepared to offer aid and comfort to yourself and others by having the essential urban survival tool with you: the Go–Bag.

Sometimes called a “Get Home Bag,” the Go–Bag is a set of resources that can be used to help you in wide range of difficulties. I have one for each one of my family's cars. I have found we use the kit on a regular basis for everyday problems. Here are a few examples:

1. Lost keys outside at night, used flashlight to find them.
2. Got cut at the beach, used the first aid kit to treat the wound.
3. Hungry but could not stop to eat, grabbed a snack on the go.
4. Developed a headache while traveling, took Advil.
5. Short on cash to buy items, used portable ATM.

In the first article of our *Survival Series* [“...Deciding to Shelter-In-Place”](#), we discussed deciding what you will want to do in several different disaster scenarios. Once those decisions have been made, you will be better able to determine how extensive to make your Go-Bag. My family will be sheltering in place, unless we are in the path of a significant natural or man-made disaster. For that contingent, we have an expanded Go-kit that will be covered later. So for us, we just need the tools to get back to the house.

The Bag to Buy?

There is some debate among survivalists about what you should use as a Go-Bag. Some feel it should look as ordinary and nondescript as possible. That is because tactical bags look like they have something worth stealing in them. This could make you a target during a crisis. It is also a particular problem for vehicles without a trunk to lock the bag in.



The other side of the argument says that yes, a tactical bag could get you noticed, but it sends a message that you are “switched on” and not to be trifled with. To solve the theft problem, many folks employ hiding strategies such as keeping the kit in a garbage bag or old cardboard box when it is in a truck or SUV. Or they may have darkly tinted windows preventing someone from seeing inside.

Personally my Go-Bag is an olive green Molle back pack. It is decidedly tactical-looking, but in a crisis I will be armed. So I am not worried that someone is going to take it from me. My wife, on the other hand, wants to maintain the lowest profile possible to avoid conflict. We have used a plain tote bag to store all of her tools.

The common and the most important feature is that both bags can be carried over the shoulder or easily in hand. My back pack has a heavy duty carry handle located at the top of the bag to make it easy to pick up. My wife’s tote has a shoulder strap that allows her to throw it over her back, freeing her hands. In a crisis, things move fast and you need your gear to do the same. If you are on foot you will want to be hands free to deal with obstacles, help others, or use your weapons.

If you need to take your bag off of your back, you will want sturdy, short handles that allow you to easily pick up and move the bag. This is the technique medics use moving around the battlefield. They carry their medical kit by the carry handles for control and speed. You will want to do the same.

The next thing to take into account is the size of the bag. You will want the bag to be small enough to carry in front of you while riding in a vehicle. Your Go-Bag is your life line – it should remain close at hand if you are in a dangerous situation. If you are forced to leave your vehicle suddenly, you may not have the time or the presences of mind to

retrieve your bag from the back. Of course if you are driving and your passenger seat is empty it could ride there or if you have a passenger it could ride in his or her lap.

There is one more important feature to consider: the type of shoulder harness: single or double. The advantage to single strap bags like a tote or a Maxpedition Bag is that they are easy to rotate from your back to your front. That makes all of your gear accessible very quickly. It also makes the entry and exit of a vehicle a snap – while keeping your gear on you. The disadvantage is that these bags limit the scope of your Go-Bag because they are not very large. Weight is also a factor with a single strap because if you have to wear it for extended periods it stresses your carrying shoulder.

If you go with a single strap bag my recommendation is to get one that can be set up to ride on the opposite side from your gun hand. That keeps your bag out of your holster's way. One of the best I have seen is the [Maxpedition Gear Slinger Sitka](#). This bag's broad shoulder strap helps with the weight problem and it holds lots of gear.

The double strapped back pack is about comfort when carrying a lot of gear. The two straps distribute the weight evenly and many backpacks also have a waist belt. The main drawback is bulk and weight. It makes vehicle entry and exit more difficult, but if you are forced to move on foot, it is the most versatile.

If you go with a backpack, I recommend getting one that has just two compartments with zippers that allow you to “rip open” the bag quickly. This will give you the most carrying capacity and cuts down on weight. I also like packs with Molle systems (a strap system for attaching additional bags) on the outside, because you can expand your carry capacity easily and it allows you to reorganize your setup to best suit you. Naturally, you will have to buy the additional pouches. They are available from www.opsgear.com or your local Army Navy Surplus.

