

Chapter 4

[The Grab-and-Go Bag]

The Grab-and-Go Bag

Many emergencies and disasters require a rapid evacuation of your home—or your office. When this occurs, you need more equipment and material than can be carried in the E-Kit detailed in Chapter 3. This additional gear is stored in a large backpack called a **Grab-and-Go Bag**.

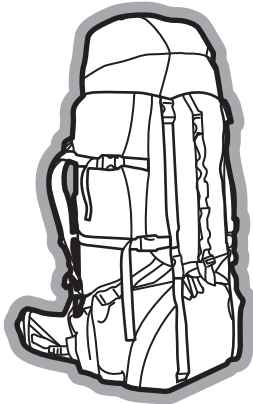
Combined with your E-Kit, your Grab-and-Go Bag contains everything (food, shelter, first aid, etc.) that you and your family need to survive a disaster for seven to ten days. The current 72-hour (three-day) minimum suggested by the Red Cross and Federal government is too conservative. A disaster that requires you to use a Grab-and-Go Bag will almost always extend well beyond three days. In the case of critical emergency supplies (food and medicine), it is always better to have and not need, than to need and not have.

The extra provisions will increase the weight and size of your bag, but as time passes, it will diminish in size with the consumption of the food and other items.

It is best to assemble your own Grab-and-Go Bag. Prepackaged kits are typically stuffed with substandard equipment and useless filler. The bags themselves can also be flimsy and this is not a desirable feature for something that may get knocked around quite a bit. The best thing to do is assemble your kit based on the lists below, then further customize it to fit your individual needs.

IA Tip:

Buy smaller bags to place inside of the Grab-and-Go Bag to reduce clutter. Granite Gear Toughsacks are a great way to keep all your gear together and easy to access. They come in different colors so that you can easily find what you need without guessing. Available at www.backcountry.com.



Hikers' Backpack

Backpacks are the best containers for Grab-and-Go Bags. You must choose a high quality bag to secure your survival materials, based on its strength and durability, storage capacity, weight and functionality.

If your bag is not waterproof (as opposed to water-resistant, meaning that the fabric provides a temporary barrier against water), a rain cover or backpack cover (available at most camping goods stores) can protect your gear. A strong large trash bag will also work in a pinch. For extra protection against moisture, “dry bags” can also be purchased. These are waterproof

bags used by whitewater rafters and special forces soldiers (Navy SEALs, Green Berets). Trek makes great dry bag backpacks, a large one called the Portage and a smaller model, the 2100 (available at www.thewaterproofstore.com). Some are quite inexpensive such as the Crossbreed Dry Pack 1000. Smaller dry “stuff bags” can be purchased and used to store your food items. This will keep your food dry, and if you keep them closed tight, insect-free. (REI sells a number of small dry bags ranging from \$15 to \$50.)

Of the many types of backpack on the market, hikers' (expedition) backpacks are good choices for the Grab-and-Go Bag. They are designed for maximum volume, low weight, and high durability. Most modern bags of this type come with compression straps and frames, internal and external, which hold the load snugly during vigorous activity. Some newer bags come with water-storage bladders.

IA Tip:

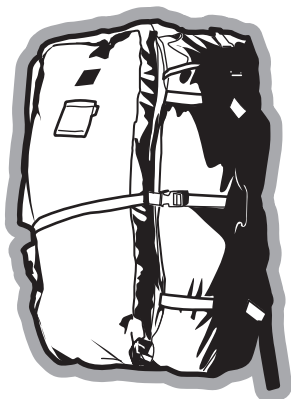
If you are single, you can use an overnight backpack for your Grab-and-Go Bag. Most high-end overnight backpacks have all the features of larger expedition bags but with less weight and lower cost. Select an overnight bag with at least 2,000 cubic

inches of space. It should also have an internal frame and lots of extra lashing straps to tie gear down.

