

The Ultimate Bug-Out Bag Checklist

Your Complete Guide to Building a Grab-and-Go Emergency Kit

Executive Summary

A Bug-Out Bag (BOB) is a portable kit designed to sustain you for **72 hours** when you need to evacuate your home in under 15 minutes. Unlike a stationary emergency supply, a BOB must be **light enough to carry, organized enough to use under stress, and complete enough to keep you alive.**

This guide provides a comprehensive, prioritized packing system—**tiered by urgency and weight**—so you know exactly what goes in your bag, what gets left behind, and why.

Part 1: The 15-Minute Rule

Why Time Matters

In most evacuation scenarios (wildfire, flood, gas leak, civil evacuation order), you have **15 minutes or less** to grab your bag and leave. Every second spent searching for items is a second you don't have.

Scenario	Typical Warning Time	Critical Items
Wildfire	10-30 minutes	Documents, medications, respirator
Flood (flash)	5-15 minutes	Dry bag, warm layer, phone charger
Gas leak/Chemical	15-60 minutes	Respirator, ID, cash

Scenario	Typical Warning Time	Critical Items
Earthquake (no warning)	0 minutes	Shoes, flashlight, first aid

The BOB Design Principle

Pack once → grab and go → never re-pack at crunch time.

Your BOB must always be **fully packed and ready**. If you take items out for daily use, you will forget to put them back, and you will leave behind what you need.

Part 2: The Complete Packing Checklist

★ Tier 0: Essentials (Must-Have, On Your Body)

These items stay on your person, not in the bag. If separated from your BOB, these keep you alive.

Item	Why	Notes
ID & documents pouch	Crossing checkpoints, shelter access, proving identity	Passport, driver's license, insurance card—waterproof pouch
Cell phone + backup battery	Communication, navigation, payment	10,000 mAh minimum; pre-download offline maps
Cash (small bills)	Power outages = no card machine	\$200 in \$5/\$10/\$20 bills
Whistle	Signal rescue	Plastic, not metal (cold weather)
Pocket knife	Cut, pry, open	Multi-tool preferred

★ Tier 1: Core Survival (First 6 Hours)

These go in the main compartment of your bag—reachable without unpacking everything.

Category	Item	Quantity	Weight
Water	1L hard bottle (metal)	1	~1 kg
Water	Collapsible 2L bladder	1	50 g empty
Water	Purification tablets	30 tablets	15 g
Shelter	Emergency bivvy bag (SOL Escape or similar)	1	180 g
Shelter	Mylar emergency blanket	2	60 g each
Fire	Ferro rod + striker	1 set	30 g
Fire	BIC lighter (wrapped with duct tape)	2	15 g each
Light	Headlamp with red mode	1	80 g (with batteries)
Light	Spare batteries (AA/AAA)	4	100 g
Navigation	Compass (baseplate, liquid-filled)	1	40 g
Navigation	Waterproof local map	1	10 g
First Aid	Trauma kit (Israeli bandage, gauze, tourniquet, gloves)	1	200 g
First Aid	Personal med kit (7 days of prescriptions + OTC meds)	1	varies

★ Tier 2: 24-Hour Sustainment

Category	Item	Quantity	Weight
Food	Calorie-dense bars (Clif, ProBar, emergency rations)	6 bars	~400 g
Food	Freeze-dried meal pouch	2	~200 g each
Food	Electrolyte powder packets	10	50 g

Category	Item	Quantity	Weight
Tools	Multi-tool (Leatherman/Gerber style)	1	200 g
Tools	Duct tape (mini roll, 10m)	1	50 g
Tools	Paracord (550 lb, 15m)	1	100 g
Tools	Sewing kit (heavy needle + thread)	1	10 g
Shelter	Tarp (1.5m × 2m, lightweight)	1	200 g
Sleep	Sleeping pad (foil/foam, foldable)	1	300 g
Clothing	Base layer (merino wool top)	1	200 g
Clothing	Wool socks (Darn Tough or equivalent)	2 pairs	150 g total
Clothing	Rain poncho	1	150 g

★ Tier 3: Extended Stay / Luxury (Days 2-3)

Pack only after Tiers 0-2 are full. These make hardship manageable but aren't life-or-death.

