



You're Hurt and Lying on the Ground. It's Getting Dark. Now What?

YOUR WORK DAY STARTS LIKE MOST OTHERS; YOU'VE DRIVEN 45 KILOMETRES and walked or driven an ATV or snowmobile for an hour before you've reached your work site to start your day. It is located in the middle of nowhere on some boundary or road line where you ended off the day before. You and your partner are part way through your day when you misstep and feel and hear a pop in your ankle. Your ATV or Snowmobile isn't within a reasonable distance for you to get to. Now what?

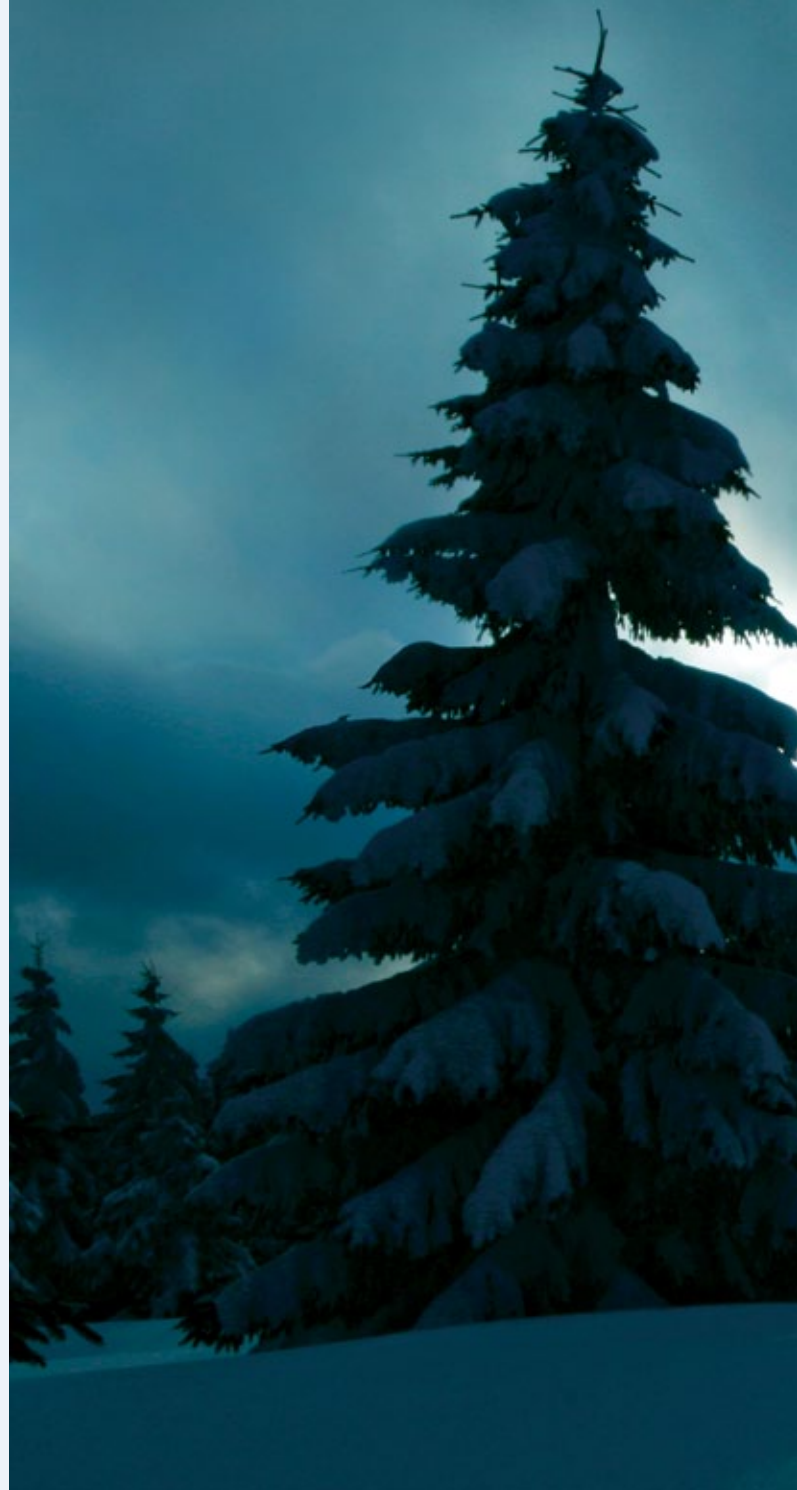
Your company likely has plans in place for such emergencies. Your partner may need to head out to get help or you may have a radio to call for help. You will likely be on your own for at least an hour or two unless you were unlucky enough to have injured yourself near the end of the day where dwindling daylight may slow the rescue you are expecting.