The Contents

A basic kit should include:

Medical Supplies – First aid kits from Wal-Mart or other retailers are fine for injuries such as minor cuts and burns. However, in a major crisis, they are woefully deficient. You need to prepare for more serious injuries, like broken bones, severe lacerations, heat strokes, shock, and even knife or gunshot wounds. You can use a pre-made kit as a starting place and then expand from there. I chose to buy a Molle medical bag and start from scratch. I will cover the details of a medical kit in a later article.

Hygiene and Comfort Items – At a minimum, you will need to carry three health items that will be important if you are stranded in one place for a long period: toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and tampons/maxi pads. I would also strongly suggest sunscreen, mosquito repellent and Chap Stick to help you deal with the environmental factors if you are forced to move on foot. You may also want to pack any items that you rely on for daily comfort such as Hydrocortisone Cream, Preparation H, or Arthritis Medicine.

Food Rations – You may not be able to return home immediately or you may be forced to travel on foot and expend a great deal of energy. So, you should carry two days of food supplies in your Go-Bag. I recommend either freeze-dried or dehydrated foods packaged in small quantities. This will add variety to your diet and help you to function at a high level in a crisis. I have tested using energy bars and beef jerky over a two day period as the only food source on a camping trip. What I found was that by day two, you don't feel great because the fuel you are giving your body does not have enough nutrients. There is nothing wrong with having energy bars and beef jerky in your kit, just don't make them the staple of your emergency diet.

Water – Staying hydrated is the single best thing you can do for your body during a crisis. Having water bottles in your kit is a good start. However, the problem with storing the bottles is that they can freeze and split in the winter and become so hot in the summer that they are hard to drink.

A better solution is a hydration bladder with a drink tube that will be filled up in an emergency. It has the advantage of holding a half a gallon of water that is easy to drink while on the move. You can get these at [REI](#), [Sports Authority](#), [opsgear.com](#), and [military.com](#).

Clothing – The size of your Go-Bag will determine how much clothing you take with you. The least you should carry is clean socks and a hat. If you normally wear footwear that is not conducive to walking long distances throw in a pair of running shoes. Then if you have room the other items you may want to consider carrying are a poncho or rain jacket, an extra pair of underwear, and a T-shirt. The clean socks and undergarment will reduce chafing and help you stay warmer at night.

Tools – There are some basic survival tools to carry with you that can be used for a number of different applications. They include:

1. A Compass
2. A knife and/or a Multi-tool
3. A flashlight
4. An emergency blanket
5. Contractor sized garbage bags
6. Emergency Shelter
7. Roll of 550 Cord
8. Duct Tape
9. Glow Sticks
10. Lighter or other fire starter
11. A whistle
12. A small mirror
13. Extra ammunition if you have a gun.

Most of these items are self explanatory. However, I would like to expand on a couple of them. First, the contractor garbage bag is really versatile. I keep two in my Go-Bag. It

can be used: for water collection, as a make shift poncho, as gear cover or concealment, as a sleeping bag, as a tent, as a privacy screen, or just as a garbage bag. Second, the mirror can be used for signaling or for self examination of wounds.

This kit could be the difference between life and death in major crisis or it could just be a life-saver in a small emergency. Either way a Go-Bag can be used to solve all kinds of problems, but only if you have one. Make it a priority and start building yours today.

Practice Exercise 2 - To truly make use of this course's information, you must go through the steps that are outlined.

1. Create a to-do list in your survival plan binder.
2. Think about the items you already have from this article. Write them on your "to pack" list.
3. Now think about the items you do not yet have but feel are important to get and write them on a "to buy" list.
4. Then prioritize the "to buy" items 1 to however many items you want and write down their ranking. Use this list to begin acquiring the items.
5. Test your gear. Find a reason to try out everything you put in your Go-Bag. You want to be confident with it and know what your gear's limitations are and that requires experience.

Remember you do not need everything today. You just need to get started. Now, go execute.

Please visit us at <http://www.thegeorgia9-12project.org> for more installments of our **Survival Series** and for other useful information. Consider joining a chapter near you. It's free.

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