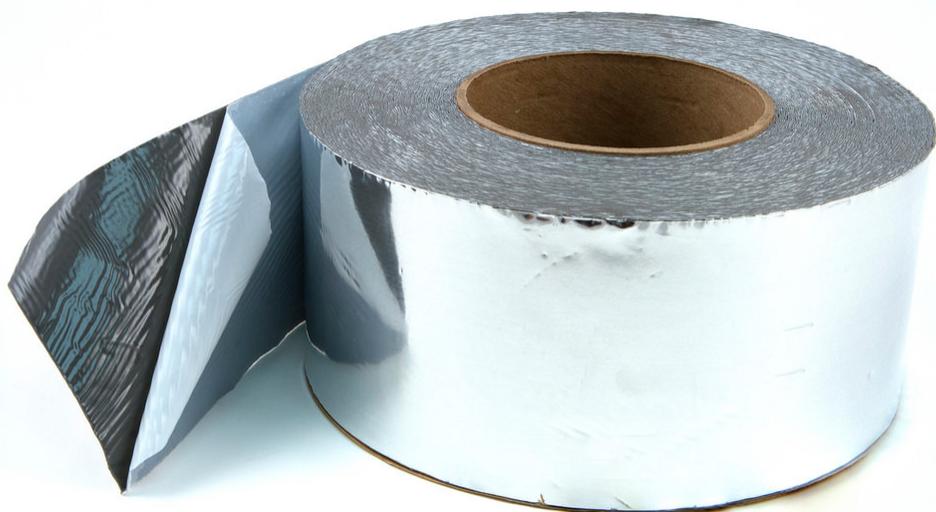


Building a 30-day Preparedness Plan

*Creating a common-sense plan
for surviving and thriving when
the unexpected occurs*



Allen Marshall

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BUT - I believe in value-for-value relationships.

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Introduction

In the not-too-distant past, most people were prepared for the unexpected. Our grandparents and those like them had food stored in case of storms or blizzards. They had money saved (actual money – not just room on their credit cards) in case of a job loss or financial emergency. They had real skills, like cooking, gardening, sewing, and mechanical ability, to take care of themselves. And they built a real sense of community through neighborhood groups, churches, and social organizations, allowing them to come together in the face of any crisis.

We've come a long way since then – and not in a good way. Our supply chains for food, fuel, and other needs is incredibly fragile, with many retailers now operating on a “just in time” inventory model that can see their shelves emptied in hours during a crisis. Few people have any money set aside: A recent survey found that 63% of Americans didn't have enough in savings to cover a \$500 emergency expense.¹ And I don't think anyone would argue with the fact that we have fewer skills, and less a sense of community, than our parents or grandparents.

The scary thing is, we're completely unprepared for the unexpected at a time when the unexpected is practically guaranteed to happen! It wouldn't take much for our fragile system to crack in some way for example: Our entire economy runs on debt and credit, and if there was a sudden financial event, such as a market crash or an extended bank holiday, or riots caused by the loss of welfare benefits for those in need, we're all going to find ourselves on unfamiliar ground.

Maybe you're not concerned about a financial crisis. Well, guess what? Other crises happen all the time. Suppose you're stranded by an ice storm and the power goes out for a few days? Suppose that once-in-a-century hurricane or tornado hits your area? Ask the people in New Orleans if they wish they had been better prepared for Hurricane Katrina. Ask the people in New York and New Jersey if they regret not being ready for Hurricane Sandy.

1 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2016/01/06/63-of-americans-dont-have-enough-savings-to-cover-a-500-emergency/#4634b714e0d9>

I don't know what the risk of any of these events is – maybe it's 1%, maybe it's 50%. But I know it's not zero. So it makes sense to at least think about what you should do if something happens, and ideally do some work now to prepare for that possibility. That's what this guide is for.

About this guide

There are lots of very good books and guides available on preparing for the unexpected. They provide exhaustive coverage of each topic they cover, which can actually be pretty overwhelming: The books on food storage alone can make you feel like you need an extra shed and tens of thousands of dollars to fill it with the right food and equipment!

This guide is intended to provide people new to the issue with the essentials – the essential topics and a simple strategy for addressing each one. You'll learn about the critical issues involved and get practical guidance and checklists to help you prepare for a limited number of scenarios.

In the following pages, we'll look at each of the following topics in turn, discussing key considerations and offering guidance on handling a three-, seven-, and thirty-day crisis:

- Water
- Food
- Heat
- Shelter
- Power
- Security
- Financial
- Medical
- Communication
- Hygiene and Sanitation
- Entertainment

We'll also cover critical questions you may face, including whether you should stay where you are or leave (which some call "bugging out") and how you might build an active community response which will make it easier to address your challenges.

And finally, knowing that cost is always a consideration, we'll focus on the lowest-cost options for preparing, but also note products that might offer convenience or additional capacity. Note that we do not accept commissions or endorsements for products; any products noted here by name are solely the result of personal experience, and not a commission or other payment.

Water

When people start thinking about preparing for the unexpected, their first thoughts usually turn to food. But water is actually a much more pressing concern. The rule of thumb is that people can live for three minutes without air, three hours without shelter (assuming an extreme environment like a blizzard), three days without water, and three weeks without food. While some have gone longer without water, it certainly wouldn't be pleasant. And those who don't have a way to get clean water could easily get sick from drinking contaminated fluids.

What you need to know

- According to FEMA, the average person needs a minimum of two quarts (half a gallon) of water per day.² Some people, like nursing mothers, need more. You'll also need more if you're in a hot environment or doing physical work.
- In addition to drinking, you'll also need daily water for hygiene and for cooking.
- It's best to plan to have one gallon per person per day of clean drinking water on hand.
- Unlike food, if you run low on water, don't ration it; drink your regular amount and look for additional water.

2 <https://www.fema.gov/pdf/library/f&web.pdf>

Storing water

The best way to keep water on hand is to buy it pre-packaged in sealed containers; those could be packs of bottled water or larger jugs. You might be surprised to find that bottled water usually has an expiration date printed on it, which seems odd since water can't actually expire or go bad. The expiration date is actually there because the plastic is slightly porous, and your water might absorb some tastes or smells from the area you store it! It's still safe to drink, but it might not taste as good as fresh water.³

If you'd rather not buy pre-packaged water, you can either buy specially made water barrels, which are typically expensive but safe and durable, or you can reuse plastic (not cardboard) bottles from the juice, soda or milk that you typically buy. Use bottles with screw-tops, which provide a good seal, and wash and sanitize them thoroughly before using. To do that, wash them out with warm, soapy water, then sanitize them by putting one teaspoon of regular household liquid bleach in a gallon of water, leaving it in the container for two minutes, then rinsing the container with drinking water before filling.⁴ You can leave water stored in these containers for six months, then you'll want to refill them with fresh water.

