

The following material was presented during an on-air meeting of the Capital Area Amateur Radio Emergency Response Team during the July 13, 2006 net. © 2006 Tim McDonough and CAARERT.

Introduction

All of us are enthusiastic about helping the community and about Amateur Radio. We take pride in our abilities as communicators and in the fixed and portable stations we've assembled.

Good Emergency Communicators have their equipment at the ready and routinely practice message handling, etc. Our *go kits* are brimming with all manner of useful gadgets. We are ready and willing to help out at public service events, Skywarn activations, or more serious emergencies when the need arises.

You are the most important piece of all the things you bring to the table as a communicator. Are *you* up to the challenge?

Think of yourself Second

The telephone rings. It's a group member telling you that we're being activated. You hang up, make your own phone calls if required, grab your gear and head for the car.

Stop. There may be some really good reasons you shouldn't rush off to help. Did you just finish 3 or 4 beers with the next door neighbor? Maybe you should sit out the first shift. The world doesn't need an extra accident to deal with in the midst of the existing problem.

Is a lot of bad weather headed our way? Perhaps you should watch things from home or offer to help run the net. This may be especially true if an elderly family member lives with and depends on you, you have young children at home, etc. It's always possible your own family could require your services.

I'm not trying to discourage anyone from helping. Just be sure to always evaluate your priorities and do the right thing.

Are you fit enough to assist?

Relax! I'm not suggesting we all go to boot camp or anything extreme. I do know there are things I'm not nearly as good at now that I am 50 as I was when I was 20-something.

If you're going out in teams and your night vision isn't what it used to be then let the other person do the driving. Perhaps you have great eyesight but you don't hear so well. Maybe you should drive and let somebody else manage the radio!

If the mission calls for search and rescue type work judge for yourself—can you walk up and down hills in the heat without wheezing so badly no one can understand you on the radio? Please! Don't become the subject of the next search and rescue operation.

In short, you know yourself better than any of us. Be truthful about what you can and cannot do.

Personal “stuff”

Okay, so you're not in some recreationally incapacitated state, the kids and the grandparents are all squared safely away, and you've got no aches and pains that will likely cause a problem. Let's take a look at a list of *personal go kit* items that you should have by your radio gear.

No matter how short a time you think you'll be out, there are some basic things you should have with you for your personal comfort and safety. This list isn't intended to put you in the field for days. I'm suggesting that you take something like this along even if you think that you're just heading out to go storm spotting for a couple of hours.

A small backpack or a large fanny pack is a handy way to keep things in one place. Toss in a small bottle of Tylenol or your favorite headache stuff. If you wear glasses stash an old pair here too. Your old prescription is probably better than nothing if you break your glasses or lose a contact lens.

Have a small container with a days worth of any prescription medications you need. Being out in the country cut off from home overnight is not when you want to skip your blood pressure medicine or your heart pills.

Also consider keeping a small “Swiss Army” type knife there. That way you'll have a knife, tweezers, toothpick, scissors, nail file and a small screwdriver in case you break

something, tear a fingernail, etc. If you want to go all out add in one of those multi-tool things that companies like Gerber make.

Visit the department store aisle where they have all the small trial size bottles of stuff. If you get stuck out somewhere it can be nice to have some sun screen, hand lotion, and insect repellent.

A little emergency clothing and accessories are always a good idea. Even if it's summer, pack a rain jacket, a hat and a pair of light work gloves. I also recommend a spare pair of socks. Remember, if the situation was normal we probably wouldn't have called you out. No matter how dirty and grimy you may get you'll feel a lot better if you change the stuff that's next to your skin.

A roll of toilet paper in a zip lock bag. No explanation needed.

A handy item that doesn't take up much space is a big bandana. A bright red one may be used to get someone's attention if need be, it also makes a nice towel if you need to wipe your face or clean up a bit, and because it's so thin it'll dry quickly and probably not mildew.

Other items to pack for all occasions are some drinking water, maybe something to munch that won't be bothered by the heat, etc. These are all kind of personal taste items except for the water—have an ample supply to get you through a day. Dehydration is no fun and can really impact your ability to work effectively.

Also, have an information package that will help others or you if there's trouble: Spouse's full name with work, cellular and home phone numbers; name and numbers of an emergency contact that doesn't live with you. Photocopy of your car insurance and your Ham license. Don't depend on it being stored in your cell phone. The phone may be broken or your own rescuer may not know how to work it.

Wrap Up

What's not here? Other than the pocket knife I didn't suggest anything in the way of tools, flashlights, batteries, etc. That stuff lives in your regular *go kit* doesn't it?

Each person will have a slightly different version of their *personal go kit*. You know what your needs are better than anyone else. I hope that this will get you thinking about

whether you personally are able and prepared to step up and serve when the next emergency comes along.

Several of you have been doing this sort of work for a long time or bring useful experiences from other areas of your personal or professional lives. What types of personal support items do you bring along?

Questions or comments?

Internet Resources:

CAARERT Home Page:

<http://www.caarert.org/>

American Red Cross – Get Prepared:

http://www.redcross.org/services/prepare/0,1082,0_239_,00.html

American Red Cross—Preparedness Today:

http://www.redcross.org/preparedness/cdc_english/home.asp