

# The automotive emergency kit is not a toy

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Back in 1992, Microsoft was small enough (11,542 employees) that the entire company could get together for a meeting in one place. Mind you, that one place was a large multipurpose arena, but at least we all fit in there.<sup>1</sup>

It was customary at the time that at the end of the meeting the attendees receive a gift, customized with the Microsoft logo, of course. In 1989, the gift was a pair of very nice binoculars, suitable for your next hike or birdwatching expedition. What a lot of them ended up being used for was spying on other employees by looking into their window office from your own window office. (Note: Requires window office, not included with binoculars.)

In 1992, the company meeting gift was a small automotive emergency kit. Inside a red bag were a few items:

- Jumper cables. From personal experience as well as conversations with others, these were far and away the most-used items from the kit.
- A flashlight.
- A can of aerosol tire inflator.
- A plastic sign that said *SEND HELP*, for placement in your rear window. This was long before everyone had a mobile telephone.

While the jumper cable was the most useful part of the kit, the most *fun* part was the *SEND HELP* sign, since you could hang it semi-ironically on your door or in your window.

Shortly after the meeting, a message was sent to all employees asking them not to put the *SEND HELP* sign in outward-facing windows, because someone might think it was a genuine call for help and call the police.

<sup>1</sup> Although the stated capacity of the Kingdome was around 50,000 people, that number assumes everyone is there to watch a sporting event. For a meeting, lots of the seats become unusable because they are to the side of or behind the stage. In fact, for the 1992 meeting, we didn't even sit in the stadium seats. We sat in folding chairs set up on the field.

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