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Tip 10: Surviving a Natural Disaster While Camping

A little bit of knowledge and preparation can help prevent some of the more common causes of camping fatalities due to natural hazards. Should severe weather or a natural disaster occur during your next camping trip you can increase your chances of survival by being prepared and following a few of the tips provided below.



😊 The O.K. Rule 😊



- **Orient Yourself**
- **Know What To Do**

Following the O.K. Rule is the first step toward ensuring you are prepared for outdoor hazards.

Being Prepared

Preparation is key. Most camping fatalities that are the result of severe weather or natural disasters are due to improper planning and poor decisions. Many of the fatalities which occur each year could be avoided just by being oriented and knowledgeable concerning one's environment.

What Is the OK Rule?

The OK Rule should be one of the very first considerations when preparing for any camping trip. Following the OK Rule and obeying normal camp safety procedures can go a long way toward ensuring a safe and enjoyable camping experience and will greatly aid you in being prepared for a disaster. The OK rule consists of two parts:

1. Orientation
2. Knowledge

1. Orientation

Knowing your environment and your relationship to it can go a long way in helping you to make good decisions to avoid hazards and act appropriately when seconds count. Before your trip and after your arrival you should study the area, note landmarks, terrain, and bodies of water, and know the location of ranger stations as well as the distances and the approximate direction of travel to any nearby roadways.

Upon arrival at your campsite, you should also note land formations, high points, low points, dry stream beds, and steep areas that might be prone to landslides. Spending a little time studying the area in which you plan to camp just might save your life!

2. Knowledge

Studying the potential hazards and knowing what to do should a natural disaster occur can mean the difference between life and death. Don't be afraid to ask questions! Check with the ranger station before your trip for any potential hazards such as current forest fire risks and landslide or avalanche warnings, and ask them for suggestions on what sort of communications equipment would be most appropriate for obtaining weather reports and emergency services in the area in which you plan to camp.

Monitor the Weather

If you want to be prepared you have to be aware! Weather can be your best friend or your worst enemy, and the ability to obtain weather information before and during your camping trip can be an indispensable tool.

You should know the difference between weather watches and warnings, and consider having at least two means by which to obtain weather information such as a weather radio and a cell phone able to receive weather alerts.

- **Watch** means conditions are favorable for the outbreak of a particular weather phenomenon. (ex: Thunderstorm Watch, Tornado Watch)
- **Warning** means severe weather is imminent in the warned area. (ex: Severe Thunderstorm Warning, Tornado Warning)

Note: Be sure to know the name of the county and township you will be camping in, and note nearby towns before setting out on your camping trip.

Safety During an Earthquake

Earthquakes are not as likely to occur as severe weather, but it is always a good idea to be prepared. Should an earthquake occur during your next camping trip follow these four tips:

1. Get out of your tent! Your tent could become entangled around you and suffocate you.
2. Move away from trees, boulders, and other objects which could fall and injure or kill you.
3. If one is burning, move away from the campfire, and as soon as the earthquake passes put the fire out!
4. Seek cover underneath a table or vehicle.

In the Event of a Forest Fire

A wildfire is perhaps the most dangerous and potentially deadly natural disaster which a camper could face. In order to avoid finding yourself in a situation where you are trapped in a burning forest, it is always a good idea to know the current fire danger level and to make certain that someone knows where you intend to be.

Remain alert to potential fires. If you see or smell smoke during the day or see a red or orange glow on the horizon at night, a forest fire is nearby!



If you find yourself trapped in a forest fire you should know that you will be unable to outrun it on foot and although you might be able to out-drive the fire, it may have already downed trees or otherwise cut off any means of escape via vehicle. Should you find yourself in a situation where fleeing from the fire in a vehicle is impossible you should consider the following:

1. Flee from the fire immediately. Hike downhill and upwind, and avoid dense areas of forest. Try to flank the fire (move around the sides of it).
2. If you hear crackling or you are able to see sparks flying through the air it is likely that you are already too close to the fire (about ½ mile) to avoid it overtaking you. Should this occur it is best that you try to seek out an area in which you can attempt to weather the

inevitable. Lakes, ponds, streams, or large open fields are probably your best bet under such circumstances.

3. Avoid areas of swampy vegetation as some species of vegetation will burn very intensely.
4. Clear away dry brush and other potential fuels.
5. If there is no body of water available, seek out the lowest spot in the area you have chosen or dig a ditch if possible.
6. Remove all synthetic clothing that could melt to your flesh, cover your head and face with clothing made from natural fibers, wet a cloth and wrap it around your face for fire and smoke protection, and lay down in the ditch. If possible, partially cover yourself with dirt.
7. As the fire approaches try to remain calm. You should know that the fire could take several minutes to pass and the heat will likely be unbearable, but if you attempt to flee at this time death is almost a certainty.
8. Once the fire passes the danger is not over. The ground and debris will still likely be very hot and extreme caution should be used when fleeing from the area.
9. Try to avoid exposing any burns you may have sustained to dirt and open air. The potential for infection will be very high and extra precautions should be taken.
10. Seek help as soon as possible!

There are many other dangers including thunderstorms, flash floods, tornados and avalanches. We borrowed this tip from Mandrake's [SkyAboveUs article](#) and you can learn even more there.