

Are You Ready?

The 30-Minute Home Emergency Preparedness Assessment

Find the weak spots in your household before an emergency finds them for you

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How to Use This Guide

The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide an organized way for you to assess your state of readiness and then do something about it. Even if this leads you to do *only one thing*, you will be that much more prepared than you were yesterday. Several “one things” put together can really make a difference when you need them. It doesn’t take much.

This isn’t designed to make you a prepper.

Use this to guide your thoughts, because we start with a mental exercise. You are to imagine different scenarios and then compare your thoughts about what could happen to where you stand today. The system is not perfect and it isn’t all encompassing. It isn’t meant to be. It is intended to give you a jump start on your readiness. Any system is helpful as long as you use it. So, start today. Take 30 minutes and think about the scenarios we propose. And do something. You will be surprised how easy it is. And how much more confident you will feel once you take action.

This assessment is organized around seven disruptions:

1. What if the power goes out?
2. What if the water stops or becomes undrinkable?
3. What if you can’t buy anything for three days?
4. What if you had 30 minutes to leave?
5. What if your phone doesn’t work?
6. What if your house becomes uncomfortable – but still habitable?
7. What if YOU aren’t there?

1. What if the power goes out?

My wife and I have been married for close to five decades and have seven children. We have lived without power for 6-10 days in different emergency situations. For some of them, we were completely unprepared and we suffered for it. For others, we were well prepared and being without electricity wasn’t a problem.

My daughter, Jessica, and her family live in Kaua’i, Hawaii. In September 2026, they experienced Hurricane Lowell. 92% of people lost electricity.¹ For my daughter, they were without power for seven days. Jessica has gone through several emergency situations with us in the family. She knows what it is like to be without electricity for an extended time. Yet, her family wasn’t prepared. If it weren’t for the kindness of a friend who lent them a power supply, they would have lost all food in their refrigerator and would not have been able to recharge their phones in order to communicate. This *one thing* made all the difference for them.

¹ Kelly, Erin. (2026 September 8). *Kauai Co-op Works to Restore Power After Hurricane Lowell Deals a Major Blow*. NRECA-America’s Electric Cooperatives. <https://www.electric.coop/hurricane-lowell-knocks-out-power-to-most-kauai-co-op-members>

So, where do you stand?

I don't care how many flashlights you have. It doesn't matter that you have a generator. You can have all sorts of gear and shiny toys and still not have what you **NEED**.

So, what do YOU *need*?

Imagine that you are suddenly without power. At this point, you don't know if you will be without electricity for minutes, hours, or days. Think what a power outage means for you and your family. The following list is to help your imagination. Walk through your home and take notice. You will be surprised at everything that suddenly stops without electricity. What other things would you add to this list? What things would you live without? How would your thinking change if you *knew* power would be out for three days (72 hours)?

- I know which things in my home stop working when the electricity fails.
- Everyone who needs one has an immediately accessible (safe) light source.
- I can recharge essential communications devices without household electricity.
- I know whether my heat requires electricity – even if the heat source is natural gas.
- I know how I would safely prepare food without my normal appliances.
- I know how long my refrigerated and frozen food can safely remain without power.
- I have considered electrically dependent garage doors, security systems, medical equipment, elevators, thermostats, internet, well water pumps, etc.
- Imagine a 72 hour power outage or longer. Add three days if you live in rural areas or in a remote area like a pacific island.

The things in my home that **ABSOLUTELY MUST HAVE** electricity:

My **BIGGEST** power vulnerability is:

One thing I will do about it this week:

2. What if the water stops or becomes undrinkable?

There was one instance when my family was without water for a week. It was terrible. During that week, our problem was not one of supply. We had plenty of water. It was power. An ice storm had knocked out our power. We had ventless propane fireplaces for warmth. We had a grill set up in the garage for cooking. We had flashlights and other light sources. It was cold outside, so we put our refrigerated items out in the snow. We had everything we needed. Everything except water. Well, we actually had plenty of fresh water. We were on a well. But we had no power to operate the water pump. We couldn't get to it. You can bet that I remedied that problem immediately after power was restored.

