

# URBAN CAMOUFLAGE: WHY YOU SHOULD BLEND IN TO WALK HOME AFTER A DISASTER

by Leon Pantenburg



You're driving home from work, something "big" just happened and you're completely stuck in gridlock on the highway. You heard the news – it's really bad and folks are panicked. But you're prepared for this scenario. You abandon your car, grab your Get-Your-Ass-Home backpack out of your trunk and start walking. How do you blend in with all the unprepared people, so you don't become a target for muggers? Here are some 'fashion' tips to get you home safe.

Much of my outdoor wardrobe is in some pattern of camouflage. But, don't compare me to the Duck Dynasty type. My beard is nowhere near as impressive, and I don't wear camo to work or at Walmart (very often.). In Central Oregon several patterns of camo are needed, for hunting in the desert, pine forests and deciduous forests, as well as waterfowl. But you won't see me in camouflage when I'm in the city. Because you never know when the "big one" will hit and wearing camo is one of the worst choices you can make for staying under the radar in an urban emergency.

Wearing 'camos' during a disaster is like wearing a blaze orange sign that says, "Look at me! Look at me! I have lot of cool things that you don't, including food and water!" You don't want to look like you stepped off the set of a "Mad Max" film, or Denzel Washington in "Book of Eli".



*My 5.11 Taclite Pro Pants don't look that tactical. My Merrill hiking shoes are drab and could pass for normal business-casual footwear. My Christmas tie is just silly.*

The best idea in an unexpected urban disaster is to look like all the other unprepared commuters, wearing a nondescript backpack, and modestly blending in with the crowd. But your pack will be full of stuff that will help you survive and get home.



**Your Get Home Bag**

The stuff you need packed in your urban survival bag is another topic, and I've written a few posts about that. Go with the kind of pack that's standard in your region. On the east coast, you might see commuter packs. In Oregon, messenger bags are popular. On any high school or college campus, backpacks are common.

See what the locals use, and plan accordingly. Whatever you use, make sure it is large enough to carry everything you need, but not so large that it's too heavy to carry on a long trip.

## **HOW TO DRESS PREPARED AND STILL LOOK LIKE EVERYONE ELSE**

### **Fabrics**

A wool business suit is going to keep you much warmer in a wet, cold area than a cotton or linen. Don't buy any potential survival garment without understanding the fabrics in it.

### **Pants**

Avoid 100% cotton pants, like jeans or khakis. They're never warm and they don't stay dry. Make good fabric choices with discreet tactical styling. Dark pants blend in easier. If you wear a long overcoat, that should cover up any pockets that might give you away as being prepared.

### **Design**

As far as I'm concerned, the more pockets in a pair of pants, the better for preparedness. My wife wishes I'd lose the pockets when we're out on the town for dinner, but I say "that's the whole point!" I wrote a whole article on the subject of pants with pockets, and I wear them daily. I like my 5.11 Tac-light Pro brand for a variety of reasons – the position and number of pockets, the fit and the wear. I do wish the pants

had an all synthetic fabric, as that would be an improvement. Another good option is the 511 Men's Stryke for an urban survival setting.

### **Shoes**

Get sturdy, insulated and waterproof boots or walking shoes. Go with a dark color. Make sure they're broken in and dirty. Draw no attention to your shiny perfect equipment. I walked through several inches of slush one afternoon to catch a train in downtown Manhattan. I was wearing my L.L. Bean Maine hunting boots, a suit and a thick-lined overcoat. The vast majority of people on that street were wearing inappropriate footwear, most noticeably, a women in a skirt and stiletto heels. My feet were warm and dry, and I could have walked many miles in those conditions with no trouble. These folks could not have survived a massive storm with broken down infrastructure without severe frost bite and hypothermia. They counted on the trains to arrive on time, a taxi to pick them up, enough room in a heated coffee shop for their respite, and the kindness of strangers. If one of these expected services fell down, these folks were in real trouble.

### **Socks**

A high quality synthetic or wool sock will work. Plenty of dress socks have a nice blend in them that will also help keep your feet warm.

### **Underwear**

I don't mind getting too personal here...stop wearing cotton underwear. There are any number of synthetic or wool undergarments that will work.

### **Shirt**

Get a good synthetic blend for the climate and conditions. A 100 percent cotton dress shirt may be your best choice if you have to walk during a heat wave. But a synthetic

blend will probably be a better overall choice for any season. Long sleeves will provide some warmth and sun protection.

### **Tie**

Whatever. Take it off and stuff it in your pack. One never knows when you'll have to tie something or someone down.

### **Overcoat**

If you need a dress coat for your work, get a long trench coat in a neutral khaki color. You'll look like most of the commuters walking home. The long coat will cover your tactical black pants pockets (with your stuff), and people will only see your shins and shoes. During the winter season, you can throw a fleece vest in the car just to prepare for the worse. I always keep layers in the trunk in a bag to pull out if needed. Bottom line: you need to have your car packed with the type of coat you may need to walk miles in freezing and snowing conditions.

If you don't wear a suit to work, your standard winter waterproof jacket will do the trick. If you live in the upper Midwest, a hooded parka is completely normal and you'll like all the other Minnesotans with their furry head gear. Go with what the natives wear.



*My camo hunting day pack is NOT a good choice for blending in with an urban environment.*

### **Gloves**

Black, warm and nondescript. I like fleece or wool gloves. They're light, warm and comfortable. And you can layer up both when they stretch.

### **Hat**

When I was younger and commuting to my first big city job, I remember walking several blocks in the pouring rain with water dripping down my neck and soaking my shirt collar and tie. I learned my lesson. After that, I got a medium-brimmed wool hat for rainy days. It looks sort of like a businessman's hat/fedora, but has the added benefit of shedding rain and keeping my head warm. It's now my go-to hat for just about everything. In colder climates, get a wool beanie, stocking cap or whatever the locals wear. In warmer weather, and especially in the peak summer months, you want a loose weave hat to keep your head and face in the shade. At all times, have your seasonal head gear in the car with you, on your head or at the office for the walk out.

When it comes to clothing, I wear seasonally appropriate items, (ice, snow, sun, heat, wind, rain) and I make sure my back up clothing is in the car if I need it.

A good definition of camouflage is the ability to blend in. Consider your circumstances and surroundings, the current weather and plan accordingly. And change your clothing, pack and gear with the seasons. Your goal is to get home safely, not to make a fashion statement.

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