

lifehacker

[How to Choose a Reliable Emergency Radio \(and Some Good Ones to Buy\)](#)

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Filed to: [emergencies9/29/14 10:00am](#)

With luck, you'll never need to rely on an emergency radio, but they're an essential part of any emergency kit. However, not all emergency radios are alike, and buying a reliable one isn't as simple as plucking one from the shelves. Here's what to look for, and some good options for your emergency kit.

We've already given you [a complete guide to what to do before, during, and after a disaster](#), and even shown you [a great short-term disaster kit](#) and some ideas for a [longer-term survival kit](#) in case it'll be a while before help comes. One essential item in any emergency kit is an emergency radio. It'll allow you to get weather and disaster alerts from the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) (NOAA), so you'll be ready for and aware of anything happening in your area, from fires and tornadoes to Amber Alerts and chemical spills.



[The Complete Guide to What To Do Before, During, and After a Disaster](#)

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Plus, while the primary purpose of an emergency radio is to keep you informed and connected with the authorities in a disaster situation, the best ones do much more. A good model can keep your devices charged, light your way at night, and even keep you connected to the rest of the world with a little entertainment while you rough it or wait for help to come.

How to Choose a Reliable Emergency Radio



Emergency radios come in all sizes and shapes, and if you don't look closely, you might think they're a commodity—that you can grab any one and be prepared for an emergency. Before you do that though, there are some things you should consider:

- **Stick to the Basics:** Most people will need a radio that will deliver NOAA alerts and other warnings to them, so before you spend a ton of money on a two-way or shortwave radio, consider whether you'll need those other bands. If you plan to communicate with others, you may want one, but if the primary purpose of your emergency radio is to be a power-sipping connection to the outside world in an emergency, consider a standalone AM/FM receiver. The AM is important: NOAA alerts are sent via AM radio, and while you may be able to use your radio to tune into local FM stations, if the disaster is severe, you may not be able to, and the longer range of AM radio will be required to get important information.
- **Look for the "Public Alert" and/or "NOAA NWR All Hazards" Logos:** The two standards compete, but both were developed with the input and evaluation of NOAA and the National Weather Service. The Public Alert sticker in particular however notes that the radio meets specific technical

standards, including the ability to receive area specific alerts, hear a tone before an alert comes through, and plug in external devices, like lights for the hearing impaired or vibration devices for people who are visually impaired. In any case, make sure your radio is branded with one or both of these.

- **Search for Radios that Offer Specific Alert Message Encoding (SAME):** SAME is the technology that we just alluded to—it allows you to specify specific areas for emergency warnings. This way you'll get notified when there are disaster warnings for your specific city, or for your county or region, as opposed to a multi-county area or state.
- **Buy a Radio that Supports Multiple Power Sources:** Battery operated radios are a must, of course, as long as you stock additional batteries for them in your disaster kit. However, consider a radio that also accepts power from an external source, like an AC adapter for when you have power, and has a hand-crank or other manual charger for when you don't. Emergency radios generally sip power and don't take much to run, but as you add features, you increase the power draw. If yours has extra add-ons that you want, you'll need to make sure you can keep it alive so it can fulfill its primary duty: Keeping you aware of alerts meant for you. If nothing else, make sure your model can be charged by hand-crank.
- **Choose Your Optional Features:** Finally, look for additional features that you may want in an emergency radio. Like we mentioned earlier, some of the best also charge your devices and have on-board battery packs you can use to power phones, tablets, or other gadgets. That may seem like overkill in an emergency—until you have a child you want to relax and calm down while you try to think clearly about what's happening. Others feature flashlights (a feature I'd recommend), solar panels for extra charging, multiple programmable stations and locations, and even ruggedized exteriors to survive drops and falls. Some have built-in speakers, others are designed to be portable and used with earphones only, reducing power consumption. Consider your individual needs and pick the added features that are best for you and your disaster kit.

Remember, not everyone needs a super-rugged disaster radio that'll survive a fall off a mountain—if your primary need is to get emergency broadcasts in the storm cellar of your home in [tornado alley](#), a flashlight, big battery, and power-efficiency are far more important. If you live on a flood plain, a waterproof model may be on the top of your list. For more tips and suggestions on specific radio features and what to look for, [head over to NOAA's guide to choosing the best ones](#).

Some Emergency Radios to Consider



The criteria for choosing a good emergency radio generally comes down to basic features, power consumption, and how right the radio is for you specifically. There are so many models and brands available that it can be dizzying to choose one, but as long as you keep the basics in mind, you won't go wrong. With that in mind though, let's take a look at some good, all-around options you can buy online easily that will serve you well in just about any situation.

- [**American Red Cross FRX3 Hand Turbine NOAA AM/FM Weather Alert Radio with Smartphone Charger**](#) (\$47): This radio features a nice large hand crank on the side to keep the internal NiMH battery charged. If you have power, you can connect it to a wall socket to charge or keep you up to date, and it has a solar panel for when your hands get tired. It has USB ports to keep your gadgets charged, a flashlight for when the lights go out, and of course, it gets AM and FM, as well as all 7 NOAA Weather bands. Plus, it comes with the recommendation of our friends [over at The Sweethome](#).
- [**Epica Emergency Solar Hand Crank AM/FM/NOAA Digital Radio, Flashlight, Cell Phone Charger**](#) (\$32): If you're looking for something a little larger (which is saying a lot—this model is flashlight sized, while the Red Cross model is palm-sized), this Epica model also comes with a hand crank and solar panel for when the batteries need recharging, a powerful flashlight for when the lights go out, USB porta for charging your devices or

for charging the radio's batteries, a waterproof case, and of course an AM/FM tuner capable of picking up all 7 NOAA weather bands.

- **[Midland WR120EZ NOAA Weather Alert All Hazard Public Alert Certified Radio with SAME, Trilingual Display and Alarm Clock \(\\$26\)](#)**:
If you want something a little higher tech, this portable emergency radio supports all of the features we've highlighted above, including SAME (with a 25 county memory), digital programming, and all 7 NOAA weather bands, complete with a bright, lit display warning you visually to what kind of issue you should be aware of. It doesn't sport a hand crank for manual charging, but it takes AA batteries (so remember to pack plenty in your emergency kit!)

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