

Totally Ready

Prepped when it really counts ⚡

“Survival in Your Pocket – the Amazing Mylar Blanket”

This past week I had occasion to speak with two different groups about preparing for an emergency. With winter storms now a holiday reality, I encouraged everyone to stock up on mylar survival blankets. Very few people are really familiar with all the uses for these compact, lightweight gems and as I listen to report after report of hikers lost on mountain trails and motorists stranded on closed highways with falling temperatures and heavy snow, it seems even more urgent.

Metallized plastic films have been produced for decorative purposes, on a small scale, beginning in the 1950s. Once NASA took an interest in this odd material, research took off. Researchers soon developed a double-sided fabric for the space program that became NASA's most widely used insulator. The first large-scale application of this technology was on Echo I, in 1960. Echo, the first passive communications satellite, was basically a huge balloon of Mylar polyester film. This technology was designed to protect against the intense heating of reentry, but was soon used on satellites in orbit, in space suits, and around delicate instruments.

Back on earth, new applications were rapidly developed, including, the "space blanket". These blankets weigh a few ounces and reflect and retain 90 percent of the user's body heat. When folded, it is the size of a deck of cards. Single-sided metallized tear-resistant fabrics, are used for all-weather clothing, protective apparel for firefighters, insulation in everything from water pipes for sprinklers and irrigation to pizza-delivery boxes, in automobile firewalls, and in candy wrappers.

It's amazing insulating properties can be lifesaving, and its small size makes it perfect for emergency kits, or to carry in your pocket when hiking or enjoying winter sports. Always store a roll of duct tape with your mylar blankets. It is best for adhering to mylar.

How can we benefit from a stash of emergency blankets?

- Warmth: Yes this is the obvious one so it is the best place to start.
 - Mylar blankets retain 80% to 90% of your body heat. This, and their compact size, make them the logical choice for a blanket in a 72 hour kit, auto kit, or when hiking. Remember to really use your blanket, tuck it under your feet, under your sides, pull it up to your chin. And remember most of your body heat is lost thru your head so a blanket cannot keep you warm if your head is uncovered.
 - Using duct tape, tape 3 sides together and create a sleeping bag for a child. For an adult tape two blankets together. This will keep out any cold drafts that may get under a blanket.
 - Sleeping bag not warm enough? Line it with your survival blanket.
 - After strenuous exercise wrap yourself in a mylar blanket to keep you warm, prevent chills, and help avoid muscle cramping.

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- Insulation from the cold: In a cold environment, either camping in a tent, during a power failure at home, or when stranded in your car, cover the walls with the blanket, with the shiny side facing inward. This will reflect the heat from a fire or even body heat, back into the space.
- Tape the blankets to the moldings surrounding the windows in your home. This will create a pocket between the window pane and the walls of your room greatly reducing drafts. Great help during a power outage.
- Insulation from the heat during the summer months. Place the blankets in windows. You can still see out and light will come in but not heat. You will be amazed at the difference this can make in the temperature inside your home. Power outages do happen during heat waves but in hot climates use these all summer.
- In a tent lay the blanket over the top of the tent or lean to, thus reflecting the sun.
- When stranded in a car place a blanket over the roof of the car and another one in the windows receiving the most direct sun.
- In first aid kits: Survival blankets are perfect to use when you are caring for a shock victim.
- As a shelter: Remember all the poor victims of Hurricane Katrina as they were stranded for hours on the freeways after walking out of their flooded homes? Mylar blankets will reflect 99% of light and 90% of heat thus making them a perfect device to make a tent or lean-to to protect yourself from the sun, during an emergency, or even when changing a tire. I recently had someone suggest using an umbrella and draping the blanket over that for even more protection from the sun when walking or changing that tire.
- Moisture barrier: Mylar is moisture proof. This quality makes it a great protector.
 - Lay the blanket on the snow before you sit down to rest and your clothing will remain dry.
 - Cut a slit in the center big enough to fit your head thru and use it as a poncho.
 - Cut the blanket into squares large enough to wrap around your foot. Wrap the squares around your foot, on top of your socks and put your shoes back on. This will not only help to keep your feet warm but also dry.
 - Cut a triangular shape piece of the blanket to wear as a scarf on your head. This will help to keep you dry and also warm. Remember most of your body heat is lost thru your head so always cover your head when you are trying to stay warm.
 - Place a blanket on the ground when you have to lie on the ground before you chain up.
 - Place under a sleeping bag to increase warmth and eliminate moisture.
- Signaling device: Because mylar reflects 99% of light rays it is perfect to signal rescue helicopters or airplanes. If you are stranded in the snow place one over the roof of your car. This will make it easier for rescuers to see your car, especially if the car is a light color. You can be creative and cut it into strips and make an arrow in a clearing pointing to where you are. You can even just hold it in your hands and wave it and the reflected light will be seen. If you need to crawl out onto your roof during a flood take your blanket with you. Wrap up. This will keep you warm and also reflect the lights of rescuers, making you more easily seen.

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- Reflector:
 - At the scene of an accident or when changing a tire, place a blanket over the trunk of the car or on a tree or post next to the road. This will make it easier for traffic to see you. This is especially true at night.
 - If you need to walk along a roadway after an accident or natural disaster cut a strip from your blanket and tie to over your shoulder like a sash. You can also tie pieces around your legs or arms. These will all reflect and make it safer for you to walk.
- Radiant heat: If you have a fire either in a fireplace or outdoors, hang a blanket a few feet away from the fire. Place yourself between the fire and the blanket and you will benefit from the radiated heat.
- Collect rainwater: Since these are waterproof you can line a bucket or bowl to collect water. You can also lay them out at night to collect dew.
- Fire starter: Line a bowl, or an area you have dug into a bowl shape with a piece of mylar blanket. Place some kindling, brush or other easily flammable material in center. Place bowl in sun. Angle the bowl so it receives the strongest rays possible and wait. The concentration of the heat from the sun's rays will light the kindling. Add more kindling until you have a flame large enough to transfer to a fire pit prepared with a larger kindling pile and additional wood for a larger fire.
- Germinating seeds. Create a seed germinating area as you normally would. Cover the glow light and trays with a mylar blanket. This will increase the light and heat the seeds receive as well as conserving the moisture in the soil.
- Wrapping left over food.
- Purifying water. Fill clear plastic soda bottle with water you have strained and need to purify. Lay bottles on a sheet of mylar in the sun for a minimum of eight hours and the water will be safe to consume.
- Cooking: Heat a few rocks next to a campfire. Place rocks in a circle and place MREs or other foods or water, in center. Use your mylar survival blanket as you would aluminum foil and "tent" rocks and food. In a few minutes food will be heated.

Don't let your loved ones be caught without an emergency blanket when traveling or camping. Take some time with your family to take out a blanket and practice using it. Teach your children the ways in which it can help them protect themselves in an emergency. Of course the best advice we can give is to find a safe area, preferably one where there is a small clearing by a roadway, and stay put. Wrap up in your blanket, use it to keep dry and signal and wait for help to come. Naturally, this is not the only element in a good survival kit but it is a great place to start.

I realize survival blankets can only be used a limited number of times and they sometimes tear, but they are lightweight, compact, and cheap, and for all these reasons, it is hard to imagine a car, a boat, a home, or a backpack without one.