

SPOT GPS Messenger

What would you do if you had a forced landing in a dangerous or inconvenient place where you couldn't get help right away? The SPOT GPS Messenger might save your day or save your life.

SPOT is a portable battery-powered device, about the size of a wallet, that sends your position whenever you want and to whomever you want. It will also immediately summon help in an emergency. It communicates through satellites and does not require cell phone coverage to work. It has several functions:



- It will send messages. You decide in advance what three messages you will want to send and to whom. You set up the messages and recipients by computer in your SPOT account. You can designate up to 10 email addresses and/or cell phones to receive the messages. Each of the three pre-written messages is triggered by a different button on the SPOT. Following SPOT's suggestions, my messages are, "I'm en route," "I'm back on the ground, safe & sound," and "I have a problem. Please call my cell phone."
- It will call for emergency help. A red "SOS" button immediately alerts the GEOS Rescue Coordination Center in Houston that you have an emergency along with your GPS location. This Center contacts 911 emergency responders near your location and coordinates their response. If that doesn't work, they have other private search and rescue providers they can mobilize.
- It will track your flight. If you push a "Track Progress" button, SPOT transmits your location to its website and marks it on a Google Map every 10 minutes. During or after your flight, anyone can see your progress and route.

It has limitations. You can't change message text or recipients from the device itself. There isn't an indicator that shows battery strength. Retailers are not transparent about the operating subscription costs when you purchase the device. The tiny buttons and lights are tricky. It has no display that shows your position or anything else. In a bad accident, it doesn't activate automatically; you have to be in good enough condition to find the SPOT in your cockpit and push the SOS button.

SPOT can be used when flying, boating, hiking, biking or driving. It costs about \$150, and the different emergency and communication services are \$100 a year. The "track progress" capability is an additional \$50 a year. Other available options are roadside assistance and rescue insurance.

I've had mine for a month and like it. My wife likes knowing where I am and that I'm OK. For me, I find having the emergency reporting capability provides an extra level of safety and comfort that I really appreciate.

Dick Martin
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