Other sources of water

If you run out of water, you may still have some clean water in your pipes and in your hot water heater. Don't use water from the toilet (bowl or tank) or from a waterbed.

Outside, you may be able to collect rainwater, or water from streams or rivers, ponds or lakes, or natural springs. If you're in a flooded area, don't use floodwater, as it may have mixed with septic systems or sewers. Any water you collect from a natural source will need to be filtered and purified as explained below.

Purifying water

There are two dangers with impure water. One is the microorganisms within it, which can lead to diseases and dysentery (the last thing you need in an emer-

3 <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/water-never-goes-bad-so-why-does-it-need-a-expiration-date-18718243/>

4 <http://extension.psu.edu/natural-resources/water/drought/how-to-store-water-for-drinking-or-cooking>

gency situation). The other is contaminants like organic materials or debris that you'd much rather not have in your body. You need to think about both filtering and purifying water before you drink it.

To filter water that has particles in it, let the water settle so the debris goes to the bottom. Then just use some kind of filter, fine screen or mesh, such as a coffee filter, pantyhose, clean cloths or several paper towels, and run the water through a couple of times.

To purify water you can use one of two methods (assuming you don't have commercial products like purification tablets). You can bring the water to a rolling boil for at least one minute; let the water cool and then either drink or store it. To improve the flavor, you might want to pour the water back and forth between two containers a few times (this adds oxygen back into the water.

If you're not able to boil water, you can add household liquid bleach at a ratio of 1/8 teaspoon, or 16 drops, per gallon of water. (Use bleach without perfumes or other additives.) Stir and let the water sit for 30 minutes; if it doesn't have a slight bleach smell, do the process again. If it still lacks a slight bleach smell, discard the water and find another source.⁵

Products to consider

You don't have to spend much at all to build up a water supply; bottled water is usually cheap, with frequent sales at most grocery stores, and unscented bleach – a great resource for purifying water is inexpensive as well. (Note, however, that bleach doesn't store well on a long-term basis; you'll need to rotate your stock every year or so, and keep it in a cool and dark place.)

Other products you might consider include:

- Water barrels – Barrels specially made for water storage (BPA free, plastic, usually blue) come in various sizes. These aren't cheap, but they're excellent for home storage.
- Emergency storage – there are products that allow you to put a liner in your bathtub, fill it up (up to 100 gallons!), and even include a pump to make it easy to get the water out. Products like WaterBOB are available online for less than \$25.

5 <https://www.fema.gov/pdf/library/f&web.pdf>

- Water purification tablets – You can find a bottle of 50 pills for \$8 or less; these are often iodine-based, which may slightly affect the color and taste of the water.
- Water filters – There are a wide range of filters out there, including those in straw form as well as those that store a few gallons of filtered water at a time. Berkey is a well-known and trusted brand with products for both traveling and home use.

Food

There have been dozens – perhaps hundreds – of books and guides written on ensuring food security in a crisis; this handbook cannot hope to offer the kind of comprehensive coverage available elsewhere on issues ranging from storage to canning to emergency cooking. What this guide will do is work through key issues so that you can customize a plan unique to your family and its needs.

First priority: Calories

When it comes to putting away food for a crisis, preparing for a short-term crisis (up to 30 days) is actually pretty simple: You need to make sure that each person in your house has enough calories available, and that this food remains edible until you need it. Should you go beyond a “subsistence” level standard? Absolutely: The more variety you can offer, and the more healthy options you can provide to your family, the easier this situation will be. But if you’re just starting out, and especially if you’re starting out with a tight budget, your first goal is to make sure you have enough to at least make it through a crisis. Once you’ve hit that marker, then by all means set a new goal of expanding variety and quality.

How many calories do you need? It varies by gender, age, and activity level. According to the USDA,⁶ assuming an “active” level of calorie consumption (and if you’re in a crisis situation you’ll likely be active and not sedentary), adult males ages 19-35 need around 3,000 calories a day as one example, while adult females in that general range (technically ages 14-30) need around 2,400.

So to determine your base food needs, you simply need to multiply the daily

6 <https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/appendix-2/>

calorie needs of each person in your house by the number of days you want to be prepared for. For a woman in her 20s to be self-sufficient for 30 days, you would simply multiply 2,400 times 30 = 72,000 calories (and to be on the safe side, perhaps 20% more to account for wasted food).

How to store food

Your storage plan depends on your budget, available space, and your preparedness window. If you have the funds available to buy a supply of packaged food (dehydrated and/or freeze dried), then great: You'll have access to a wide variety of foods that will keep for a very long time as long as conditions are good. If not, you can still build up a great long-term supply as long as you plan ahead.

When it comes to long-term storage, here are the conditions you want to focus on:

- Temperature
- Moisture
- Oxygen
- Light
- Container quality

When thinking about an ideal storage location, picture a dark, temperature-controlled space with low humidity, like an indoor pantry or closet. Avoid the garage or attic, both of which can experience dramatic changes in temperature and moisture.

With that in mind, your options for food storage are outlined below. You'll likely want to incorporate most or all of them depending on the kinds of foods you plan on setting aside.

Normal rotation

Whether you're preparing long-term storage or just adding groceries to your regular pantry, remember to rotate your foods so that the oldest versions are at the front, ready for use. For items with limited shelf life, whether fruits or canned vegetables, rotation ensures that you use your foods before they go bad.

Natural long-term storage

While some foods have a short shelf life, ranging from fruits (a few days) to canned goods (a few years), there are a handful of staple foods that keep for many years – even decades – if stored properly. Some foods, like honey, sugar, and salt, last indefinitely, while others can last between 10-30 years such as white rice, grains, and dried beans. Storage conditions have a huge impact on shelf life, with products like flour lasting for five years or more in an oxygen-free environment but only a year in its regular packaging in the pantry. To check on the shelf life of particular foods, visit <http://www.stilltasty.com>.

Canning

You can expect canned foods to last for years, though experienced canners say that they only stay at peak quality for a year or two, with acidic foods lasting less time than those that are non-acidic. You can can without special equipment, or opt for a pressure cooker in the \$100 to \$200 range.