I am a firm believer that 99.9% of people will have enough water at all times and in all situations for their needs. Personally, I am not a proponent for storing large amounts of water for emergencies. I don't think that **quantity** will be an issue. However, water **quality** is a different story. Although I think we will have enough water in an emergency, I also *do not* think that we should rely on the *purity* of that water in emergency situations.

I live in Utah. By most measures, we are the second driest state in the union behind Nevada. We are also in the middle of a multi-decade mega drought. Yet, statewide, I am sure that we have plenty of water. We waste most of our water resources on watering lawns and agriculture. Indoor use by residents only accounts for 3-4% of our water consumption.² Utah does not have a supply problem. Ours is a management problem.

No major cities in the United States have ever run short of water. There are many on the brink of a water crisis because of mismanagement. But they haven't run out. If you research towns in the U.S. that have actually run dry over the past ten years, you come up with five. Three in Utah. One in California. And one in Louisiana which didn't run out of water, it ran out of potable (drinkable) water. Again, mismanagement. Water availability is a hot button issue for politicians. Careers have been ruined because of problems with water. However, it is almost always because of water mismanagement and water quality, not water supply. Other preparation advocates will beat the drum of water storage. I will always maintain that we will always have the water that we *need*.

Only you can decide your vulnerability to water, be it either a dry tap or an undrinkable water source. For the most part, a majority of Americans rely on a municipality for drinking water. Municipalities are bureaucracies. I worked for one of the largest and most efficient bureaucracies on the planet, the U.S. Army. All bureaucracies have problems. We are all at risk in some form or fashion.

For our family, we do have a limited supply of drinking water on hand. Maybe a couple of cases of bottled water. We also have several ways to make our municipal water drinkable. However, we do not store large quantities of water based upon our assessment of where we live and our water source. Check out the questions below to start your own assessment. Add other items as they may pertain to your situation. And remember, you don't need drinkable water to be able to

² (No Date). *Are We Running Out of Water?* Utah Rivers Council. <https://utahrivers.org/are-we-running-out-of-water>

flush the toilet, do laundry, or do dishes if you use a dishwasher. Non-potable water is fine for such things, with a few rare exceptions.

- Could my household function for 24 hours without a working faucet?
- I have enough drinking water immediately available for everyone in my household.
- I have additional water available for basic sanitation.
- I know how I would flush a toilet if municipal water service stopped.
- I know where my household water shutoff is and I know how to shut it off.
- I have at least one method for making questionable water safer to drink.
- I know which stored beverages and water sources in my home could supplement my drinking-water supply.

The 24-hour Challenge

Starting tomorrow morning, imagine that no water comes from any faucet. Don't actually shut off your water. Simply walk through your normal morning and identify every time you would need it.

Shower. Toilet. Coffee. Teeth. Medication. Pets. Breakfast. Washing hands. Dishes.

Does that water need to be drinkable?

Now imagine the same exercise where you had plenty of water coming from your faucets, but authorities have warned to boil it before drinking. Or you suspect that it is contaminated. How does your planning change?

The things in my home for which I **ABSOLUTELY MUST HAVE** drinkable water:

We won't give you a magic formula for daily water needs, either by household or per person. Make your best guess. Do your own research. Then increase that by 10%. My daily drinkable water requirements are (express in gallons):

Not considering washing clothes and with minimal personal sanitation, my total daily water requirements are (express in gallons):

How do I want to make water drinkable? There are many methods. Some are easier than others. Some are more expensive. The only two ways of purifying water from all pathogens as well as heavy metals like lead is distillation or reverse osmosis.

The one thing I will do this week to increase my supply of drinkable water. (Quantity of drinkable water available)

The one thing I will do this week to have a way to make water drinkable. (Water purification. Decide how you want to do it above. Implement that decision here.)

3. What if you can't buy anything for three days?

If you lived through the Covid-19 Pandemic, you experienced empty store shelves starting in March 2020. In our case, stores were still in operation. But they didn't have toilet paper and cleaning supplies. You could still purchase a lot of things. In our community, there was no panic and people were happy to ration or share. Since I live in a community that believes in preparedness, we didn't experience any problems, only occasional nuisances.

