

Is there a walkie talkie in your survival kit?

By Joseph Parish



We all can remember those times in our youthful days when we would have an inexpensive set of walkie talkies and try to speak back and forth with a friend several houses down the street. If you notice I said try for most of the time the walkie talkies that we had available were scarcely sufficient to get from one room to another in our home. This provided a very nasty taste in my mouth towards these electronic devices for many years afterwards.

Today it is not uncommon to find that the cost has decreased on these communication devices while the effective range has been drastically extended. With all the positive information that has been floating around concerning the current two-way radios I thought it would be best for me to reconsider my previous stance.

As I began to search for a two-way radio, I quickly found that not only are they available in a vast array of price ranges but they also have a hefty amount of options that you could obtain as well. These options range from an interference eliminator to a built-in weather alert signal. Some units even have an emergency button installed that would transmit an emergency SOS signal if needed. A few even sport a hands-free operation which is really a great safety feature.

When planning your purchase avoid the usual "toy" units and make sure that you purchase a pair of radios which operate on the GMRS band as well as the FRS band.

The GMRS band has an effective power output level of 1 to 5 watt while the FRS boasts a mere 1/2 watt.

If this is starting to sound good to you allow me to explain the potential catch here. In order to use the more powerful channels of this radio you are supposed to purchase a five-year license through the FCC at a rate of \$75.00. It is unlikely however that any one actually follows through on this and pays the registration fee.

The transmission range that the companies typically promote is up to 20 miles although according to the terrain you would be lucky to actually reach a 2-mile limit. Being trained previously in electronics and radio in particular I find the handhelds to be only as effective as a line of sight signal. If you encounter a hill or mountain you can just about be assured that you will not be able to communicate at all.

When communicating with another person in the immediate area the walkie talkies will work fine as long as you are within the two-mile range of each other. I will be using them on my next outing to communicate between cars as we bug out to another adventure in the great outdoors. Hopefully they do not disappoint me as the ones of my youth did.