Freeze-drying

Freeze-dried food can last for decades; you can either buy it already prepared or do it yourself, though you'll need some specialized equipment to do it well. Freeze drying involves flash-freezing food and then removing the moisture; you can do this in your home freezer with mixed results, but to do it well you'd want a vacuum chamber (to freeze-dry the food) as well as a vacuum sealer (in order to seal it without oxygen). These tools aren't cheap, with a vacuum chamber costing \$2,000 or more and a vacuum sealer costing a few hundred dollars.

Dehydrating

You can either buy dehydrated foods or make your own using an inexpensive dehydrator (many models cost less than \$100) or even your own oven. The process takes some time, but in the end you'll have food that lasts for years and can be eaten either in dried form (jerky, banana chips, fruit leather) or rehydrated.

Other considerations

Some other things to consider when planning for your food needs:

- If you're in a situation in which you suddenly can't buy food, it's possible that your other systems, like power, water, or gas, may also be impacted. So it's smart to think about how you'll prepare and cook the foods you've

set aside. Do you have manual versions of the tools you use when cooking, like can openers and mixers? Do you have access to a heat source for cooking?

- It seems obvious, but you should store the same kinds of foods that you and your family already enjoy. If you're in a crisis situation, you'll be a lot happier looking at a pantry full of foods you like versus foods you only bought because they were on sale. (You can survive on canned pumpkin, but you probably won't be happy about it.)
- Store some "treat" foods like candy or other favorites. They can be a big morale-booster.
- If you have pets, remember to store food for them as well, either dry or canned. You don't want to dilute your own food supply by trying to expand it to meet your pet's needs, and switching their diet suddenly could have unattractive consequences.
- In an emergency situation, you want to waste as little food as possible, so think about strategies such as sharing or re-using leftovers. And speaking of waste, have a plan for disposing of your food and food by-products. If you garden, for example, you may be composting already, but if not ask around to see if you have a neighbor who does.

Shelter

This component seems pretty obvious: If you're able to stay at home, whether that's an apartment or a house, you have shelter pretty well covered, right?

Actually it's not that simple. Because even if you do have a roof over your head, you're still in a place susceptible to the elements, and a place that may experience failures like burst pipes, broken windows, or other emergencies. And if you're in the midst of a crisis, whether it lasts three, seven, or thirty days, you may not have access to experts; you may not even have electricity. So you had better have the materials and the skills needed to keep your shelter in a livable condition.

Key issues to be ready for

- **Water issues** – If your pipes freeze and burst, or you have unexpected damage for some other reason, you had better be able to remedy the

situation quickly. Do you know where your inside and outside water shutoff valves are, and how to use them? Do you have essential plumbing tools like a pipe wrench and a snake?

- **Electrical issues** – Electricity powers our modern lives, but it can be very dangerous, especially in a crisis situation. One of the smartest things you can do now is to make sure your fuse box is fully labeled, detailing which parts of your home are controlled by each switch. It would be helpful to have some basic tools on hand, like wire cutters and strippers, but do not attempt to make any repairs unless you're absolutely sure the power is off and you have a basic level of competence working in this area. It may just be smart to leave the power off in certain parts of your home rather than injure yourself trying to fix a problem.
- **Gas** – Many homes use gas for heating, cooking, or appliances. If yours is one of them, you need to know where your gas shutoff valve is located and how to use it; you also need carbon monoxide detectors positioned throughout your house. Remember that CO is odorless and colorless; you may not know you have a gas problem until it's too late unless you have a way to detect problems.
- **Fire** – Do you have smoke detectors and fully-charged fire extinguishers in your kitchen and other areas of your home? Do you know how to use a fire extinguisher if needed?
- **Windows** – In the event of a natural disaster, it's very possible that you may end up with some broken windows. If you're not able to call a repairman or get to the home improvement store, how will you deal with that? While it's not elegant, it's best to have some duct tape and plastic sheeting on hand; if you live in a hurricane zone, you may even want to stock plywood to secure them as needed. Finally, be sure to have good window coverings, such as curtains or blinds, to keep the sun out and maintain your privacy as needed.
- **Temperature** – One of the smartest things you can do now, whether or not you ever face an actual crisis, is thoroughly insulate your home. If nothing ever happens, at least you'll save money on heating bills, and if you do have to deal with the unexpected, especially in a situation

without power, you'll be glad for a house that retains as much heat as possible.

- **Cleanliness** – You might not think about the importance of a clean house during a time of crisis, but you still need a sanitary environment to prevent disease, and to provide you with some comfort during a disruptive period. You'll also need to be prepared to clean up after any unexpected events: What happens if a pipe breaks and floods the house, or if a window breaks and someone needs to clean up that glass?

Products to consider

Before you have to face an unexpected event – and regardless of whether anything ever happens – it would be smart to make sure your home is well-insulated and that you have working CO detectors, smoke detectors, and fire extinguishers. Beyond that, you should consider keeping the following materials on hand:

- Work clothes – Clothes that cover your arms and legs, a good pair of work gloves to protect your hands, some kind of eye protection, and a dust mask.
- Handyman guides – books, not digital versions
- Tools – Assume you won't have electricity, so buy manual or battery-powered tools. You'll want a saw, shovel, rake, buckets, hatchet or axe, knife, hammer, screwdrivers, pliers, wrenches (including a plumbing wrench) and a drill.
- Duct tape
- Plastic sheeting
- Plywood (if in a hurricane zone)
- Cleaning supplies, including extra towels

Heat

We've become very accustomed to our climate-controlled environments: As long as you have power to run the AC or the furnace, or to plug in your fan or space heater, you can be quite comfortable. But what happens if you lose electricity? All of a sudden staying cool or warm becomes a very big issue.

In the summertime, a lack of air conditioning can be extremely uncomfortable, and there's not much you can do to reduce the heat. The best you can do is drink lots of fluids and stay as cool as you can. Remember that heat rises, so stay downstairs if you have a multi-story home; dress comfortably; use a hand fan, or even a magazine to fan yourself; and try to increase air flow as much as possible by opening windows. If you have running water, a cold compress or bath, or cold water in an outside pool, can be a godsend.