During the Loma Prieta Earthquake of October 1989 in California, our family experienced *completely empty stores* in six hours from the onset of the quake. Stores were not resupplied for many days. During Hurricane Katrina, I was in New Orleans as a Battalion Commander with one of my military units. Widespread panic inspired looting where stores were quickly cleaned out of everything on the shelves. Everything! I remember seeing video of police officers joining the looters as they panicked as well.

Now, imagine that it is Friday afternoon. Stores are closed until (at least) Monday. Amazon isn't coming. Restaurants aren't operating. What becomes a problem?

Think about non-perishable (i.e. does not have to be refrigerated), long shelf-life foods and supplies. In a true emergency, you will eat the things thawing in your freezer first, as well as those things spoiling in your refrigerator.

- We could prepare three days of meals using food already in our home.
- We have food that requires little or no cooking.
- We have adequate pet food.
- We have necessary medications.
- We have toilet paper and basic hygiene supplies.
- We have feminine hygiene products as appropriate.
- We have needed infant, elder-care, or disability supplies.
- We have enough fuel/energy to prepare food if normal cooking is unavailable.
- I have enough (name your personal poison: cigarettes, alcohol, chocolate, etc.) on hand.

We're not talking about emergency rations here. (Yuk!) How do you answer these questions for food that you and your family actually eat?

Use this space to jot down your thoughts.

4. What if you had to leave in 30 minutes?

About 15 years ago, we had a wildfire in our community. My town is nestled up against the Wasatch Range. The fire came within three blocks of our house. It was scary. We had a sheriff deputy knock on our door and told us that we had two hours to get away.

I will tell you that we didn't go to a "checklist." We didn't grab "go bags." We thought, "What is most important to us?" Since the fire was threatening our home and not houses across town, we packed a car full of our most precious treasures and parked it at a friend's house. We packed photographs, computer hard drives with videos and voice recordings, important documents, and other heirloom items. We went through the house like crazy people deciding quickly if it met the criteria for taking with us. We didn't think much about what to wear, personal hygiene items, food, or water. And we took a little more than the two hours given to us. The house survived and we were able to return in a couple of days.

We know Afghani refugees living close by. They fled Afghanistan during Operation Allies Refuge in August 2021. They were able to take the clothes on their backs.

Our daughter, Jessica, evacuated from Manhattan during the Covid-19 Pandemic. She fled to Canada to stay with a friend. She was able to take what she could on an airplane.

Evacuations are a reality. You may think that it will never happen to you. And yet, people are ordered to evacuate, or choose to evacuate, all the time. I have found that most things that are in pre-made "go bags" are useless for our circumstances. I am comfortable with the idea of a 72-hour emergency kit. But I do not think that "one size fits all" is the way to go.

Since we evacuated, we have kits, but they are what we want in them. None of them are back packs. Much too small. We are fortunate enough to have a supply of clothing, food, and necessary supplies at a secure location away from our home. We have evacuation "triggers." We know where we will go. We know how we will get there. We have enough to stay for a long time. I do not consider myself a prepper by any means. However, we still live in the same house that we had 15 years ago. And since that time, we have had another wildfire in our community. And there are wild fires all around us. A good rule of thumb: If something has happened once in the past, chances are that it will happen again. We are prepared for another wildfire close to us.

A police officer knocks on your door and tells you your neighborhood is being evacuated. You have 30 minutes. Where are the things you would take? Think about the items listed below and add your own as appropriate. Our answers would change today, based upon the preparations we have already made.

- I know where everyone's essential medications are.
- I can quickly locate identification and critical documents.
- I have access to some cash and payment alternatives.
- I can quickly gather chargers and essential electronics.
- I know what my pets need to evacuate.
- I have appropriate clothing and footwear readily available.

- I know what irreplaceable items I would take if time permitted.
- I know at least two ways out of my neighborhood.
- My vehicle normally has enough fuel/charge to leave the area.
- I know where I would go.

