Communication in the Woods

By: Texan

Camping, hiking, boating, canoeing, biking

Proper planning is necessary when a person decides to leave modern life behind. When a person is hiking or camping, they leave behind automobiles, houses, telephones and other people. When I describe camping or hiking as leaving civilization behind, it may seem overly dramatic, but it is not. All it takes to leave civilization is to be away from modern conveniences and other people for just a short time. A persons voice when they can only be heard for 100 to 200 yards. This means that if you are in a rural area and walk just for a minute or two you can no longer be heard if you need help.

· If you slip, fall and break a bone in your home and are out of reach of a telephone, you are away from civilization and must wait for someone to hear your screams to get help, assuming you are conscious.

o There are all too common instances of people dying in their own homes because they could not reach the phone and no one came to visit them.

o It is also common for hikers to get hurt and die because no one found them for days or weeks. No one plans to be injured while hiking so you should plan for the emergency, no matter how rare the chance of it happening.

o In both of these cases, the person was away from civilization and help.

As humans we require the help of other humans from time to time. It is great to get away from cities and other people, but it is necessary to remember that we need each other. Just because you have gone on many hikes in the past and never had a major problem does not mean that you will not slip and fall and break a bone next time. Success on your past trips does not mean that you will not fall into a gully and be invisible from the trail and unable to get help.

· It is necessary to make sure someone you trust knows where you are going, what path you will take and when you will return.

It is common for private pilots and sailors to leave travel plans with friends in case of an emergency. It does not matter how well the boats or planes are kept in good working order, they still may break down or crash.

· This breakdown may also happen to your body, car, mountain bike, cell phone or anything else. Leave plans for your trip with responsible adults and do not deviate from your plans. The plans must be left with responsible adults because if you do not contact them at an agreed upon time,

they are to call the police, forest rangers or anyone else you specified in your instructions to start searching for you.

o If you decide to have a CB or walkie-talkie radio with you, make sure the responsible adult knows what type of device you have and what frequency or channel you monitor so any rescue party can contact you.

o It is also important for you to know what frequencies or channels the local authorities or rangers monitor so you can purchase a radio that works on their channels.

Another important aspect of camping or hiking is supplies. You must plan for conditions that are more difficult than you expect and carry more supplies than you think you will need. You never wait until your car is totally out of gas before you fill up the tank so do not wait until you are freezing, thirsty or hungry to find more supplies.

· If you expect it to be 50 degrees at night, make plans and carry supplies for 30 degrees.

· If the weather forecast say it will not rain you should still plan for rain.

· If you plan to be gone for one day, you should have food and water for two days.

· Always carry some type of flashlight. Even if you plan to be back before dark you should still have a light in case you get lost and need to get someone's attention.

· If you will be in areas with large animals, it is advisable to have a pepper spray container or some other weapon. Pepper spray is a relatively good way to keep large predators away from you or your camp site.

o If you suspect an animal is following you, it is possible to spray the ground behind you. When the animal smells the pepper spray they will lose their ability to smell for several hours.

o Another good weapon for protecting against any animal is a road flare. When lit, all animals on the planet will stay away from the flare. It is important to remember that this flare will drip hot paper and fuel on the ground so be careful of starting a forest or grass fire.

· Any electronic device you carry such as GPS receivers, radios, flashlights or cell phones should have extra batteries.

· If you are hiking with others, it is good for each person to have their own walkie-talkie or CB.

o If a member of your group gets separated, they can call for help from the others in the group.

o Most walkie-talkies only have a one to three-mile range line of sight.

o If a member of the group is separated for more than a few hours, it is advisable not to keep the radio turned on constantly as the radio will have power for only 10 to 20 hours depending on the batteries in the radio, the amount of talking and the quality of the batteries.

o There should be a plan between the members of the group that when a person is lost, the radio should only be turned on for the first 5 or 10 minutes of every hour as this will save the radio's battery. Make sure everyone has a watch.

o When in a state or national park, find out what radios the local rangers use and what frequencies they monitor.

o In case of an emergency while hiking, there should be a plan with an agreed upon meeting place if the group becomes separated. Every hour or two as the group is hiking the group should decide upon a new meeting point, which can be either in front of or behind the group's location. This rally point is where the group will go to if the group becomes separated. This insures that every member knows where to go if they get lost or injured.

