

# Tent Care and Cleaning

Your tent is your shelter in bad weather and your protection from the elements in the great outdoors. With proper care, a quality tent can last many years and provide you with many days and nights of clean, warm, comfortable shelter.

## **Always practice preventive care.**

Remember what your grandmother told you, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Investing in some preventive care will mean a long life for your tent. Before you take your tent camping, set it up somewhere out of direct sunlight. Check the tent and make sure nothing is missing. Put on the fly and make sure to anchor it down and draw it tight. A tent that is properly cared for can offer years of service. Proper care of a tent is simple.

## **Buy some seam sealer recommended by the manufacturer and painstakingly seal all the outside seams of your fly and the floor of your tent.**

I know, the tent instructions say it is waterproof and that all the seals have been treated and sealed. Trust us; seal them, if you don't even a \$1,000 four season tent can leak when it rains. This job isn't much fun, but will give you a completely watertight fly and floor. If you are feeling extremely eager, you can even seal the inside seams as well, but this is usually unnecessary. You will appreciate your efforts when the first downpour comes.

Seam sealing is mandatory on single wall tents. Although seam taped from the inside, single walls have exposed seams on the outside which need to be sealed. Especially because they do cost so much and you cannot replace a fly, you need to seal your single wall to keep it water tight longer.

## **Practice setting up your tent.**

Learning to setup your tent should not be done at the campsite with the sun going down. Improper setup can cause tents to sag, broken poles, cut guy lines and ripped tents. Know how to set it up and pack it. A common mistake when packing your tent is folding it into a neat little package. Your tent stuff sack is called a stuff sack for a reason. Take the sack, put in the poles, then the fly and then the tent body. This makes sense; consider this if you are setting up your tent in a windstorm. Are you really going to take the time to fold you tent nicely? No, you shouldn't be either. Also, consider this, same windstorm, you pull out your fly first, since this is the last piece to go on, it will just get in the way and get blown away while you are setting up the tent body. Put in the tent body last and it will be the first thing you grab when you set up your tent, as it should be. The other and more important reason for not folding the tent is the fly can form creases and cracks after being repeatedly being folded in the same way. While your tent may look nice and pressed, you will feel rather silly when water is seeping through the creases.

## **Check your campsite before pitching your tent.**

You're looking for two things; to make sure you're not placing your tent on top of rocks, roots or uneven ground that can cause damage to your tent and an uncomfortable night for you, and that the nice, flat, smooth area you find is not the lowest point on the campsite. Otherwise you could be flooded out in a storm when all the water runs downhill into your tent.

## **Use a groundcloth.**

This helps protect the exterior floor of the tent as well helping to prevent water from gathering under the floor. The best way to do that is to take a tarp or piece of 3 mil plastic sheeting and cut it just a little smaller than your tent's "footprint" so that the edges of the tent floor extend out slightly beyond the groundcloth's edges. If you don't make the groundcloth smaller, then water will gather on top of the

groundcloth and then run in between the groundcloth and the exterior floor of the tent. Not a comfortable feeling in the middle of the night.

### **Keep it clean - Inside.**

Remove your footwear at the door to avoid tracking dirt and water inside the tent. If you can't or don't want to leave your shoes or boots outside the tent, use a plastic bag or the built-in pockets on most later model tents to store them inside. If you do get dirt or a stain inside, clean it up immediately to reduce the chance of further damage.

### **Keep it clean - Outside.**

There is almost no way to avoid getting dirt, stains, bird droppings, tree sap droppings and lots of other various things on the exterior of your tent. Always use clean water and a rag or sponge to clean up those stains or dirt as soon as possible.

### **Don't pack your tent wet.**

If your tent does get wet and you have to break camp, set it up as soon as you can and let it dry out. Just like a sleeping bag, let your tent hang out after each trip. If your tent does mildew, wash it gently with warm water. For serious cases we recommend contacting the manufacturer. Don't use detergent or chemicals as this can ruin the tent or neutralize its waterproofing. If after you have cleaned your tent you still have a mildew smell, contact the manufacturer. Once the mildew has gotten into the material, it is very difficult to get rid of it.