Now, ask yourself this question: What three things would I probably waste precious time looking for?

Use this space to jot down your thoughts.

5. What if your phone doesn't work?

I was assigned to the Pentagon on the 10th of September 2001. On that day, I asked my boss if I could have the next day off in order to move my family. On the fateful day of 9/11, I watched with horror as the Pentagon was attacked. On the day after, 9/12, I reported for duty and was assigned to an Emergency Operations Center.

I have friends who were there in the building. They felt the impact of the jet. They got themselves out of the building. Many of them tried to use their cell phones to call loved ones.

And the cell phone service didn't work!

Towers were overloaded. One of my friends was finally able to make it to a payphone and call his family collect. You don't find many payphones around these days.

I know of another man who was arrested. His cellphone was confiscated. His family was out of their minds with worry because they had not heard from him for days. Yes, he was given the opportunity to call someone. But, he didn't know anybody's phone number. It was all locked away in his cellphone!

Modern preparedness advice often assumes the smartphone will solve everything. But, those of us who have lived through it know better.

Imagine your phone has 3% battery, cellular service is overloaded, and the internet is unavailable. Now what? Use the following statements to help guide you through some situations. Do you have alternative methods of communication or “standing orders” as we call them in the military?

- I know important family telephone numbers without relying entirely on my contacts list—or have them written down.
- I have an alternative way to charge my phone.
- I know how my community communicates emergency information.
- I have important addresses written or printed somewhere.
- I have offline access to critical information.
- My family has an agreed-upon meeting location.
- We have someone outside the immediate area who can serve as a family contact.
- I know how I would get reliable information if internet service failed.

Thoughts?

6. What if your home becomes uncomfortable—but not uninhabitable?

Most disasters don't destroy people's homes. They make normal life *difficult*.

No air conditioning.

No heat.

No elevator.

No running water or non-drinkable water.

No refrigerator.

No internet.

Parts of the house that are so damaged that you cannot use them.

Sewage backup.

Broken windows.

Extreme temperatures.

When we moved into our present home, we had no idea of the water problems we would face. The first Spring, we had flooding in our finished basement. We learned later that our house had a history of basement flooding which was not adequately disclosed.

Imagine standing in four inches of water as you use a shop vac to try to suck up as much water as you can. It wasn't fun. But it didn't require an evacuation either. I now have three sump pumps and a French drain surrounding my home. No more leaks.

Remember our daughter in Hawaii? Since they had no electricity after Hurricane Lowell struck, they had no air conditioning. Their stove was electric and they did not have an alternate way of cooking food. They faced a "boil water" order for the first part of the crisis. How do you do that without a stove? And her in-laws were visiting. Uncomfortable? Yes? Uninhabitable? No.

Ask yourself, "Could I safely remain in my home for 72 hours if normal utilities were unreliable? Or if there were physical problems with parts of my home?"

Now, go through the most likely situations for your home. Then assess temperature, lighting, sanitation, sleeping, food preparation, security, communication, medications, pets, and boredom/comfort.

That last one matters.

Preparedness isn't merely remaining alive.

It's maintaining a reasonable degree of normalcy while infrastructure is being restored.

Use this page for notes and thoughts. 😊

7. What if YOU aren't there?

This is probably the most unusual section of this preparation guide. Most preparedness plans quietly assume that the person doing the planning will also be present to execute the plan.

Really. Could the people who depend upon you be able to manage the emergency themselves if you were at work, traveling, injured, or simply couldn't get home?

I told you about our loss of power and consequently our loss of water for about a week? Shortly after that experience, an electrician neighbor and I installed a power inlet box for a generator and a manual transfer switch outside of my home. I purchased a humble generator, about 5,000 watts. These renovations allowed me to hook up a generator to the outside of our home. All we had to do was throw a switch so that our house operated on generator power instead of city power. This is also code, by the way. We want to protect any power linemen working on the city power lines from being electrocuted by our generator power. We have installed such inlet boxes and transfer switches in every home we have owned ever since.

