

PREPARE TO SURVIVE!

By Chuck McGill

Throughout your initial and recurrent training pilot training, you are taught and retaught how to deal with aircraft emergencies. The Prime Directive is to get the aircraft on the ground as intact as possible with minimal damage to the occupants. Now that you have the aircraft on the ground and stopped, how are you going to survive? How are you going to assist in being rescued in a minimal amount of time? Common sense, a few inexpensive and lightweight items, and current technology are key to survival and rescue.

When flying out for the weekend \$100 hamburger, it is very easy to be far from civilization in a very short period of time, even if flying a J-3 Cub or an Aeronca Champ. Even though you were just flying over the hill to the next airport, were you prepared in the event something unplanned occurred? Any aircraft departing on a short cross country flight should have at least minimal survival equipment on board. A survival kit should suit the terrain of the flight and the number of persons on board. A survival kit need not be elaborate, large, or heavy, and a small backpack can be used to hold everything. As you know, survivability requires Shelter, Water, and Food. Rescue usually requires signaling.

SHELTER: Simple and inexpensive things such as lawn and leaf bags can provide shelter in many ways, such as a makeshift rain suit, a sunshade, a ground cloth, and even a method for collecting and storing water. Always carry some type of jacket and head covering. Think about how complex or how simple you want to be with your shelter equipment and pack appropriately. I think any survival kit should have at least a dozen large lawn and leaf bags in it.

WATER: You should always carry water in your airplane. It is the simplest of survival items, and one without which the body cannot function. Most folks just carry bottled water, but you can also purchase water in sealed survival pouches to be left in the airplane for long periods of time. Water can be purified through an inexpensive survival straw, but that may not help if you are in the middle of the desert.

FOOD: You don't have to be elaborate with food items. You could purchase military MRE meals, or dehydrated food from a camping store. But, for the weekend flier, perhaps a jar of peanut butter and a handful of Power Bars will fill the bill. Sufficient food takes little space and can be stored for long periods of time.

MEDICATION: Be sure you carry the medications that might be needed for you or your passengers on every flight in case you have unintended delays. Band aids, aspirin, tape, and a few other medical items you deem appropriate are of great value in a survival situation, and you probably already have plenty in your home. Small medical kits are available on line from a variety of sources.

SIGNALING: Technology makes this fairly easy. Your cell phone won't work everywhere, but take it with you. It might work when you need it. Be sure the cell phone is turned off during the flight so

you don't wear the battery down. If you have a satellite phone, take it with you. A PLB (personal locator beacon) is a handy thing to have. There is now an inexpensive PLB available that fits in your shirt pocket! It sells for \$300 or less, operates on 406 MHz and contains and transmits your location using GPS technology. If you have a handheld GPS in the airplane, it will provide your coordinates if you can use your cell phone or handheld radio to talk to others. Remember that commercial airliners and military aircraft guard 121.5 at all times. And, they fly high, so even if you are in a valley you may be able to transmit to them in the blind. Be sure you carry spare batteries for all your portable equipment. Something as simple as a shiny space blanket, available in every camping store for less than \$5, makes an excellent signaling device.

BASIC ITEMS: A Swiss Army knife or Leatherman Tool, a strong LED flashlight, waterproof matches, trash bags, water, a roll of duct tape and some nylon rope. A waterproof aircraft survival manual created by the U.S. Air Force is available online for less than \$15. An excellent survival guide is available in a deck of card format. It is small, waterproof, and easy to carry. The value of these survival manuals is that they help you focus on the important issues at hand, as well as providing survival information you would not otherwise know. You can easily and inexpensively put together a basic survival kit that weighs ten pounds or less. A trip to the local Wal-Mart camping department can just about fill up your survival kit. Of course you need to check your survival kit at regular intervals and replace time limited items such as food and batteries. I go through mine each year when I remove it from the aircraft during the annual.

Fly Safely,
Chuck McGill
Master CFI, CFII, MEI

January 2010