You have more options when it comes to dealing with the cold of winter:

- You can dress warmly, ideally in layers (the air trapped between the layers acts as insulation).
- You can put on blankets, also preferably in layers.
- You can make sure your home is as closed-off as possible, with curtains drawn (and hopefully also with lots of insulation already present in the walls and attic, as suggested in the Home section).
- You can huddle together with other people in the home.
- You can use products like hand-warmers, which use a chemical reaction to produce heat and can last for up to ten hours.
- You can start a fire; obviously having a fireplace would be ideal, but even the warmth from a few candles can make a difference.

Above all, keep a close eye on those who could be particularly vulnerable to heat or cold, such as young children. They may not be able to tell you how they're feeling. Keep them hydrated and as cool as possible in the summer, and warm in the winter. If you're not able to do enough for them, consider leaving and/or getting medical attention as needed.

Power

If you've ever lost power during a storm, it can be a jarring experience: As the lights and the quiet hum of your appliances suddenly disappear, you realize how dependent you were on your electric support system, and scramble as you figure out how to make do without it. Of course, in most cases the power comes back on in a matter of minutes or hours, and you quickly forget that sense of disori-

entation. But suppose it's days, or even weeks, before it's restored: Are you ready to go without for an extended period?

There are two strategies to consider when preparing for a loss of power. The first involves finding alternate sources of power, while the second requires you to minimize the power you need.

Finding alternate sources of power

It's remarkably easy to use power – and lots of it – when all you have to do is plug devices into a wall and they magically work. It's not until you have to generate your own, doing a great deal of work to produce a surprisingly small amount of juice, that you realize how completely you took this luxury for granted.

Because the reality is that it's very hard to generate power. You need a lot of input, in the form of fuels or labor, to create it, and it's wholly insufficient for replacing the amount of energy you had been using. Keep that in mind as you think about options for replacing your current sources of energy: You may be able to replace some percentage of it, for a limited time, but at best this should only be a part of the solution you devise.

When it comes to generating power during an outage, most people's first thoughts turn to generators. Yes, these can provide you with electricity, but there are several drawbacks: They're expensive, usually noisy (not good unless you're planning to share your juice and other supplies), and require a lot of fuel to create that electricity. According to Consumer Reports, depending on the type of generator you have, you can expect to use 12-20 gallons of gasoline, or four to eight 20-lbs. tanks of propane, to run a generator for 24 hours.⁷

You might consider manual generators, which use a hand crank or a bicycle mechanism so that you can turn our own physical labor into electricity. There are some devices, like flashlights or radios, that have a hand crank built into them for easy charging; in other cases you can buy the generator, with or without a battery hookup, to store energy for use by devices. These can be great as a short-term solution, but you don't want to find yourself chained to a manual charger in order to keep your refrigerator running for example.

7 <https://www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2014/12/how-much-fuel-do-you-need-to-run-a-generator/index.htm>

Solar panels, especially coupled with a deep-cycle battery (designed to use most of their capacity before recharging), are worth considering. Unless you have several large panels and lots of sun, these will supply a limited amount of power, but they're silent and require no effort beyond setup, so they serve as a great passive supplemental source.

Batteries are a smart resource for a crisis; have several sets on hand for critical devices like radios and flashlights, and consider buying a set of rechargeable batteries in common sizes to you can reuse them (assuming you have a way to recharge them like a generator or solar panel). Like the others, these are a short-term and partial solution, but they are certainly a welcome addition to your toolkit.

Minimizing the power you need

Believe it or not, there was a time in the not-too-distant past that people had no electric power at all. In fact, Thomas Edison didn't start working on electrical distribution until the 1880s, and it took decades for it to be widely adopted across the country. So the idea of electricity is at most 130 years old, and for the majority of the country access was far more recent. And people survived, just as you can survive by finding other ways to meet your needs.

Prioritize

Given the reality that you'll likely have far less power available, your first priority should be to decide what is essential and what is simply nice to have. Survival is your first priority: If you depend on medical devices, that need power, for example, you need to plan for those before you think about any other allocation. This includes devices that you need on an ongoing basis as well as those that need to be ready for an emergency situation, such as a nebulizer for people with breathing problems.

Survival also includes providing for essential needs, such as food and water; however, these can largely be addressed through natural methods as well (see below), so hopefully you won't need to allocate any electricity to this.

After your essential survival needs are covered, you can start to think about security, communication, and finally comfort. Security would include things like lights and flashlights; communication includes finding ways to get news of

the world (radios, internet access) and interacting with others (phones, internet access). Comfort includes both physical comfort, like getting air conditioning in the middle of a hot summer, and mental/emotional comfort, like allowing your children to play video games or watch television or recorded video. All of these are valuable, but should only be considered after the essentials of survival are covered.

Reducing power needs

You might be surprised to learn that America represents just 5% of the world's population, but consumes 18% of all energy.⁸ The lesson here is that a lot of people around the world use a lot less energy than we do, which means we have a lot of room to reduce our own usage – and, in a crisis situation, even greater room to work it down to a bare minimum.

There are a lot of ways we can reduce our energy needs in an emergency, allowing our limited resources to go further:

- Invest in low-energy appliances as well as LED or fluorescent light bulbs. There are also emergency lamps and other devices that require an absolute minimum level of power.
- Turn things off when you're not using them.
- Reduce what you use: If you used to use three lamps to light a room, scale back to one.
- Reduce your living space: Seal off a floor of your house, or a room in your condo or apartment. This will allow you to light, heat, or cool a smaller space.
- Keep your vehicles tuned up, which will improve your mileage.
- To extend the battery life of your mobile devices, turn off any unnecessary apps, turn off services like location detector, and lower the brightness of your screen.

The natural approach

The best way to save energy, of course, is to not use it at all. Think about how people used to live 130 years ago, and adopt some of those practices:

- Walk, or use a bicycle, instead of a car for short trips.

⁸ <https://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.php?id=87&t=1>

- Instead of electric lights, consider using candles or lanterns. These can provide a fair amount of light especially if you couple them with mirrors.
- You have a number of options for cooking without using an electric oven or stove. Gas is a good option, either for your stovetop range or outdoor grill; you can also look into building a solar oven, or simply cooking with fire. Rocket stoves are a particularly efficient model for cooking with fire.
- You may not be able to refrigerate as effectively as you can without power, but you can keep foods (and yourself) cooler with a few techniques. To keep your house as cool as possible, use your shades to fully block out the sun, and open windows in a way that creates a cross-breeze. To keep food and other goods cool, go underground by digging a root cellar (or, if you have access, using a cave or a well), or put items in a sealed container in a stream of running water.