In our present home, my parents came to live with us years ago. My father required oxygen from an oxygen concentrator. The concentrator required electricity to operate. We were away when the power went off. A daughter called us and asked what to do. I told her where the generator was. Then I directed her to an instruction sheet that I had written and laminated. It told her exactly how to hook up the generator, which circuit breakers to close, how to throw the switch, everything she needed to get the generator power into the house. She was able to be up and running on generator power within minutes. She called us back about 10 minutes later and reported that everything was working well. They had power and Grandpa had his oxygen.

What every family needs in terms of preparation is household resilience rather than one person's hobby. Preparation is a family affair. Consider the things that follow. Add your own. The idea is to get you thinking about your situation.

- Other household members know where emergency supplies are located.
- Someone besides me knows how to shut off utilities.
- Someone besides me knows the family communication plan.
- Family members know where medications and critical information are kept.
- Children know what they should do – appropriate for their ages.
- Someone will care for my pets if I can't return home.
- The household could function without me giving everyone instructions.

I'm not going to give you a box this time. Scribble all over the page.

Bringing it Together

I want you to notice that for this entire assessment, we have not pushed any products. We haven't given you any checklists. We've done our best to not push you one way or the other as to what you need. Your circumstances are personal and only you can (and must) decide what takes priority. You aren't preparing for Armageddon or the end of the world. We are trying to help you get through the next storm a little more comfortable than the last one.

Will your preparation save lives? Maybe, but probably not. You have experienced emergencies and storms before. Will your preparation make life easier as you navigate the crisis? Absolutely! As I said at the beginning, even if you only prepare one little thing, you are more prepared than you were yesterday. And a few little things eventually add up to quite a bit of preparation.

My family will no longer be without electricity for very long. Not if I can help it.
My family will not have to worry about safe drinking water. Not if I can help it.
My family will always have enough food and supplies to weather any storm.
My family will evacuate to a safe and secure place if and when necessary.
My family has methods to communicate outside of cellular phone coverage.
My family knows how to shelter at home, even when it is uncomfortable.
My family knows how to do stuff without my needing to be present.

And the reason is not because I am some preparation guru. We have lived through all sorts of natural disasters and emergency situations. Earthquakes, storms, wars, deployments, a pandemic, floods, wildfires, mudslides, hurricanes, tornado watches, family sickness, and death. Yes. Death. We have made our share of mistakes. When we were able, we have immediately sought to rectify our shortcomings. Not all at once. Little by little. And we haven't tried to fix everything. Only enough to take away the sting of the emergency where possible.

Now it is your turn. Fill in the snapshot below. What has impressed you the most? Where do you feel most at risk? But first, the snapshot. Rate yourself in each area. I like to put an "X", an "X-" or an "X+" to provide a bit of subtlety.

Household Preparation Snapshot				
Area	Comfortable	Needs Work	Unprepared	Notes
Power				
Water				
Food & Essentials				
Evacuation				
Communication				
Shelter at Home				
Household Independence				

Look at your areas that need work or where you rate yourself as unprepared.

Your lowest-scoring areas aren't failures. They're your priorities.

This is *actionable* preparedness.

The Sensible Survivor APPP & Method

Assess • Plan • Prepare • Practice

If you completed the exercises we outlined for you above, you successfully applied the Sensible Survivor APPP without knowing you were working according to a methodology.

Preparedness can feel overwhelming to people. When they first begin thinking about it, they imagine a long endless checklist of equipment, supplies, and complicated plans. The task seems so large and expensive that many people decide it is easier not to start at all.

But, as you've seen, preparedness does not need to be complicated. Jessica and her family were able to make it through a week with no electricity a little bit better because a friend lent them *one thing*, a power supply. Did people around her have the same? Probably not. As they talked with neighbors, they heard about food spoilage from refrigerators and not being able to charge phones. Neighbors also made it through, but it was more difficult.

The most effective preparedness often follows a very simple process.

We call this process the **Sensible Survivor APPP**.

It has four steps:

Assess

Plan

Prepare

Practice

These four steps transform preparedness from something vague and intimidating into something practical and manageable.

Step One: Assess

Preparation begins with understanding the risks most likely to affect your life.