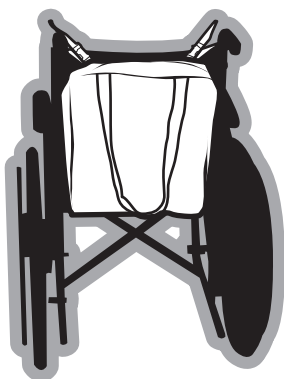
The most durable backpacks available are the ones used by the military and firefighters. If you can afford one, this is the best choice for a Grab-and-Go Bag. They are built to survive very tough conditions that exceed anything the other bags are designed to handle. They are incredibly strong, durable, and lightweight, and have many functions. Many of these backpacks have slots for ALICE (All-purpose Lightweight

Individual Carrying Equipment) clips, which let you easily clip on extra gear pouches (available at military surplus stores) to hold anything from keys to radios.

My personal Grab-and-Go Bag is the “War Bag” backpack manufactured by Eagle Gear. It is specially designed to accommodate wildland firefighters. They carry lots of heavy gear into the field, are exposed to extreme conditions, and need to live outdoors for extended periods. The War Bag is roomy enough to carry everything I need to support my family for two weeks (one month if I stretch the food supply). It even has room for my four-person tent. A whole lot of bag for less than \$150. Eagle Gear has other excellent wildland firefighter backpacks that can be adapted for use as Grab-and-Go Bags. The Commissioner, Mission, and Revolution bags are smaller than the War Bag but are still large enough to function as excellent Grab-and-Go bags. They have multiple large pockets to allow easy access to your critical gear and even a patented suspension system to make



Eagle Gear War Bag



Wheelchair Bag

the bags more comfortable to wear for long periods. There is an internal pocket that can hold a 70-ounce water reservoir (bladder) and other great features. Go online to check out these bags at www.eaglegear.com.

IA Tip:

If you are physically challenged or injured, you may not be able to use a backpack. There are alternative ways to carry your gear. You will need to use a combination of different types of bags to substitute for a larger backpack. With the right mix, you will be able to haul quite a bit of gear and supplies—not as much as in a backpack because of weight limitations, but enough to help you in an extended crisis. If you are in a wheelchair, and have enough upper body strength, your first bag should be a large messenger bag, which can be slung over the shoulder and placed on the lap for easy access to your essential items. The next bag should be a wheelchair bag. These bags have straps that can be slung around wheelchair seat posts. Smaller wheelchair pouches can be attached to wheelchair armrests or beneath the seat.

Grab-and-Go Bag Supplies

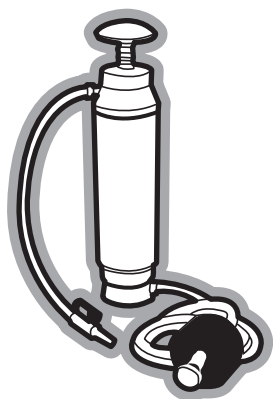
Essential Grab-and-Go Bag Items:

- ▶ **Water containers**, canteens, camelback jugs.
- ▶ **Water** (Two liters of water per person per day if you can). 4 oz. “Lifeboat” water pouches can be used and packed away inside your kit. Be careful to keep them away from sharp objects you have inside.
- ▶ **Portable water filter, purifier, or water purification tablets.**
- ▶ **Emergency food.** Select for nutrition, weight, ease of preparation (without water or heat), ease of storage.

IA Food Tip:

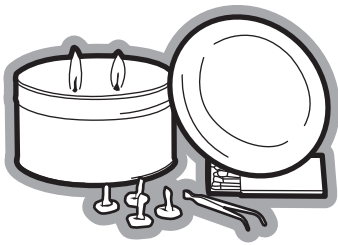
Emergency Food Bars are packed with nutrients, lightweight, and can sit for years. The ER Bar is one of the best emergency bars available. It comes in 2,400- and 3,600-calorie sizes and is not prepared with tropical oils that can produce severe allergic reactions during periods when medical assistance is scarce. Breakfast bars, power bars, jerky, raisins, sardines or other light canned high-protein foods are also great to include. Avoid foods that provoke thirst.