Security

In 1906, writer Alfred Henry Lewis said “There are only nine meals between mankind and anarchy.”⁹ I believe there’s a lot of truth to that statement, and in a crisis, you need to consider how you’re going to protect your family and your property.

Community

When I first started to think about the prospect of some kind of long-term emergency, I figured the best approach was the “one man army” approach: Turn your house into a fortress and keep everyone away from your stuff. That approach, however, came from a place of fear. Once I got past that, I reconnected with my core belief that people are generally good, and that there’s no way you can singlehandedly keep the world at bay. The truth is, you’re likely surrounded by a community of people, and if you band together you can not only help one another but you can also gain a greater level of security than you could possibly manage on your own.

So the first consideration is to build community relations now, so you have personal ties that can connect you with your neighbors if needed. Participate in community events. Serve on your homeowners’ association board or the neigh-

9 <http://www.internationalman.com/articles/nine-meals-from-anarchy>

borhood watch. Invite neighbors over for dinner or a drink. When the time comes to band together, you'll do so with people you know and trust, and who know and trust you.

Hiding your loot

If you get creative, there are a million places to hide your valuables in case of a robbery. Start by thinking like a burglar, and realize that they have two objectives: To find something of value and to get out as fast as they can. So you want to store your valuables in places that would typically not keep something valuable in them, away from the entry points of your home (the further in they go, the longer it takes to get out), and/or hidden in things that normally don't hold anything at all. Some examples:

- Inside your vacuum cleaner, where the bag would normally go
- Under the trash bag in a trash can
- In the back of the freezer, wrapped in aluminum foil
- Inside a potted plant (in or underneath the dirt)
- False structures within your home – a false stair, false outlet, false-bottom drawer, false trim, or inside the casing around a bathtub
- Inside an appliance like underneath a refrigerator or inside the housing of a washer or dryer (make sure it doesn't interfere with the appliance's operation)
- Inside your child's room (in a place your child won't find it)
- Inside stored materials in your garage – in a paint can or inside a box labeled "Children's clothes" or "Ornaments," provided it's one item of several like it

Remember that a burglar won't want to leave until they find something of value, and no matter how good you are at hiding your possessions, with enough time anyone can eventually stumble on your items. So consider planting a "false stash" of a couple hundred dollars or so in a place that would be easy to find, giving them a "win" and an excuse to get out.

Opsec

Opsec, or Operations Security, simply refers to keeping your assets and your plans secret from those who could take advantage of them, and even from those who can't keep a secret. You may know a lot of people with whom you're casually friendly, but if their families are starving and they know you have a big stockpile of food, how far will those past niceties get you?

I'm not saying you shouldn't trust people, and I'm certainly not saying you shouldn't help others if you're in a position to. As noted elsewhere, having a strong community is a huge asset, and part of that will involve contributing to the group in various ways. What I am saying is that how, what, and to whom you contribute needs to be your choice, and if your preparedness is well-known, you may not only lose that choice but unnecessarily put yourself in danger.

Home security

When people choose to steal, they look for targets that promise a big payoff, easy access, and minimal personal risk. To make your home as unappealing a target as possible, consider the following guidance:

- Get a security system, and place signage prominently on your windows or around your property. Keep it armed at night and while you're out of the house.
- Consider outside lighting with motion detectors, or keep your lights on during the night.
- Blend in with the neighborhood. If no one else is mowing their yards during the crisis, you shouldn't mow either for example.
- Avoid public displays of your preparedness. Don't run your generator unless you have to (within minutes everyone will know you have one). If people are hungry, don't fire up the grill and let the smell of your steaks waft throughout the neighborhood.
- Get a dog. Small yippy dogs act as your own supplemental alarm system; large dogs serve as a deterrent in their own way.
- Invest in good locks for your doors and windows, especially on the first floor of a home. Buy bars for your sliding glass doors.

Weapons

Guns are a controversial subject in this country. But the reality is, if we end up in some kind of a crisis situation lasting a week or more, where people are hungry and law enforcement is stretched, your level of personal risk rises to the point where firearms are a valuable part of your security plan.

Firearms are the single best tool available for protecting yourself in some kind of a confrontation. They are a “force equalizer,” allowing a woman to protect herself from a man twice her size. They also act as a deterrence to violence: If people know you have them, you’ll be much less likely to be chosen as a target in the first place.

They are not magic wands, however. They don’t fire themselves: You have to learn how to use them properly, and you have to shoot with them regularly if you hope to be able to use them well in a crisis situation. They don’t make you invincible: While they are an important tool for defense, you still need to actively pursue other defensive measures like home security and community involvement as part of your defensive strategy. And they present dangers of their own: You should know how to secure them, especially if you have children in the house.

So by all means arm yourself, but don’t pretend that it’s the only step you need to take. It’s just one component of your overall plan.

Financial

According to a 2016 survey by TSYS,¹⁰ we love using our “plastic” – 40% of respondents prefer to make payments with a credit card, while 35% prefer to use a debit card. (Just 11% prefer cash.) What would those people do if their cards suddenly stopped working, perhaps due to a credit crisis or a power outage? What would you do – would you be able to buy the food or materials you needed?

It’s smart to keep physical cash on hand; even in the event of a currency crisis, cash will still be accepted due to a lack of alternatives. How much is up to you. Some sources suggest as little as \$300, while others go so far as to suggest two

10 http://www.tsys.com/Assets/TSYS/downloads/rs_2016-us-consumer-payment-study.pdf

full months of living expenses. You need to decide the amount based on what you're reasonably able to set aside, and what you could realistically need in a short-term crisis. (For example, someone with a lot of food in storage may feel a need for a lower cash reserve than someone who isn't able to store anything.) Even if you're not in a position to withdraw a large amount for safekeeping, consider setting aside just \$5 or \$10 each week until you hit a number that feels comfortable to you.

As you build up your reserves of food and materials, you should strongly consider getting more than you need in case you find bartering opportunities. The ideal materials for barter aren't necessarily expensive: They fill a core need, store well (in other words, no perishables), and will likely be scarce when people are caught unprepared. Some ideal prospects include:

- Alcohol (especially in smaller bottles, like one-ounce or 375 ml bottles)
- Soap
- Candles
- Batteries
- Toilet paper
- Feminine products like tampons
- Ammunition
- Books, especially resource books
- Propane
- Matches or lighters
- Toothpaste
- Basic medical supplies, like band-aids or ibuprofen
- Playing cards
- Sewing supplies
- Coffee (instant, or vacuum-sealed)

What about precious metals like gold and silver? These two have served as money for more than 6,000 years, and I believe that they will play an important role after a currency crisis passes and a new monetary system is needed. That said, I doubt these will be helpful in a short-term emergency: Too few people

understand their value to make them a valued resource. So you should definitely invest in them for your long-term security, but for a short-term event, keep your focus on physical cash and tradeable goods.