Category	Item	Notes
Hygiene	Wet wipes (travel pack)	20-30 wipes
Hygiene	Hand sanitizer (60ml)	70%+ alcohol
Hygiene	Toothbrush + toothpaste (mini)	
Hygiene	Toilet paper (1 roll, cardboard removed, flattened)	
Cooking	Titanium camp cup (300ml)	Light enough to matter
Cooking	Esbit stove + 4 fuel tabs	Better than alcohol stove in wind
Comfort	N95 respirator mask	2 (fire, chemical, smoke)
Comfort	Ear plugs + eye mask	Sleep in shelter conditions
Signal	Signal mirror	

Category	Item	Notes
		Lightweight, can be seen miles away
Signal	Sharpie marker (permanent)	Leave notes, mark trail
Documents	USB drive with scanned documents (encrypted)	Medical records, insurance, wills

Part 3: Bag Selection

What Makes a Good Bug-Out Bag

Feature	Must-Have	Nice-to-Have
Capacity	35-50 liters	50-65 liters (larger = heavier)
Hydration sleeve	Yes	Integrated reservoir
Hip belt	Yes (transfers weight)	Load-lifter straps
Rain cover	Yes	Bright color for visibility
MOLLE/PALS webbing	No	Yes (add external pouches)
Laptop compartment	No	Yes (docs & electronics)

Recommended Budget Options

Bag	Volume	Price Range	Best For
5.11 Rush 24	37L	\$100-130	All-purpose, durable
Osprey Farpoint 40	40L	\$150-180	Comfort, travel-legal
Military surplus assault pack	25-35L	\$30-50	Budget, rugged
IKEA Förnuft (yes, seriously)	35L	\$15	Ultra-budget, works fine

Part 4: Total Weight Budget

Tier	Item Count	Target Weight	Actual
Tier 0 (on body)	5 items	0.5 kg	varies
Tier 1 (core)	15 items	2.5-3.5 kg	measure yours
Tier 2 (sustainment)	12 items	2.0-3.0 kg	measure yours
Tier 3 (extended)	12 items	1.0-1.5 kg	measure yours
Bag itself	1	1.0-2.0 kg	varies
Total	45 items	7-10 kg	WEIGH YOUR BAG

Golden Rule: A BOB over 12 kg (26 lb) will be abandoned within 5 km. Train with your bag, or lighten your load.

Part 5: Seasonal Adjustments

Season	Add	Remove
Winter	Extra wool layer, hand warmers (12h), insulated sleeping pad, snow melt tablets	Lightweight tarp (if you have 4-season shelter)
Summer	2x water capacity, sun protection (hat + SPF50), insect repellent, extra electrolyte	Heavy base layer, Esbit stove (optional)
Rainy	Dry bags (2, for electronics + clothing), extra socks, waterproof document case	Signal mirror (rain = no sun)

Part 6: Pre-Packed Checklist (Printable)

Cut this section out and tape it inside your bag lid.

Before You Leave Home (5-Minute Scan)

Priority	Check
P0	<input type="checkbox"/> Phone charged + backup battery
P0	<input type="checkbox"/> Documents pouch (passport, ID, insurance, cash)
P0	<input type="checkbox"/> Prescription medications (minimum 7-day supply)
P1	<input type="checkbox"/> Pet carrier + leash + pet food (if applicable)
P1	<input type="checkbox"/> Car keys / house keys in pocket
P1	<input type="checkbox"/> Important phone numbers written down (not just in phone)

Bag Contents Scan (30-Second Check)

Compartment	Check
Main	<input type="checkbox"/> Water (1L hard + 2L collapsible)
Main	<input type="checkbox"/> Food (6 bars + 2 meal pouches)
Main	<input type="checkbox"/> Shelter (bivvy + mylar blanket)
Main	<input type="checkbox"/> Clothing layer (base + socks + poncho)
Top flap	<input type="checkbox"/> First aid + meds
Side pouch	<input type="checkbox"/> Water purification + fire kit + headlamp
Hip belt	<input type="checkbox"/> Knife + whistle + compass

Quick Reference: Top 10 Most Forgotten Items

Based on FEMA after-action reports and survivor accounts, these are the items people most often leave behind:

1. **✗ Reading glasses** — you can't read a map or instructions without them
2. **✗ Prescription medications** — 7+ days, not 3 days
3. **✗ Phone charger + cable** — a dead phone is a brick
4. **✗ Toilet paper** — you will need it within 6 hours

5. **✗ Notebook + pen** — write down instructions, contact info, insurance claims
 6. **✗ Trash bags (heavy-duty, 3-5)** — waterproofing, shelter, sanitation
 7. **✗ Pet supplies** — if you have a pet, their survival is your responsibility
 8. **✗ Spare house/car key** — you will lose your keyring in the chaos
 9. **✗ Change of underwear** — morale matters more than you think
 10. **✗ N95 mask (not surgical)** — smoke, dust, chemical particles
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References

- FEMA: Build a Kit ([ready.gov/kit](https://www.ready.gov/kit))
 - Red Cross: Emergency Preparedness Checklist
 - U.S. Forest Service: Wildfire Evacuation Checklist
 - Personal field experience: 3-season bug-out testing
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