

EMERGENCY SHELTER

In survival as in all aspects of life, it is easier to be organized if we prioritize. The priorities, in order, are shelter, water, heat, food, signal, and utility. You can live 4-6 weeks without food; 3-5 days without water; but hypothermia will kill you in 30 minutes. Therefore, **shelter is the first priority!** Shelter may be defined as anything that protects the human element from nature's elements. I will not discuss clothing here, other than to say that a good coat can't be beat, and it is easier to survive in the summer with winter clothes than in the winter with summer clothes.

What You Need A free-standing dome or A-frame tent is the only realistic option for a mobile shelter in a short-term emergency preparedness kit. There are several things to be aware of in selecting a tent. Construction should be of good quality, breathable materials. The rain fly should extend from the apex of the tent almost to the ground. A small rain fly like those found on many discount shelf specials is unsuitable, because it means the tent walls are made mostly of waterproof material. The human body passes 1-2 quarts of water vapor daily and if you are in a waterproof tent for an extended period of time that water vapor will condense on the walls. It is for this very reason that tube tents should be avoided like the plague.

A heavy-duty space blanket is recommended to put under the tent in order to protect the tent floor. It is much easier and cheaper to replace a \$12 space blanket than a \$100 tent. Avoid the pocket space blanket—another plague! Their usefulness is limited and they breed a false sense of security. A sleeping bag is the most critical piece of survival equipment you can possess, especially in winter. Fires are only 50% effective. You cook your front side while your buns freeze, or you toast your buns and your nose freezes— you just can't win! In a sleeping bag, however, you can efficiently maintain body heat.

A good sleeping bag will have the capability to form a hood. It will have a sizable draft tube along the length of the zipper to prevent snags. Another important feature is the ability to zip two bags together to share body heat or to put a child between parents. Select a synthetic insulation rather than down. Qualofill, Polarguard and some of the new materials recently released are excellent. The advantage of synthetic insulation is that when the bag gets wet, it can be wrung out and will still keep you warm. When down gets wet, the insulation value drops to nearly nothing. Emergency survival situations rarely occur on warm sunny days, and you can just about bet it will be on a dark, rainy or snowy night when the world comes apart.

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An absolute must in a temperate climate is a sleeping pad. Ground cold can suck the heat right out of your body, through your sleeping bag. A closed-cell foam pad will provide the insulation required, but will give little if any comfort. An air mattress of the type you take to the beach or swimming pool will freeze your whole persona during the winter. For true comfort an air mattress such as Thermarest is expensive but worth every cent. For economy, a simple 3/4-length closed cell foam pad is all that you need. Avoid open-cell pads because they soak up water just like a sponge.

In putting together a good short-term preparedness kit, you may think it necessary to initially purchase items that are of inferior quality. Perhaps so, but at the first opportunity the higher quality equipment should be purchased. There is no economy in going second class. Tents and sleeping bags are expensive and should be considered a serious investment. After all, your life and the lives of your family are in the balance!