Medical

In a crisis situation, even one lasting up to 30 days, it's likely that there will be some kind of emergency medical services available at hospitals, clinics, and other locations like fire stations. So when you think about medical preparedness, your efforts should focus on being able to treat non-critical issues yourself and stabilizing critical problems until you can get people to qualified professionals.

Before worrying about unexpected problems, deal with the problems you know about: Specifically, if you're currently taking medicine for some mental or physical condition keep a 30-day reserve on hand. And take the time now to find out if any of your neighbors have medical training, perhaps as a physician or nurse or as someone who deals with emergency medical situations like an EMT, fireman or police officer. Those could be good relationships to have if the unexpected happens. Finally, consider getting some basic training on emergency medical care like CPR.

There are certain common-sense items you'll want in your medical kit, including a variety of bandages (including wrap bandages, gauze, and tape), alcohol, antibiotic creams, pain relievers (ibuprofen or aspirin), a thermometer, scissors, and personal protection like masks and gloves. You'll also want a how-to book or guide on basic first aid procedures, preferably illustrated. If you have children, be sure that you have pain relievers appropriate for them; younger children may need smaller doses or may not be comfortable swallowing pills.

If you end up in a crisis, even if it's a short-term situation, your life is going to get a lot more physical. You may be gathering wood for a fire, looking for food or water, or even just spending more time outside meeting with neighbors. And for many of us, that will be a somewhat new experience: Our bodies may not be used to that level of physical activity. You can prepare for that by stocking sunscreen, lotion for dry skin and for sunburns, anti-itch medicine and antihistamines for bug bites or poison ivy, band-aids and disinfectants for blisters, tweezers for ticks and splinters, a cold pack for sprains, and an emergency blanket for hypothermia.

There are a variety of pre-packaged first aid kits on the market, or you can compile your own. If you're storing medicines, either prescription or over the counter, just keep a close eye on their expiration dates so you always have medicines available at their full potency.

Communication

As long as you have power, communication shouldn't be an issue. You might lose your cable signal; you might even lose your internet connection. But as long as you have power and a smart phone (which 77% of us do in the US)¹¹, you should be able to get a satellite signal and reach the outside world via telephone and internet browsing. And of course, nearly half of US households still have a landline.¹²

But if you don't have that landline, and the power goes out and you don't have spare batteries or some way to recharge your device, you'll lose the use of that smart phone after a day or two. Then what?

To listen in on the outside world, you'll want to at least have a battery-operated AM/FM radio, with enough spare batteries to power it for a while. You can find a decent one online in the \$10-20 range, and it will at least allow you to get news and weather reports from local stations.

If you're willing to spend a bit more – not much more, maybe in the \$30-50 range – you can get a multifunction emergency radio. These will give you AM/FM radio service as well as other stations like NOAA weather stations and short-band frequencies, and many come with attractive features like solar panels and hand cranks to power the radio, flashlights, and even ports to charge your devices with the energy you create.

Without cell phone service, communicating with others in your group or community will become very difficult. Before you have to face a crisis situation, talk with people important to you and see if you can all agree to invest in a shared technology like satellite phones, CBs, or ham radios – or at least persuade them to invest in rechargeable technology, like the emergency radio above, so they can

11 <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology/>

12 <https://www.theverge.com/2017/5/4/15544596/american-households-now-use-cellphones-more-than-landlines>

recharge their cell phones for continued contact.

If you don't have any power at all, and your loved ones expect to stay with a half-mile to mile area, as a last resort you can use an emergency whistle, which can cost anywhere from \$1-10. Make sure each member of your family has one, and agree to a limited series of codes you can all understand. As a bonus, these whistles are useful to alert others – not just your family – when you're in danger or lost.

Hygiene and Sanitation

In an emergency, cleanliness – both for yourself and your surroundings – is extremely important. Aside from the low morale caused by feeling dirty and living in a dirty environment, poor hygiene makes it more likely that you'll get sick, and poor sanitation can attract animals, pollute your land and water, and make life unpleasant in general. It's best to plan ahead for how you'll keep yourself, your family, and your living conditions in good shape.

Hygiene

You'll want to be able to do the following, whether a crisis lasts three days or thirty or more, so you should stock up on supplies accordingly:

- Washing your face, hands, and body, using bar soap, liquid soap, and/or body wash
- Brushing your teeth at least twice a day with toothbrush and toothpaste
- Washing your hair at least every few days, requiring soap or shampoo
- Using moisturizer and lip balm as appropriate in harsh environments
- Supplying woman who have menstrual cycles, with tampons and pads
- Supporting the needs of babies and toddlers with diapers, wipes, powder, and rash cream
- Supporting the needs of the elderly as needed
- Allowing men and women to shave with razors and shaving cream (optional)
- Cleaning your living environment, which will require dish soap, disinfectant, and cleaning supplies like dish rags, towels, mops, and brooms

If you have running water, great; if not, remember that up to half of your water supply (see the Water section above) is meant for cooking, cleaning, and hygiene. Use it sparingly, but do use it.

Ideally, you'll have all of the materials you need at hand; if you run out of something, however, consider the following substitutes:

- Bleach (preferably unscented) is great for sanitizing and disinfecting. For a sanitizing liquid, use one tablespoon of bleach and one gallon of water; for a disinfecting solution, use $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of bleach per gallon of water. In both cases, you can wipe the surfaces and leave them to air dry. You can use the disinfecting solution as a hand wash if you run out of soap.
- If you have no shampoo, you can do a "dry shampoo" by putting corn starch or cornmeal in your hair and brushing vigorously.
- Instead of toothpaste, you can brush with baking soda or sea salt. You can use them in solid form or dilute them a bit with water if you're worried about them being too abrasive.
- If you don't have soap, you can use baby wipes or make your own body scrub using baking soda and water mixed to make a paste (from thick to runny, it's personal preference). There are recipes for making homemade soap out there, but if you haven't stocked actual soap, odds are that you also haven't stocked soap ingredients like lye.