Meals Ready to Eat military food (MRE) is heavy and bulky but can also be included with food bars for variety. Freeze-dried trail food is great too, provided you have a source of clean water and heat to cook it with. Make sure to place multi-vitamins (crystal forms are best) and electrolyte replacement drink mix in the food portion of your bag. This is to ensure that you maintain the proper electrolytic and nutritional balances in your body. It will also help prevent cramping, illness and other physical maladies created by the high levels of physical exertion and stress.



**Katadyn Pocket
Water Purifier**

- ▶ **Stainless steel mess kit** or outdoor cooking gear.
- ▶ **Utensils:** cups, forks, knives, plastic plates.
- ▶ **Prescription medication, eyeglasses,** and other special needs items, like contact lens solutions, and hearing aid batteries.
- ▶ **Items for infants,** such as formula, diapers, bottles, and pacifiers.
- ▶ **Lighter(s).**
- ▶ **Candle lantern.**
- ▶ **Two Nuwick 120-hour emergency candles** can also be used to heat food.



Nuwick Emergency Candles

is best because it is much more durable, waterproof and non-incendive. I discourage choosing regular battery-powered flashlights as your Grab-and-Go Bag emergency lights. You are much better off with a battery-free model. They're a bit more expensive, but you will find that they are worth every extra penny you pay when you are caught in an emergency. Batteries are difficult to come by during disasters. Choosing battery-free flashlights for your Grab-and-Go Bag is the most logical and even safest option.

IA Tip:

Do not buy the inexpensive knock-off flashlights you see on TV or find on the street. They are unreliable. Only a real Nightstar will do.

- ▶ **Radio:** hand-crank or solar only—no battery power radios.
- ▶ **Crowbar or four-way hatchet tool.**
- ▶ **Roll of duct tape:** flatten the roll first to save space.
- ▶ **550-lb. test nylon cord.**
- ▶ **Insect repellent:** Make sure the repellent protects against mosquitoes, ticks, sand- and horse flies, and other disease-carrying insects. If you live in an area that is infested with mosquitoes, purchase the strongest type available. If you don't want to use insect repellent you will need to carry a good mosquito net.

- ▶ **Clothing detergent:** a small bottle of concentrated liquid such as Tide. Can also be used as a decontamination detergent for nuclear emergencies.
- ▶ **Essential toiletries:** soap, shampoo, toothbrush and toothpaste, sunscreen, skin lotion, foot powder, deodorant, feminine hygiene items (for women), baby wipes in place of toilet paper. If you prefer toilet paper, flatten the roll before placing into bag—make sure it is in a sealed plastic bag to prevent moisture from destroying it. I recommend Lavelin deodorant. It is all-natural and kills odor-causing bacteria for up to two weeks with one application.
- ▶ **Sleeping bag, or fleece or mylar blankets** (because they are lighter and take up less space).
- ▶ **Sleeping mat:** inflatable or regular.
- ▶ **Heavy-duty plastic garbage bags** for waste disposal.
- ▶ **Ziploc storage bags** for waste disposal.
- ▶ **Small can of Lysol** or other industrial-strength disinfectant for sanitation purposes.
- ▶ **Rain ponchos** (lashed to the outside of your bag).
- ▶ **Hats** for each family member.
- ▶ **Tent:** size depends on number of users.
- ▶ **Tarp** (can be used as a tent in a pinch).
- ▶ **Goggles, military style** (for emergency eye protection).
- ▶ **Sewing kit.**
- ▶ **Knife** (full tang).
- ▶ **Sharpening tool.**
- ▶ **Extra set of keys** to your home and car.
- ▶ **Documents:** duplicates of all your most important records (insurance, will, etc.) and valued pictures.
- ▶ **Money:** Consider these expenses while factoring how much cash (and coins) you should have on hand, put away within the Grab-and-Go Bag:

- Average price of a plane, bus, or train ticket to an evacuation destination.
- Average price of a hotel or motel room (or rooms if you have a large family) for a minimum of three days to a maximum of two weeks.
- Average price of gas and tolls (if you drive).
- Average price of food for your entire family for two weeks.
- ▶ Miscellaneous expenses.
- ▶ **First Aid Kit** (see section below).

