December 2014
Emergency Preparedness Pointers

Staying Connected

The holiday season is here and a big part of this time of year is staying connected with friends and family. Cell phones allow people to talk, text and update their status on social media. They are a powerful means of communication but are only as good as their remaining battery life. Winter weather can cause power outages and the ability to plug a cell phone into the wall for a charge may not be an option. Fortunately, with every challenge there is a solution or solutions. Car chargers are a popular alternative for charging electronic devices, but they are not the only one. External rechargeable battery packs are another option and are available in a variety of sizes, capabilities and prices.

Power On The Go

External Battery Packs can charge phones, tablets or laptops through a USB connection. They are available in many sizes from as small and light as a lipstick tube to as big as a two pound, paperback book. Generally, the larger the device, the more power it will hold. The smallest battery packs will top off a cell phone battery, while the largest of them will keep a phone or tablet charged for days. It all depends on personal needs and purpose of the battery pack. If it is something that needs to fit in a pocket to keep devices going for normal day use then the smaller units will do fine; if it is being used as the backup power in a preparedness kit, then perhaps a larger model would be best. The most important thing is that the battery pack remains charged when power is available. Battery packs and devices can be charged simultaneously by plugging the pack into the wall and the devices into the pack. For more information on battery packs and which one may be right for you, see the HTG Guide to External Battery Packs at:

http://www.howtogeek.com/178374/the-htg-guide-to-external-battery-packs/

Charging Alternatives

A power outage may well outlast a battery pack during a major event. The good news is that there are multiple manufacturers that produce a battery pack that will not only charge from an outlet, but also has a winding crank to recharge the battery. It is best to not let a phone go completely dead if you are going use the hand crank. Start up processes on some smart phones can take quite a bit of power, so the crank feature is actually a better way to sustain a charge rather than build one up to start a dead phone. Depending on the model, the correlation of winding to available power varies. One model required winding for one minute to make a thirty second phone call, while another claimed that three to five minutes of winding would generate five to twelve minutes of talk time.

Another option is a solar charger. There are many lightweight, compact models. Some of these charge the phone directly while others charge a battery which will charge the phone once it is ready. The ability to store power can make this type of charger more versatile. The price range of solar chargers varies greatly. The higher end models are designed to be durable for harsh, outdoor use. Whether used for camping or as part of 72 hour kit, they are a useful tool as long as there is enough light to charge them. Depending on the model, a full charge requires between six and eighteen hours of light.

Turn Your Phone Into A Lifesaver

The world of smart phone apps is constantly expanding and now there are some that will turn your phone into an Emergency Beacon. A quick internet search will turn up a variety of Emergency Beacon apps ranging in price from free to three dollars. These apps use very limited power to send out your GPS coordinates to a designated group of contacts. Most importantly, this feature uses email or text which has a greater chance of getting through than a phone call does when cell phone towers are extremely busy.

Whether it is an inexpensive app or a powerful battery backup, giving the gift of extended communications can be a lifesaver for a friend or family member. Be prepared and have a safe and happy holiday season.