Sanitation

Most of us live a pretty magical life when it comes to sanitation. When we go to the bathroom, our problems are simply flushed away with the flip of a switch, and as we generate trash, it disappears each week as long as we remember to take it down to the curb. If you lose that running water, or your trash service is interrupted, then suddenly you have some very big issues to deal with.

When it comes to human waste, urine is at least an easy problem to solve: As long as you dispose of it where you won't have to deal with any odor you'll be fine. In fact, if you want to put that urine to work, you can dilute it in water at a 10:1 ratio and use it as a fertilizer in your garden!

If your plumbing system stops working, excrement is a trickier problem. Digging a hole for an outside toilet is not a great solution: Aside from the smell,

it can attract animals and insects, and pollute the ground and any nearby water sources. The ideal solution is to use plastic bags as a liner in the toilet bowl, letting people go number two in the usual way (this can be less stressful for some than going outside anyway). Tie up the waste and use those bags to fill up another heavy-duty bag, using disinfectant and air freshener to mitigate the smell. Store those bags in a tight-fitting trash can in hopes that the city will be able to resume trash pickup service soon.

If your toilet is not an option for some reason, you can follow the same process using a five-gallon bucket (there are actually toilet seats designed for these) or another receptacle outside, either with or without a toilet seat. If you don't have enough bags, or you don't think you'll be seeing trash service for a while, an outside solution may be your only option.

According to *Emergency Essentials*,¹³ the best approach is the "long trench": Dig a trench 18-24 inches deep, use that as your restroom, and cover up your waste as you go. This sounds shallow, but it's deep enough to safely cover the waste, and it will still break down quickly at this depth. Remember to dig your trench at least a few hundred yards from a water source and away from and downwind of your residence or camp.

In any case, remember that toilet paper is an extremely welcome resource, and you should have enough to cover you and your family for some time.

When it comes to trash, if pickup service is disrupted you'll need to approach this issue with a very different mindset than you've had in the past. The goal is to minimize your trash to the greatest extent possible.

According to the USDA, food waste accounts for 30-40% of America's food supply.¹⁴ If you're not able to rely on trash pickup, your goal is to get that number as close to zero as possible (and actually that should be your goal anyway) as follows:

- Serve smaller portions. If someone wants more food they can go back for seconds, but smaller portions will reduce the amount left on plates.
- Save leftovers, and eat them before preparing new food.
- Cook or freeze perishables, especially meats, as soon as you can.

13 <https://beprepared.com/blog/5920/sanitation-and-hygiene-during-an-emergency-2/>

14 <https://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/faqs.htm>

- Find ways to use things you would normally have thrown away. If you cook a chicken, for example, use the bones to make chicken broth; if you have meat left over as well, turn it into chicken soup. If your bread has gone stale, turn it into bread crumbs or croutons.
- Any vegetable waste, such as carrot peelings or apple cores, can be used for compost. If you don't garden, find someone who does and share with them. You may get some fresh produce in return.

For other trash, follow the “Reduce/Reuse/Recycle” rules. Don't get anything you don't actually need, and once you're done with something find a way to reuse it. Soda bottles, for example, can be used to store water or start garden seeds; newspaper can be used to start fires, mop up greasy spills, or shredded and added to compost. The less trash you have to deal with in an emergency situation, the better off you'll be.

Entertainment

If you planned your response to an unexpected event based on the movies, you would think the experience would be action-packed, with crises constantly unfolding and you scrambling to respond. In reality, once you've gotten your initial bearings, crises can present long stretches of intense boredom. When you couple that boredom with the stress that everyone will likely be feeling from having their lives disrupted, you can imagine how valuable some ready-made distractions can be.

You should be prepared with both electronic and non-electronic options (since you don't know whether you'll have electricity or not). Video games and movies are great, but if the power is out you've still got to be able to pass the time.

Some options:

- Books, magazines, comic books, old yearbooks, etc.
- Activity books (especially for younger people)
- Puzzle books
- Board games
- Decks of cards

- Toys like Legos (fun for adults too!)
- Balls for outdoor activities – baseballs, basketballs, soccer balls, etc.
- Outdoor games like horseshoes, Frisbee, etc.

Finally, reach out to your community to set up some group activities. Children don't need anything to play hide and seek or tag, while adults can get card games together that will entertain while building needed community connections.

Should I stay or should I go?

In September 2005, shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana, another Hurricane – Hurricane Rita – was barreling towards Houston. Given that Rita was a Category 5 storm, and with Katrina's devastation fresh in their minds, officials called on Houston residents to evacuate the city.

The storm ultimately made landfall further east, and as a Category 3 hurricane, causing \$12 billion in damages and a loss of nearly 100 lives. In Houston, meanwhile, according to the Houston Chronicle:¹⁵

In the Houston area, the muddled flight from the city killed almost as many people as Rita did. An estimated 2.5 million people hit the road ahead of the storm's arrival, creating some of the most insane gridlock in U.S. history. More than 100 evacuees died in the exodus. Drivers waited in traffic for 20-plus hours, and heat stroke impaired or killed dozens. Fights broke out on the highway. A bus carrying nursing home evacuees caught fire, and 24 died.

Given the information they had at the time, you can't say city officials made the wrong call, but you can look at this experience as an example of how hard the decision can be, and the dangers of not being prepared to act when required to.

Decision factors

In a crisis, your default setting should be to stay put: You've got all your resources at hand, you know the area, you have an entire community to support you (and if not, get to work building your local network before you need it),

15 <http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Hurricane-Rita-anxiety-leads-to-hellish-fatal-6521994.php>

and you avoid the hazards of traveling in a dangerous emergency situation. But there may come a time when you need to “bug out.” Answer these three questions to help you make that decision:

1. **Is the danger so bad that I really need to leave?** If your home is in imminent danger of being destroyed, due perhaps to wildfires or a volcanic eruption, then obviously it’s time to go. Other dangers, such as a hurricane, aren’t as clear-cut. Consider not only the immediate danger, but also the follow-on effects of not having power for an extended period.
2. **Do I have somewhere to go?** If you have a second home or family members with whom you can stay, then leaving may be an easier decision. But if you’re heading out without a destination in mind, you could be facing pretty significant challenges: In the event of a mass evacuation, you’ll probably find that shelters and hotels are filled for hundreds of miles around. Try to secure a location in advance if you need to leave.
3. **Am I able to make the trip?** There are a few issues related to this question, such as: Do I have reliable transportation? Am I sure I’ll be able to find fuel along the way? Am I prepared with food, water, and other resources if I’m stuck in traffic for hours on end? Are all the members of my family physically able to make the trip? Will I be able to bring my pets?