Add to all this, inclement weather, like rain and snow, and your regular day in the woods can be one of the most uncomfortable, and possibly riskiest you've ever experienced. What have you yourself done to prepare for your own survival while your rescue is being activated? Your comfort and possibly survival will depend on how prepared you are to spend the next couple of hours and even overnight in the forest.

What you carry in your cruising vest can dramatically increase your comfort and safety. On the next page we've listed the ten essentials that anyone going into the forest should carry. As a forest professional you are more prepared than most. You likely have a compass and map or a GPS and, unlike most, you actually know how to use these tools. But in this scenario you're not lost, you're injured. Do you also carry some extra clothing in your vest, like rain gear or a dry shirt, or did you pull it out to save a bit of weight? If you did, you'll be wishing you hadn't now.

You likely brought food and water for lunch but do you have anything extra in your vest just in case? An overnight stay in the forest with an injury and bad weather can be made better with a bit of food and water in your belly. The extra nourishment allows your body to produce the energy it needs to keep you warm. Carrying a bag of trail mix or energy bars may be the most important thing you have in your cruising vest.

Any self-respecting forest professional carries a pocket knife or multi-purpose tool. This could come in handy with the matches or lighter you should also be carrying in your vest. A fire can add to your comfort and warmth. However, it is amazing how many people have carried the tools to start a fire but have never actually started a fire. It



can be more difficult than you think and you don't want to start learning how in the middle of an emergency.

I have been a volunteer for Coquitlam Search and Rescue (www.coquitlam-sar.bc.ca) for over 20 years and have rescued countless people who never expected to spend any additional time in the forest. I've lost count of the number of times we have found hikers in the early morning hours with little more than shorts, a T-shirt, sneakers, an empty water bottle, no food and a dead cell phone. All were out for a day hike and none planned on getting lost or injuring themselves but it happens.

Other resources you should be aware of are your local search and rescue teams. Over the years, I have trained and worked with countless volunteers of the province's network of search and rescue community. I have also found that a number of them are also forest professionals like myself. Forest professionals have the skills and training to navigate and



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are used to working and recreating in the outdoors. With these skills, they become a valuable asset to any search team. Activating a search and rescue team should be part of your company's safety plan and is as simple as a call to 911 where the BC Ambulance Service or local police should be well versed on activating your local team.

When at work, do not forget to prepare for the unexpected. Work and play safe in the forest and remember, you are your first line of safety. 🐾

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The Ten Essentials

1. **Flashlight and Spare Batteries.** Many people take just a little too long on a hike and are caught by darkness, and it can get really dark under the trees. We've found people who only got lost after dark because they could not stay on the trail.
2. **Extra Food and Water.** If you're delayed by weather, a little food and water can make an uncomfortable situation much better. You're less likely to panic, and it allows you to think clearer so you don't turn a little mistake into a big one.
3. **Extra Clothing (rain, wind, water protection).** If you're delayed and out at night you know how cold it can get. Even a jacket and a hat can help keep you much warmer.
4. **Pocket Knife.** This useful item can make tent pegs, whittle wood for a fire, cut rope and hundreds of other things that can help you survive.
5. **Navigational Aids (map, compass, altimeter, GPS, chart, radio, mobile phone).** Without (at the very least) a map, a compass and the knowledge of how to use them both, you're really at the mercy of whoever built the trail you are on.
6. **Candle.** A candle can provide warmth and light, but also lets you start a fire.
7. **First Aid Kit and know how to use it.** Small accidents are a big problem if you have nothing to treat them with.
8. **Large Orange Garbage Bag.** When we tell people to bring one of these they think we are crazy, but every SAR member has them. They're VERY useful as an emergency shelter and they can also be used as a signaling device for helicopters.
9. **Fire Starter.** Bring matches in a waterproof container or a full lighter.
10. **Sun Protection (glasses, sunscreen, hat).** The sun is a force to be reckoned with. Without sun protection, burns and sun stroke are almost certain on a sunny day.