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SHOPPING WITH ... HARRY ALLEN

## Designed for Disaster



Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times

**CLOSE-UP** Harry Allen inspects the Sea to Summit X Mug, a silicone cup that can collapse into a palm-size disk; \$10.95 at Paragon Sports, (800) 961-3030, paragonsports.com.

By TIM McKEOUGH  
 Published: July 29, 2009

THE next time there's an emergency like a local power failure or a large-scale blackout, will you be able to find your flashlight? How about a portable radio for listening to the news? While many people own those items, they often end up being buried out of sight, deep in drawers or closets, never to surface again, simply because they aren't that attractive.

### Multimedia



Interactive Feature  
 Shopping With Harry Allen

But emergency items don't have to be eyesores, says the New York designer Harry Allen. He recently partnered with Johnson & Johnson to revamp its Deluxe First Aid Kit, creating a sculptural white case with a bold red cross and an integrated grip area for carrying — the sort of thing you would be proud to show off when a friend cuts a finger.

It replaces the company's previous kit, which was little more than "a clear clamshell with a label stuck on it," Mr. Allen said. This month, his sleek new version won the best packaging award in I.D. magazine's 2009 annual design review.

Why is the look of such a utilitarian product important?

"When something's more beautiful, maybe you'll leave it out rather than trying to hide it under the counter, which is a good thing," he said, especially when time is of the essence.

Mr. Allen isn't the only designer giving emergency-preparedness items an overhaul. Shopping in Manhattan and online, he found a number of products offering an appealing blend of form and function.

At the Home Depot in Chelsea, he admired the white HomeHero fire extinguisher for its streamlined design. Its bright red pull pin and push-button operation would make it intuitive to use, he said.

A few blocks away at Paragon Sports, he headed for the camping section, where he examined the water purifiers, portable stoves and lanterns. "They can overdesign this stuff," he said, to the point "where you don't even know what they are." One product that received his approval was the X Mug by Sea to Summit — a simple collapsible silicone cup that's easy to carry in a bag or pocket.

Online, Mr. Allen selected the Torch flashlight by Jonas Damon for Areaware, which has a wood handle and an LED that runs on batteries. "I like the idea that when you're reaching for your flashlight, this looks like a flashlight," he said of its clean, unmistakable shape.

He also admired the clarity of the bandage packaging by Help Remedies: a minimalist white square with a simple description and an embossed impression of what's inside.

But Mr. Allen cautioned that style should never be considered more important than function. The best products combine both, he said, but in a pinch, "I would rather have a life raft that saves me than a life raft that looks good."

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