



GPE publication 2013-27

Fireline first aid kit recommendations

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INTRODUCTION

Conducting planned burns and fighting unplanned fires carries some inherent risk for injury. Even though firefighters train and plan in an effort to reduce risks on the fireline, accidents still happen. Being prepared for emergencies can improve chances for recovery. A well stocked fireline first aid kit can make a difference during an emergency by facilitating treatment to be started at the scene of an accident. Of course, medical professionals and supervisors should be contacted in the event an injury occurs, but there are some actions we all can take to reduce risk and provide comfort for our co-workers on the fireline.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) or other specific agencies may require different or additional items for government agency or other employers. Check to see if you have specific standards required for your kit. If you work with personnel trained to the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) level or higher, they may have additional items they are trained/authorized to use that they wish to add as well. Most or all of the items in this list can be found at your local discount store or pharmacy. If not, there are many online sources for first aid and medical supplies. Including preassembled kits.

HINTS

- Assemble your items first, so you know how much space they take up, then select your container. It can be as simple as a large zipper-closed bag, coffee can, or organizational container like a tool box, ammunition can, tackle box, or any other container that will hold the items and keep them out of the weather.
- Many items come in boxes, but do not need to stay in them. Gauze pads, bandages, Band-Aids, etc.,

can be removed from the cardboard box if it makes it easier to pack in your kit.

RECOMMENDED KIT CONTENTS

Brand names are mentioned for clarity, not as an endorsement of a specific brand.

- 1 bottle of water (medical, or even just bottled water, for burns and flushing wounds).
- 1 box 4x4 gauze pads (5-10 pads).
- 2 rolls gauze bandage, 3 - 4" inches wide.
- 1 elastic ("Ace") bandage, 3 - 4 inches wide.
- 1 commercial tourniquet (Readily available online. Be sure to get one with a windlass, and not just an elastic one Figure 1).
- 1 box assorted adhesive bandages ("Band-aids").
- 1 roll 1 or 2 inch wide medical tape.
- 1 package of "moleskin" for blisters.
- 1 burn dressing.
- 2 8x10 inch dressings (also called ABD's or surgi-pads).
- 1 small bottle of pain reliever (aspirin, Tylenol, etc).
- 1 small package of Benadryl for allergies (Other medicines you may need: prescription, or over-the-counter medications like antacids, etc.).
- 1 small pair scissors.
- 2 pairs exam gloves (latex or nitrile – vinyl gloves are ineffective).
- 1 tweezers.
- 1 small bottle of hand sanitizer and/or package of disinfectant cleansing wipes .



Figure 1. An example of a commercially available tourniquet and a tourniquet applied to a leg.

Additional items

You may want to consider adding in the following items for situations you anticipate.

- 1 cold pack *Keep in mind that cold packs often fail. Choose a product that won't leak in your kit. Consider keeping it in a sealed bag.*
- 1 antibiotic salve. *This item is helpful for small wounds, but washing with soap and water is preferred and should occur before applying salve.*
- 1 Bee sting treatment. *These topical applications are often marginally effective. The space in your kit may be more efficiently used with other contents.*
- 1 CPR mask. *There are several designs available. This is an excellent product if users are trained to use it. Compressions are currently emphasized over breathing in CPR techniques, however.*

CONCLUSION

A properly stocked first aid kit can make a big difference in an emergency, but training is invaluable. Classes in first aid and CPR are taught widely by a number of organizations like the Red Cross and American Heart Association. The recommendations here are no substitute for certified and accredited training programs and are not meant to be a substitute for contacting trained professional staff during an emergency.

GETTING HELP

For more information and training, see:

- <http://www.redcross.org/lp/cpr-aed-firstaid>
- http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/CPRAndECC/CPR_UCM_001118_SubHomePage.jsp

Pre-assembled first aid kits are also sold by a variety of wildland fire gear outlets.

The Great Plains Fire Science Exchange has resources on fire, fire effects, monitoring, and more at <http://GPFireScience.org>. A recorded webinar of fireline first aid can also be accessed at the Exchange's website. The GPE is available to locate experts to respond to your fire questions.

For more information:

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