What to have ready

If you have to go mobile, there’s a balance between what you want to bring and your capacity to carry it. You assume that you’ll be able to go by car, but there are cases where roads are impassible (such as after an earthquake or severe storm with downed trees and power lines), and you end up having to go on foot. It’s the difference between being able to carry hundreds of pounds of supplies versus literally what you can carry on your back.

It’s therefore smart to plan a two-stage strategy. For travel by car, pack as you would for a camping trip, bringing along all the materials you would need (tents, cooking supplies, etc.) to be self-sufficient for a period of time. The other is a more basic level of preparedness: Having a “bug-out bag” no larger than a

backpack, something you can literally carry on foot. In either case, materials should be ready to go. (Store your car supplies in a closet near your garage in order to avoid weighing down or cluttering your car on a day-to-day basis.)

For the car

Consider having the following supplies ready to throw into your trunk when needed:

- Three-day supply of food (see Food section for recommendations on calorie counts)
- Three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day)
- First aid kit
- Three days of clothing for each person, including for inclement weather, as well as special supplies for infants if needed
- Blankets
- Camping equipment (tents, sleeping bags, cooking supplies/mess kit, etc.)
- Car emergency kit (flares, fire extinguisher, tire repair kit, jumper cables, etc.)
- Sanitary supplies (garbage bags, toilet paper, moist towelettes, hand sanitizer, etc.)
- Materials to pass the time: paper and pen, games, etc.
- Area maps

For your backpack

Assuming you need emergency supplies you can carry on foot, pack what you need but remember the hiking mantra that “every ounce counts.” You can probably carry a sixty pound pack for a while, but after a few hours it’s going to become a real burden, so keep weight as a key consideration while you plan for the essentials going into your bag; that includes looking for low-weight alternatives to the things you know you’ll want. For example, you’ll probably be better off with high-density, calorie-rich energy bars rather than full meal kits, just as you’ll be better served by a mylar space blanket than a large wool covering.

Some items you’ll want to include in the bags you prepare for yourself and your family members:

- Important documents
- Copy of insurance policies
- Identification
- \$300 cash in small denominations, at least some coins
- Prescriptions
- eyeglasses
- Small bottle of bleach and medicine dropper to purify water
- Purell or hand wipes
- Solar blankets (4)
- Knife, can opener, scissors, fire starter and bag of tinder
- Matches in waterproof container
- Flashlight and batteries
- Whistle to signal for help
- Portable NOAA weather radio, preferably with AM/FM (battery or hand-crank powered)
- Mini first-aid kit with bandages, antibiotic ointment, aspirin
- Whistle
- Ponchos (4)
- Bottled water (4)
- Cell Phone and charger
- Granola or energy bars (8)
- Socks (4 pairs)
- Heat-pack hand warmers (4)
- Little treats like hard candy, peanut butter/cracker packs, dried fruit, etc.

You should check your prepared materials every six to twelve months to make sure food supplies are fresh, clothes are appropriately sized, and that everything continues to be current and in good working order.

Building an active community response

Wherever you live, whether in a neighborhood or apartment complex, the people around you make up a de facto community simply by the fact that you all share a living area. That doesn't mean you have an active community however; oftentimes we don't know many (or sometimes any!) of our neighbors at all, let alone well enough to have the kind of familiarity or trust that would be helpful in a crisis.

If at all possible, build up those relationships now, before you face any kind of emergency. Join your homeowner's association. Participate in community activities like holiday parties, community meetings, or common area cleanups. Talk to your neighbors, and get to know them by helping them with their projects or inviting them over for dinner. If a crisis never occurs, your life will be much richer for having friends in your neighborhood; if it does then you'll have established bonds that will make it much easier to respond as a group.

Whether or not you've had a chance to establish those bonds, however, think about working with your neighbors in the following areas to better support all of the families in your community.

Leadership

Odds are that your community already has some kind of leadership structure in place, such as a homeowner's association, condo board or tenant's association. Remember that this is voluntary leadership: people holding offices in these associations can't force residents to do things, but they can help to set priorities and build consensus, serve as a point of coordination for activities, and manage the community resources they were elected to oversee (such as the cash reserves of the association or access to a community center).

Communication

The way in which you and your neighbors communicate will depend on the availability of power. If you have power, it's simple to set up an email or text system to send out updates as needed, though these should be supplemented with as many face-to-face meetings as possible (remember, the idea is to build community, which you can't do just by texting people you don't know). If the power is out, you'll need to build a different communication plan, perhaps by holding community meetings supplemented with "block captains" who are each

responsible for sharing information with 10-20 families.

Identify Skills and Resources

If roads become impassable, you may find yourself suddenly without access to the kinds of products and services you might need in an emergency. What happens if you can't get to a hardware store for tools to repair damage to your home? What happens if you can't get to a doctor? If you've invested the time to build relationships in your community, odds are that you'll have access to people who can help -perhaps you have a carpenter down the street, or an EMT or doctor within walking distance.

Community Projects

By coming together, you and your community members can tackle projects that would be difficult for any single person or family to manage. If you've gone through a hurricane, for example, get a team together to clear trees and debris. Have a group go through the neighborhood to check on neighbors and respond to any medical needs or other emergencies. Form a cooking pool to share scarce resources like gas or charcoal grills. By working together you'll reduce the burden on individuals and make it easier to weather the crisis.

Safety

As the saying goes, "no man is an island," and it's unrealistic to think that any one of us can protect our families and properties 24 hours a day: We all need sleep, and we'll all have other tasks to be handled depending on the nature of the emergency. By working with your neighbors, you can share the job of protecting your community by instituting a neighborhood watch, starting regular patrols as needed, and instituting an emergency system such as a phone or email tree.

Be Patient and Kind

When people's lives are disrupted by a crisis they can become disoriented and stressed, resulting in short tempers and changes in behavior. Remembering that people are not their normal selves helps us to be patient as they come to terms with the situation, and helps avoid the kinds of problems that short tempers and lack of sleep can cause in a community. Do what you can to help everyone keep a sense of perspective, help them to acknowledge the role of higher stress in your relationships, and find ways to reduce that stress by taking time out to relax and even have a little fun.