

## Keep Murphy From Springing a Nasty Surprise On You



BY HARVEY LINTON  
for WorkSafeBC

You've been fishing long days and sleeping less than four hours in 24. One night, the bilge alarm drags you from your bunk. Pulling clothes on, you try starting the engine. But the battery's near dead, probably drained by the automatic pumps. There isn't enough power to send a distress call, and the boat's low in the water with the deck nearly awash. You decide to abandon ship. The life raft doesn't inflate fully, so you throw grub, sleeping bag and some other things into the skiff and head for a sandy beach a kilometer away. You get through the surf, but it's not easy.

Stranded on a remote stretch of coast, you know few boats pass at this time of year, and it's not clear when help might come. You avoided hypothermia and drowning in the chuck, but now you need to deal with exposure ashore. With your resistance down from the stress and effort of reaching land, getting out of the wind, wet and cold is a must. A rock face offers some protection, and you manage to build a shelter above the high-tide line with driftwood and cedar branches. Then you collect more wood and start a fire. Besides keeping you warm, it may mark your position for any rescuers.

There isn't much food from the boat, and you plan later to browse...a clam beach, tidal pools, a creek for salmon and the daily litre of water needed to survive. Before taking a breather, you scratch a large SOS in the sand, trying to make the letters visible from the air by filling them in with rocks. And that's it...you're home.

Resting, you think about the quick-grab, abandon-ship kit that you'll definitely pack before going fishing again. Your mental shopping list includes:

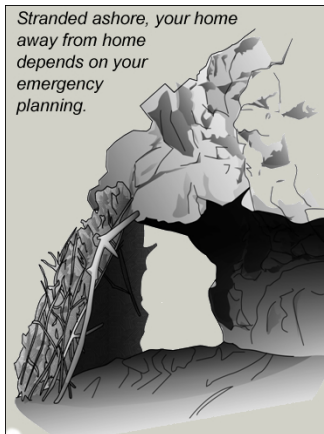
- Shelter items like a plastic tube tent, big garbage bags, duct tape, tarps, space blankets, chemical hand warmers;
- High-energy, dried or preserved food and a container to heat water for tea, coffee or instant soup;

- Communications like a cell phone, hand-held VHF, EPHIRB, mirror, whistle, bright cloth, flares, strobe light or canned smoke;
- Matches or a cigarette lighter, and candles or chemical light sticks;
- A first aid kit, selected with likely travel times to hospital in mind;
- Tools like fishing tackle, saw, screwdriver, pliers, knife, 50-foot nylon cord; and,
- A map or chart, and compass.

That kit should be part of all crew orientations and emergency drills because Murphy's Law applies – if anything can go wrong, it probably will.

I remember longlining black cod one October; years ago. After setting the gear and going into Sea Otter Cove, we tied up to a mooring buoy. Three of us headed ashore to hunt geese, but turned back when a gale-force southeasterly and heavy rain roared in. Our outboard quit, and we couldn't make headway upwind. Rowing ashore, we huddled by a boulder through a cold, wet, miserable night. We were thankful it wasn't longer.

One way or another, Murphy's waiting out there. You can beat him by planning ahead. It can be the difference between life or death.



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