IA Knife Tip:

A good knife is an indispensable tool in an emergency, and I recommend getting the best one you can afford. A full-tang knife is constructed of one continuous piece of metal, end to end. It should be made of high-grade steel, such as tool or stainless, for protection from corrosion. Single-edged blades are sharp along the bottom edge. The top of the blade may be flat or have a serrated section. Double-edged blades, designed for combat, are not effective or desirable work tools.

If you own and include a knife in your Grab-and-Go Bag, you should also own a sharpener. A dull knife is a useless tool. The best kind of full-tang knife will include a metal pommel (cap) on the handle for pounding, serrations for cutting and will be thick enough to pry and chop with.

Ontario knives offers an inexpensive knife called the SP8 that makes a great Grab-and-Go Bag knife. It even has saw teeth on the back. An even better Grab-and-Go Bag knife is the Spetznaz Survival Machete offered only by Siegler & Co. It weighs one pound and can be used as a machete, knife, shovel, hammer, ice pick/sewing needle, saw, pry bar, ruler, navigational sight, parachute cord cutter, screwdriver, wrench and more. Before

adding a knife to your E-Kit or Grab-and-Go Bag, check local carry laws.

Recommended Grab-and-Go Bag Items:

- ▶ **Work gloves.**
- ▶ **Tri-fold shovel.**
- ▶ **Section of stainless steel bailing wire** (used for repairs, e.g., of broken glasses).
- ▶ **Tube of Seam Grip** (for emergency tent repair).
- ▶ **Six to ten ALICE clips.**
- ▶ **Two signal mirrors.**
- ▶ **Pistol belt.**
- ▶ **Combat suspender.**
- ▶ **Portable stove** (multi-fuel is best).
- ▶ **Fuel and fuel bottles.**
- ▶ **Pack of fish hooks.**
- ▶ **Five assorted sinkers.**
- ▶ **Spool of 30-lb. test fishing line.**
- ▶ **Cat litter** (for sanitation purposes, to be carried on your hand cart).
- ▶ **Chlorophyll** to reduce smell of waste material.
- ▶ **Extra cotton underwear.**
- ▶ **Three pairs of wick-dry socks.**
- ▶ **Two pairs of seal socks.**
- ▶ **Two pairs of sorbothane shock soles.**
- ▶ **Extra pair of sturdy shoes** (tied to the outside of the backpack).
- ▶ **Two pairs of comfortable work pants.**
- ▶ **Non-essential toiletries:** foot powder, shampoo, razors and small can of shaving lotion.
- ▶ **Sunglasses.**
- ▶ **Powdered drink mix, tea, coffee, etc.**

- ▶ **Mini-folding chair.**
- ▶ **Magnesium fire starter.**
- ▶ **Safety or construction helmet.** This is especially important if you live in seismically active areas. I use a military PASGT (Personnel Armor System Ground Troop) helmet as my protection. A skateboarder or bicycle helmet will work fine in a pinch.
- ▶ **FRS or GMRS walkie-talkies.** If you have other family members, walkie-talkies are great tools to include in your Grab-and-Go Bag.

➤ **First Aid Kit**

In an emergency, basic first aid knowledge can mean the difference between life and death. If you have never had any first aid training, I recommend that you sign up at your local Red Cross or hospital for a BLS (Basic Life Saving) and first aid course.

