

# Ever tried to call 911 from the woods?

By Blair Doyle

Well that's easy, just call on the shoe phone! The cell phone has come on strong and allowed us that quick call luxury. But, even those that use cells regularly around town will question their reliability. Get them out of the urban core and they are even less so. Add in a fading battery or leaning over and accidentally dropping it in the lake then stepping on it trying to find it. "You shouldn't put all your eggs in one basket" I heard someone say one day. After you make the call, now what? Where exactly are you in the woods? "Next to the big white tree, adjacent this rock right here sir"! Unlike all of N.S., Winnie the Pooh hasn't got a civic address. Who's coming to get you? When? How? You clearly have to know more, preparation and awareness is the key.

I have found the majority of us take our access to 911 and the many resources that can be scrambled to a scene for granted. With all the modern equipment and training that has come along Joe and Josephine citizen should be able too. The vast majority of calls are for those folk that are very near pavement. That is why our basic and even advanced Pre hospital Emergency Care (First Aid) protocols are set up around the urban-based assumption that we have rapid access to ambulance and medical services in virtually every populated area of Canada and short term management of illness and injury. Interestingly enough in N.S. anywhere that it takes an ambulance more than 30 min to respond is considered rural and remote.

Take those protocols and apply them to a simple broken ankle while on a hiking excursion in the backcountry of one of our National Parks, and then add in wind, a heavy rain and eventually nightfall. Or maybe you are a Ground Search and Rescue Team Captain and one of your crew at night while searching a shoreline 8 km from the nearest house lobs off into the water, add in the month of February and a, now, wet radio. You may have some more decisions to make and you won't find it referenced adequately in a traditional First Aid text or program. These two situations are distinct from regular First Aid dilemmas in that you have a Time and Place concern. You are going to be spending a lot more TIME than 15 min. with the injury and the injured; and given the PLACE your evacuation will not be happening quickly or easily. The Golden Hour may become the Golden Day!

Wilderness and Remote First Aid programs have been available all across North America and have recently become mainstream and available in Nova Scotia. Everyone that has a First Aid qualification at any level will find that they may want gain a different mind set when treating injuries and the injured far from the roadside. The principles still apply, but just differently. I have seen some very skilled Medical Professionals realize that all their capability becomes very challenged when you haven't got a \$30,000 rescue rig to draw from. There is only so much room in those backpacks and kayaks.

Calling 911 is one of those First Aid principles. Ensuring access to 911 or just help, for that matter, involves a lot more preparation in the "back of beyond". Set yourself up for a home run

not a strike. Let someone know where you are going. That's why planes file flight plans. If you don't return you will be sought after within a certain time. Search and Rescue are not looking for you by the way. They instead are seeking clues. Statistically there are more clues than you, therefore be sure to leave lots. You can use cell phones, radio, satellite distress beacons, and flares. Just don't rely on one form of getting help and be aware of your resources limitations. Electrical devices are not fool proof. Anyone involved in Search and Rescue is well aware that three of anything is the international sign of distress. (i.e. Three whistle blasts, three shotgun blasts, three rocks or logs on a beach, three flashes from a flashlight, etc.) The Canadian Coast Guard has just decommissioned use of S.O.S. or Morse code, but if you know it, use it. Be sure to have a sense for your location, otherwise your help will be an even longer arriving. There are a lot of Long Lakes in this province. Which one are you on?

A lot of unanswered questions get asked in First Aid courses on how to access 911 when you are far from anything. A Wilderness and Remote First Aid Training program will give you a better sense for how to do that and just who is coming to help you. As well it will empower you to treat when injuries go well beyond the "Golden Hour".

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