### **Mildew cleaning tips.**

A musty odor, and/or small cross-shaped spots on the tent fabric indicate mildew formation. Mildew, a fungus spore, requires a dark, warm, moist environment to grow. Mildew uses the dirt and soil found on many tents as nutrients to grow and reproduce. This fungus actually penetrates the urethane coating of the tent fabric and grows between the tent fabric and coating, eventually lifting the coating from the fabric. Waterproofness is thus lost and the fabric is eventually destroyed.

Should mildew begin to form, immediate action can be taken to retard further growth. Wash the tent as instructed above. Next, sponge-wipe the tent with a dilute solution of McNett MiraZyme. Sponge over the affected areas and allow to air dry, out of direct sunlight, without rinsing. This will kill the mildew on the tent, and prevent it from getting worse, but it will not remove the mildew marks.

### **Pole care.**

DO NOT allow the shockcord to snap the pole sections together, this can damage the poles. Wipe poles with damp cloth to remove any saltwater, as saltwater can cause corrosion on the poles. Store your poles only after they are completely dry.

### **Zipper care.**

Keep loose threads trimmed. Keep free from dirt. Spray periodically with a non-greasy, non-staining silicone spray designed for fabrics. To prevent salt water corrosion on zipper pulls, make sure you rinse with clear water after exposure.

### **Repair.**

Science fiction author Carl Zwanzig wrote, "*Duct tape is like the Force. It has a light side, a dark side, and it holds the universe together.*" That may be a slight exaggeration, but duct tape is a tent's friend. You can use it to quickly patch a rip or tear and prevent it from getting worse, seal up split seams, fix broken support poles and many other repairs. The key is to make those repairs immediately, before they become unmanageable.

Hopefully you will not need to repair your tent in the field, but there may come a time when you need to be prepared. Rips and tears can be temporarily alleviated by heated duct tape, which you should have in abundance.

Usually the poles are first items to break, since they receive the most stress. Think about the torturous bend they have to go through in order support your tent and the amount of stress this puts on the metal. The accessory kit that comes with your tent should have a repair sleeve. A little aluminum tube, the sleeve fits over the break, use liberal amounts of duct tape to keep it in place.

Another common problem is a ripped pole sleeve, again duct tape should be able to repair the tear. Just remember that duct tape does not stick to moist areas and useless when cold. Use a lighter to warm up the tape and apply it to the rip. Continue to use the lighter on the tape so it can meld to the tent fabric better.

Perhaps the most annoying repair is a broken zipper. Tent zippers have the unenviable job of have to zip in circles or arch under incredible stress from the tent. When a zipper blows, it is hard to repair. Most tents have a mesh door, you can often "sew" the broken door to the mesh door as a temporary fix. Manufacturers offer zipper repair kits that can rejoin the broken zipper, but there is nothing for zipper with broken teeth. If the zipper separates and it is small, release tension on the tent by taking releasing the poles. The slack may be enough to run the zipper through and rejoin the teeth. As they say, an ounce of prevention can save you time and despair, so make sure your tent zippers are working well before you head out on your expedition.

#### **Make sure your tent is ventilated.**

On a cold night it is tempting to close up all of the windows and flaps of a tent tight but this can cause another problem. As you sleep you sweat and breathe out about a cup of fluid. Four people in a tent can release almost a quart of fluid. When the inside of the tent becomes warmer than the outside air, this moisture can start to condensate on the inside of your tent and make things pretty wet inside by morning. Make sure you have some ventilation point(s) open in your tent to help reduce condensation.

#### **Stake down your tent.**

Although freestanding tents don't require you to stake them down, the weather can. A strong enough wind can move a tent, even with occupants in it! If you are setting up your tent on a windy day, put your pack and gear in the tent to help hold it down. Make sure that the proper amount of tension is set as you stake down the tent, enough that it can flex in the wind, but not so much that the material will flap and beat itself.

#### **Never, ever, ever keep food inside the tent.**

Hungry critters will chew through the tent fabric in search of a snack. In bear country, it's an invitation for you to become a bear snack.