

What Now?!

IT'S HAPPENED! You're experiencing that in-flight emergency you've always dreaded and you're going to have to set the aircraft down. Endless questions race through your mind. *What do I do first? Where should I land? How long before they even realize I'm missing??*

This issue of *FAA Safety Briefing* focuses on emergency preparedness. In that spirit, here are a few tips from our survival experts that could help you if the worst does happen.

1. Admit that "it *can* happen to me." Denial puts a pilot in the position of being unprepared. If the pilot hasn't thought things out beforehand, necessary decisions are too often "snap" decisions that could lead to critical mistakes.
2. Pack a survival kit. If you don't take care of item 1 (admit it can happen) you will never get to item 2. Take into consideration the terrain you're flying over, number of occupants on board, and the basic items you will need to get rescued.
3. Have the survival kit on your person or tied down near the exit. Once the aircraft has come to a stop, you need to get out as quickly as possible. If the aircraft is burning or sinking, you may not have time to locate a kit in the cargo area (or worse, in an unknown location because it has moved during flight).
4. Establish an opened exit before you touch the ground or water. If the airframe bends or warps during the set-down, it could pin doors and hatches closed, would impeding you from leaving the aircraft in a timely fashion.
5. Evacuate the aircraft and find a "hole-up" site. It should be a safe distance from the aircraft because of the threat of fire, or, in the event of a water landing, being pulled under by a sinking aircraft. As advised in the "Passenger Safety Briefing" sidebar on page 16, brief passengers on a post-evacuation meeting point (for example: "Let's gather 100 yards behind the tail").
6. Account for all crewmembers. It seems simple, but with adrenaline levels high, it can be surprisingly easy to overlook a missing person. The missing person could be injured, in shock, or simply lost.
7. Treat injuries. Do the best you can. With medical supplies likely to be limited, you may have to improvise. This is where training makes a difference. CPR training, basic first responder skills, and survival medicine courses will obviously help.
8. Establish a camp. Find a suitable site that will offer some natural protection from the elements. In the cold, you will want to find protection from the wind and damp. In a hot and/or arid environment, you will want to get out of the direct sunlight.
9. DON'T WANDER! One of the biggest mistakes a person makes while trying to survive is going to look for help. Do you know where you are? Do you know where you're going? Are you injured? Is your clothing adequate to protect you from the accident environment? Remember, rescue parties are primarily looking for the downed aircraft, which is far easier to spot than a lone individual. Your chances of being located and rescued are much greater if you are in the vicinity of the wreckage. If you are in a life raft, deploy your sea anchor to keep it near the area where the aircraft went down.
10. Start a fire. Fire is a survivor's best friend. It gives protection and warmth. It also serves as a signal and offers a sense of security. Be aware that starting a fire is a little tougher than most people realize. It isn't as simple as putting a match to wood; on the contrary, fire-starting is a skill that requires some training and practice.
11. Establish a distress signal. If you have started a fire, then you have one signal already going. Ballistic flares, smoke generators, electronic types (including cell phones), and reflectors should be ready and easily reachable. There may be a very small window of opportunity to get someone's attention.
12. Drink water. The average human in a typical household setting needs between two and four quarts of water every 24 hours. In a survival environment, this number may go way up. The water you took from the aircraft may be all you have. Remember that the days of rationing water are long gone. The new thinking is to ration your sweat, but not your water. That means that you should use your body as a canteen by drinking as much as you can whenever you can, and control your perspiration (i.e., avoid dehydration). There are several survival techniques that will help you find, sanitize, and conserve precious fluids.

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