A well-stocked First Aid Kit is essential. What you pack in your First Aid Kit should correspond with what you know about first aid—never pack what you couldn't use. Good pre-packaged family-sized First Aid Kits can be had for between \$50 and \$100. Adventure Medical Kits (www.adventuremedicalkits.com) makes a number of excellent First Aid Kits. You can put together a comparable kit for much less if you are willing to gather the gear and a strong bag (with belt loops or ALICE clips) to carry it. Below are items found in my own Grab-and-Go Bag First Aid Kit.

- ▶ **CPR Kit.**
- ▶ **Band-Aids** (assorted sizes).
- ▶ **isopropyl alcohol** (small bottle).
- ▶ **Gauze pads:** one each (per family member) of various size pads.
- ▶ **Talcum powder** (small bottle).

- ▶ **Hydrogen peroxide** (small bottle).
- ▶ **Spenco second skin dressing kits** (two per family member).
- ▶ **Tincture of iodine** (small bottle).
- ▶ **Extra-strength Motrin** (or generic version), small bottle.
- ▶ **Extra-strength Tylenol** (or generic version), small bottle.
- ▶ **Ipecac syrup** (small bottle).
- ▶ **Aspirin** (small bottle).
- ▶ **Tube of micronazole cream.**
- ▶ **Bottle of mineral oil.**
- ▶ **Triple antibiotic cream.**
- ▶ **Bottle of eyewash and eye pads.**
- ▶ **Smelling salts.**
- ▶ **Large roll first aid tape** (small for single people).
- ▶ **Four maxi sanitary napkins** (for blood absorption from deep lacerations, avulsions, and puncture wounds).
- ▶ **Scalpel with extra blades.**
- ▶ **Two tweezers** (one regular size and one small “gripper”).
- ▶ **Epi-pen** (for anaphylaxis—for those allergic to insect stings and bites).
- ▶ **Candle with a pack of weatherproof matches** (to sterilize instruments).
- ▶ **EMT shears.**
- ▶ **Lighter.**
- ▶ **Irrigating syringe** (pump or bulb).
- ▶ **Small pack of sterile cotton balls.**
- ▶ **Pack of sterile swabs.**
- ▶ **Vacuum extractor snakebite kit** (if you live in a region where poisonous snakes are common).
- ▶ **Rubber tourniquet.**
- ▶ **Ace bandages** (one per family member).
- ▶ **Two sterile rolls of gauze.**
- ▶ **Bottle of visine eye drops.**

- ▶ **Two thermometers** (digital).
- ▶ **Six pairs of latex gloves** (or nitrile if you are allergic to latex).
- ▶ **R,P,N-100 or 95 respirator masks:** preferably rated R (resistant to) or P (partially resistant to) organic dusts and mists, one per family member.
- ▶ **Bottle or pack of potassium iodate** (ki) or iodide (KIO_3) for nuclear emergencies, one per family member.
- ▶ **Tube of hydrocortisone.**
- ▶ **Small bottle of Anbesol and dental emergency kit.**
- ▶ **Tube of Libucaine.**
- ▶ **Starr Optic drops**, 1–2 oz. bottle (ear pain, wax).
- ▶ **Bottle or box of Pepto-Bismol** or whatever you prefer for gastric relief.
- ▶ **Charcoal:** medical grade—keep this in your First Aid Kit.

➤ **Grab-and-Go Bag Storage**

Your Grab-and-Go Bag must be stored in an area that permits easy and rapid access. Place it near a door, window, fire escape (if applicable), or other exit free of obstructions and flammable materials. Keep it away from high-risk areas such as the kitchen (prone to fire) and other potential danger areas (electrical outlets with multiple plugs, electric or gas heaters). Do not put it any other place where it is not readily accessible. You may not have time to dig if an emergency comes.

You must also take into consideration the weight of your bag. It should be no more than one-quarter of your total body weight when fully packed. If you are physically fit and very strong, you should be able to carry more. For example, in some cases, combat troops carry backpacks that weigh upwards of 80 pounds. If you are out of shape, don't even think about overpacking!