o No one in a hiking or camping party should leave the other group members without telling someone where they are going and when they will come back.

o It is best to make sure that everyone has an assigned "buddy". It is the responsibility of the buddies to keep track of each other. The "buddy" system is especially important if the group is large. This system helps prevent the larger group from leaving behind a single individual.

o Make sure that you have a map of the area and study the map prior to leaving the area.

o When you intend to rely on a phone, GPS (global positioning satellite) or radio when camping, make sure the device is sealed in a waterproof plastic bag, and then make sure it is in a container that will protect it in case it is hit or dropped.

o Radios and cell phones work best on the top of a building or hill so if you cannot get a signal get higher and you may get a signal.

o A satellite phone can be rented for about 50 dollars per week in case you are traveling in distant areas where there is no chance of cell phones or other radios being useful. Make sure you have the phone numbers or local police and rescue personnel.

o When walking or hiking keep the slowest person in the front and the fastest person in the rear because this actually speeds up pace. This is an absolute fact and has been found to be true through research.

o Have the stronger and faster person in the group carry some of the gear of the slower or weaker members of the group. Be having the stronger person carry extra gear for the weaker member of the group the weaker person will be able to go faster and farther. It will also make it less likely that the slower member will become injured or disabled.

o This may seem unfair for the stronger person to carry more equipment but if speed is important this is best because this prevents the slower or weaker member from getting exhausted and needing to be carried or to need to stop to rest

· If a person wants to use a GPS receiver to find a location, it is a must to practice using the GPS before your trip. GPS receivers are not the easiest devices to use so do not make the mistake of failing to train with the GPS prior to your trip. It does not help to know your exact position on the planet if you do not know where you are in relation to known points on a map.

· A few entrée portions of the US military survival food MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat) or other dried food can be kept in a backpack when hiking or traveling. These foods last for years and will keep hunger away.

· It is advisable to keep a small water filter in your pack also. These filters are the size of a 12 oz can of soda and can purify dozens of gallons river or creek water. It is even possible to find a water filter that is the size of a large straw. Just make sure the filter traps particle down to 0.3 microns in size to it will filter all micro organisms.

* It is important to carry your gear in the most comfortable position possible. When possible carry as much weight as possible on your hips and not your back. This may mean using a backpack and a butt pack or it may mean having a backpack with a large padded hip pad attached. This is important because it requires more muscle power to carry items on your back than on your hips. Items such as tools and water are best carried on your hip.

· It is important to get acclimatized to the heat before hiking or traveling in a hot climate. When military units deploy to hot climates they always spend the first week or so slowly increasing the workload of the soldiers every day. If it is important for young tough soldiers to slowly get used to the heat it is definitely important for civilians to get acclimatized as well.

· If you intend to hike any distance it is wise to go on some practice hikes. A few weeks or months before your planned hike you should fill up your backpack and walk for 30 to 60 minutes. Your practice hikes should happen a few times per week for a few months so you can handle the hike. Practicing like this will also make your trip much more enjoyable and less painful.

· Everyone should carry a whistle in their pocket, 24 hours per day when hiking or camping. A whistle is much louder than yelling and will get the attention of others much easier.

· Everyone should always have a compass, knife and fire starting gear on their person at all times when hiking or camping. People get lost on accident so never ever be away from your gear.

It is great to occasionally leave the stress of the city behind and go hiking and camping, but it is important to remember that criminals do not just attack in the city. They often look for hikers or campers because they may be easy targets.

· When you are hiking or camping, keep a weapon on your person at all times, 24 hours a day. Look around to see if others are following you.

· When in your tent, keep a weapon handy. When you are in your sleeping bag keep your gun, if you have one, and a knife in the bag with you. Criminals attack when you are least expecting it and when you cannot defend yourself. If the zipper is stuck the knife can be used to cut your way out.

· When you are bathing or toileting, do not let your guard down. If you are in a large group, you may want to do your business in private, which is more dangerous. If a criminal is watching you from a distance, they will learn your habits and may wait for you to be alone. If you leave the group, do not go very far. If possible, take another person with you. The buddy system is very important.

Just because other campers or hikers seem to be nice, environmentally friendly, vegetarians or animal lovers, does not mean they won't hurt you. Be aware and cautious of your surroundings no matter where you are.