

The Abandon Ship Bag (ASB)

Your ASB is a vital piece of gear. There is a tension, however, between completeness and utility. A large bag, replete with all gear necessary for all situations, is likely to be cumbersome, heavy, and difficult to maneuver onto a life raft from a small yacht. A smaller bag will be lighter and more easily handled but will have less equipment.

One must then focus on ASB contents felt to be most critical for your likely circumstances. For instance, modern communications and emergency signaling capabilities suggest earlier rescue possibilities requiring less time in the raft – it is quite likely that a rescue can happen in 24 to 48 hours after an emergency signal. ASB gear might focus on getting crew safely into the life raft, communication capabilities, and early survival needs, with less attention to long-term survival equipment in the style of Steve Callahan, who spent 76 days in a raft in 1981.

You should target the contents of your ASB to your sailing route, your rescue plan, and to the needs of you and your crew. The fashion in which your bag is put together is different for every boat.

The best ASBs are watertight and float.

List of potential ASB contents to select from:

- Outside the bag, a tether for the bag
- Folding knife on lanyard hung outside of the bag

Communication with rescuers

- VHF radio, ideally with DSC and GPS built in and MMSI number programmed
- GPS (unless integral to VHF)
- IridiumGo (ideally matched with a dedicated smartphone or tablet appropriately protected in an Aquapack with power pack) or other satellite phone
- Many additional batteries for VHF, GPS, rechargers, and flashlights
- Spare USB battery chargers with battery and solar charging kit
- A second EPIRB (in addition to the one that may not make it from the boat)
- LED Signal Locator Beacon that flashes SOS
- Pyrotechnics – SOLAS parachute flares, handheld flares, and smoke canisters
- One dozen glow sticks – 12-hour duration to tie on a lanyard and swing
- Emergency radar reflector
- Strobe light
- Mirror
- Rescue streamer – floating 40 ft / 12 m red streamer
- Binoculars
- Whistle

Maintenance and protection of the raft and equipment

- Manual inflation pump
- Spare plugs for pressure relief valves and topping up valves and spare sea anchor
- Multitool
- Fifty feet of parachute cord and fifty wire ties
- Zip lock bags

Personal

- Eyeglasses for all who need them
- Vital medicines for everyone – insulin, blood pressure pills, etc.
- Water or watermaker
- Food is less critical (you can survive 3 weeks without food, but only 3 days without water)
- First aid book (Peter Eastman – *Advanced First Aid Afloat*)
- Seasick tablets, Chapstick, sunscreen
- Toilet paper and wipes in Ziplock bag
- Trash bags
- Gloves to protect hands from flares
- Photocopies of drivers' licenses, passports, and a credit card in waterproof bag or laminated
- Weather-rite emergency ponchos
- Thermal foil blankets
- Thermal protective aid-sleeping bag with hood
- Fishing kit
- One or more cell phones or tablets for passing the time
- Two LED flashlights taking batteries
- Water packaged in the raft is sipped directly from the package, but if you have five-gallon jugs, you will need cups – perhaps kids sippy cups that won't spill easily, or maybe a baster?
- Laminated list of ASB contents

The following are usually in the life raft package, but, if not, must be in the ASB:

- First aid kit
- Signal mirror
- Bailer and sponges
- Life raft patch kit and patch clamps

Note: Everything electrical – VHF, GPS, strobe light, phones, tablets, and flashlights must take batteries or be rechargeable in the life raft. The EPIRB is an exception to this. Batteries and all electronics should be changed and/or inspected on a regular schedule such as when re-certifying your raft.

For any extended voyage, it is a good idea to have at least four blue five-gallon water containers tied together with a lanyard near the life raft. If not quite full, they will float.