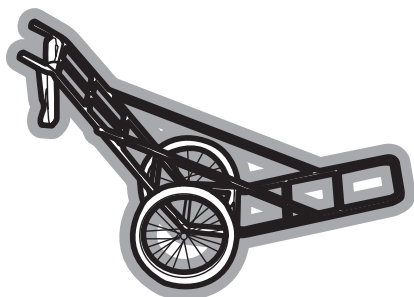
Never pack more than you can carry, or even drag for an extended period and distance. You won't do yourself or your family any good if

they have to drag you to the shelter after you pass out from exhaustion, a heart attack or some other type of stress-related illness during a disaster. Know your limitations and you won't go wrong.

The cost of Grab-and-Go Bags can vary greatly. It all depends on the components that you choose and of course where you purchase them. Generally speaking, if you use high-end components, your Grab-and-Go Bag could be costly. Just realize that spending more does not necessarily get you better gear. This is all about what you need, and most importantly *what you know*. If you are on a budget, and you exercise good judgment, you can assemble a fully stocked Grab-and-Go Bag for about \$250. If you really shop for bargains, you can do it for less than \$200.

> How to Carry Your Gear

After a nuclear accident or terrorist attack with a nuclear weapon, dirty bomb, or biological weapons, emergency shelters could be many miles away from the contaminated area. In these extreme cases, vehicular travel may be made impossible by congestion. The only practical way that you could move away from the contaminated area is by bicycle or on foot. You would need to be able to carry or pull your gear for long distances. If you need to walk, a sturdy luggage cart can help take the strain off of your back. They can be purchased for \$30–\$150. Many can haul up to 150 pounds (not that you would



Game Hauler

ever carry this much gear). The handiest ones fold flat. Or you could use special carts called “game haulers” used by hunters to carry their “trophies” out of the woods over rugged terrain. In the military these are called **ATACS** (All Terrain All-Purpose Cart-Sled). Ameristep makes a fantastic backpack game cart

that can be folded up and worn like a backpack. It has a 250-pound capacity and costs approximately \$150; it will allow you to haul three times as much gear for long distances without straining yourself.

If you own a good bicycle, you can buy a bicycle cart and bags to haul a significant amount of gear easily.

You should regularly stage emergency evacuation drills, putting on all of the gear and leaving your home, aiming to eventually get all of your gear on and be out of your house in less than one minute.

> **Grab-and-Go Bags for the Office**

The unexpected may very well strike while you are at work. You should have a smaller, streamlined version of the Grab-and-Go Bag to leave in your office or workspace. The office Grab-and-Go Bag should be well constructed and contain the following:

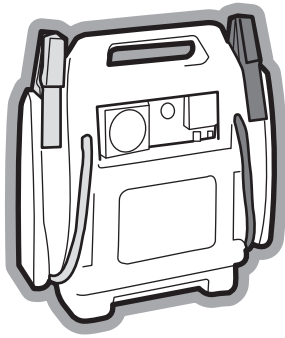
- ▶ **Flashlight** (non-incendive).
- ▶ **Small emergency radio.**
- ▶ **Mini-pry bar** (if you don't include it in your E-Kit).
- ▶ **Energy bars.**
- ▶ **Small First Aid Kit.**
- ▶ **Emergency rain poncho.**
- ▶ **Smoke Hood** (even if you have one in your main E-Kit).
- ▶ **Bottle of water.**
- ▶ **Small roll of duct tape.**
- ▶ **550-lb. test cord.**
- ▶ **Extra keys** (to your home and vehicle).
- ▶ **Extra medication** (if needed).
- ▶ **Extra glasses** (sports glasses, if needed).
- ▶ **Extra ID.**
- ▶ **Change of clothes** (if possible).
- ▶ Add anything useful during an extended stay at your office or in making your way home or out of the city after a major

disaster. Some of my fellow IPN members keep airline and railroad tickets in their office bags, and a few keep emergency money. Finally, you would be wise to keep a bicycle at your place of work for emergency transportation.

