

Things You Should Have in Your Car



Ralph Seekins

Question: I'm new to Alaska and my neighbor tells me I should have an emergency kit in my car. What do you recommend?

First, let me commend you for wanting to be prepared should an emergency occur – particularly up here where an unforeseen breakdown can result in serious injury or death. Sadly, a lot of people are totally unprepared.

When a car or truck lets you down it will most probably be something considered relatively minor like a dead battery, a burst or leaking coolant hose, a flat tire, a blown fuse or running out of gas. And Murphy's Law says it will always happen at the most inopportune time and place. With that in mind, here's a list of things I think you should have in your vehicle.

A Spare Tire, Jack and Lug Wrench. Always have a properly inflated spare tire, an operating jack and a lug wrench that fits the lug nuts that hold the wheels to the car. Your owner's manual (keep it in your glove box) will show you where these items are

located and tell you how to use them correctly.

A First Aid Kit. A good kit includes basic care items for a lot of different injuries and a manual demonstrating how to use them. Always throw in a bottle or two of 100% DEET insect repellent. Prices will vary depending on how comprehensive you want your kit to be. You can get a good kit for \$50 or less at many local retailers or pharmacies.

Your Cell Phone and Charger. If you have one, always carry your charged phone and a 12 volt charger with you. There are lots of examples of folks who were quickly rescued because they had a cell phone with them. And there are sad stories of folks who didn't have a phone and couldn't get help.

Duct Tape, Small Rope and Super Glue. You need things that hold other things together. Some folks substitute bungee cords for the small rope. I recommend both.

Jumper Cables, Spare Fan Belt and Basic Tool Kit. I recommend at least 12 foot jumper cables. A spare fan belt can be a life saver since your car won't run without electricity. The basic tool kit should include several pliers, an adjustable wrench, a couple sizes of screwdrivers and a box to keep them in. One important addition is the proper tool required to replace your fan belt. Your automotive supply store can help you get one.

Flashlight, Spare Batteries, Fuses, Road Flares, Safety

Reflector. I recommend a small flashlight and batteries in the glove box and a larger one with spare batteries in the trunk. Road flares should be kept in a fireproof container. A small selection of appropriate fuses is also recommended. An automotive supply store can help you get all the right items.

Appropriate Clothing. Warm jackets, gloves, boots and hats are a must in winter – even for short trips. For road trips, we carry complete snow machine gear. We've never had to use these suits but it's nice to know they're on board.

Blankets or Sleeping Bags. You may also want to consider a couple sleeping bags or wool blankets during coldest winter or on road trips. They don't have to be fancy, just warm. In severe winter, one sleeping bag per passenger is ideal.

Finally, a little common sense goes a long way. Keep calm in all situations and don't do anything rash. Let people know where you are going before you leave and when to expect you back or to make contact. Then, if you have a problem, stay with your vehicle if at all possible and try to make contact with emergency services. Good luck and safe driving.

Ralph Seekins has more than 43 years' experience in the automotive industry. He started as a mechanic, worked in sales, and for the past 36 years, has been the owner of Seekins Ford Lincoln.

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