> **Grab-and-Go Bags for Your Car**

Keep another version of your Grab-and-Go Bag in your car. If you attempt to leave a large city in your car during a disaster, you will spend a lot of time in seemingly endless traffic jams caused by detours, roadblocks, and similar problems. Therefore, your automobile Grab-and-Go Bag should be almost as well stocked (if not equal to) the one in your home. A good auto emergency kit will include:

- ▶ **Emergency battery charger.**
- ▶ **Photovoltaic trickle battery charger.**
- ▶ **Water** (five gallons at least).
- ▶ **Non-perishable food.**
- ▶ **Blankets.**
- ▶ **Tri-folding shovel.**
- ▶ **Road flares.**
- ▶ **Reading material, playing cards, Music CDs**—whatever you prefer to do while you sit in traffic. Include a solar or hand crank-powered radio or CD player to avoid wasting valuable car battery power.
- ▶ **Tidy Cat Litter, Small Trash Bags, Baby Wipes, and Empty Water Container with a Sealable Cap and...Bedpan.** You are probably asking yourself, what are these last few items for? You will be in traffic for a long time. Eventually, nature will call and you will be compelled to answer. In a huge traffic jam, private spaces are not accessible; you will probably have to do it in your car. The thought is disturbing and disgusting, and I don't even like to bring it up, but I would be remiss if I



Portable Battery Charger

didn't. If you have to evacuate a city by car, the worst thing to do is to leave your vehicle to evacuate your bowels or bladder.

When you leave your car, you expose yourself to all of the danger and chaos on the street and increase your chances of a carjacking. If things are bad enough to prompt a large urban evacuation, you would be surprised at how fast a thief can get into your car and drive away while you urinate. You

must wait until you get into a secure area where there is less traffic and confusion, or use an in-car method.

When nature calls, a large water container (one gallon) will allow you to store away a few trips' worth of your used water. This is easier for men than for women, who should stash a small funnel and short length of tubing that fits over the neck in your glove compartment, to get the job done neatly. As for your solid waste, the best option is to stash a bedpan in your car. Throw a little Tidy Cat litter in the pan and take care of your business. I'm sure that everything will come out fine.

- ▶ **Car air freshener.**
- ▶ **Road maps of your area and surrounding areas.**
- ▶ **Extra pair of comfortable shoes and change of clothes.**
- ▶ **Self-defense equipment** (pepper spray, mace, stun or taser weapon). If you think that road rage is bad during times of peace, wait until you see what happens during a protracted disaster. You will need to carry some self-defense device to protect yourself, your family, and your vehicle.
- ▶ **Towing line or chain.**
- ▶ **Small fire extinguisher** mounted inside the passenger compartment.

- ▶ **Spare tire and jack, and non-explosive emergency flat fixer.**
- ▶ **Soap and other toiletries.**
- ▶ **Radio scanner** (see emergency communications section).
- ▶ **First aid kit** (full size with CPR kit).
- ▶ **Sturdy backpack** to store away all your gear.
- ▶ Add anything not on the list but needed in light of your own circumstances. You could also include emergency protective coveralls (Tyvek), another smoke escape hood, or a two-way radio. Finally, always keep your oil and other critical fluids fresh and at the right levels, and your gas tank as full as possible.

IA Tip:

If you ever find yourself in this situation, it is a good idea to purchase chlorophyll tablets or liquid digestive aids. Take a tablespoon or a few pills right before you begin driving. By the time you have to go, they will have started to work. Nursing homes use this to reduce the fecal odor of their incontinent elderly patients. It wouldn't hurt you to do the same. Anyone riding in the car with you will thank you. Nature's Way makes a great product called Chlorofresh 90 SG that is available in quality health food stores.

A well-stocked Grab-and-Go Bag will provide you and your family with critical emergency supplies, food, and water. Think of it as extra insurance against the unexpected. The time and money that you take to assemble it will be repaid a thousandfold if you are ever caught in a large-scale crisis.