Many people make the mistake of preparing for situations that are extremely unlikely while ignoring the disruptions they are far more likely to encounter.

For urban residents, the most common disruptions usually involve systems rather than dramatic disasters.

Power outages.

Transit shutdowns.

Severe weather.

Supply chain disruptions.

Temporary shortages.

These events may not make dramatic headlines, but they affect everyday life in significant ways.

Assessment simply means asking a few practical questions. We guided you through your own assessment according to seven areas: power, water, food & supplies, evacuation, life without your phone, sheltering in place, and household resilience. You could have evaluated your situation as it relates to other areas. We chose these seven because these are the most common

disruptions people face. They aren't limited to any particular crisis. In any assessment, you should ask yourself:

What disruptions are most likely where I live?

What systems does my daily life depend on?

What would happen if those systems paused temporarily?

When a person understands these risks, preparation becomes much easier to focus.

Step Two: Plan

Once risks are identified, the next step is simple planning.

Planning does not require elaborate documents or complicated strategies.

Often it involves nothing more than thinking through how you might respond if certain situations occur.

For example:

If a winter storm shuts down transportation, how will I get home?

If power is unavailable for several days, how will I cook or stay warm?

If grocery stores become crowded or supplies are limited, how will I adapt?

The purpose of planning is not to eliminate uncertainty.

It is to remove surprise.

When you have already considered how you might respond to a situation, the situation feels much less intimidating if and when it actually occurs.

Simple plans replace confusion with direction.

Step Three: Prepare

After risks have been assessed and plans have been made, preparation becomes straightforward.

Preparation simply means gathering the gear, equipment, tools, and/or supplies that support those plans.

This does not require stockpiling large quantities of equipment.

Often a small number of practical items can solve many problems.

Flashlights or solar lanterns provide light during power outages.

Portable battery packs keep phones operating and refrigerators running.

Stored water and shelf-stable food reduce stress during short disruptions.

Preparation should always remain *sensible*.

It should fit your living space, your resources, and your lifestyle.

The goal is capability, not excess.

Step Four: Practice

The final step is the one many people overlook.

Practice.

Plans and supplies are only useful if you understand how to use them.

Practice can be very simple.

Walk a possible route home from work.

Test a flashlight or emergency light before you need it.

Discuss evacuation plans with family members.

Review where important supplies are stored.

Practice transforms preparation into confidence.

When a disruption occurs, you are not facing the situation for the first time.

You have already thought about it.

You have already rehearsed your response.

And that familiarity helps you remain calm.

Practice turns preparation into confidence.

How APPP Creates Calm

When people encounter sudden disruptions without preparation, their minds immediately begin searching for answers.

What should I do?

What is happening?

What comes next?

That uncertainty can quickly create stress. But when you follow the Sensible Survivor APPP Method, the situation feels different.

You have already **assessed** the risks.

You have already made simple **plans**.

You have already **prepared** basic tools and supplies.

You have already **practiced** how you will respond.

Instead of confusion, you feel recognition. You have encountered this situation before—at least in your planning. That familiarity allows calm to take the place of panic.

Continue to use the Sensible Survivor APPP as you take stock of how ready you are for any emergency.

My Five Things

OK. Here is where the rubber meets the road. Based on what you discovered, choose only five things to improve.

My Sensible Survivor Five

Don't try to prepare for everything this weekend. Choose the **five** improvements that would make the greatest difference in your household. Only choose five. If five are too many, choose two or three or maybe only one. In other words, don't make this complicated. Remember, if you only do *one thing* to prepare, you are better off today than you were yesterday.

- 1. This week: _____
- 2. This week: _____
- 3. This month: _____
- 4. This month: _____
- 5. Later: _____

One thing we should practice:

One thing I need to teach someone else in my household:

The one vulnerability that surprised me most:

If you did the exercise in this eBook, you have made your **assessment**.

This one page becomes your **plan**.

Now go and **prepare** and don't forget to **practice**.

We love to hear your stories. Send us a note to hello@sensiblesurvivor.org or comment on our Facebook or Instagram posts. You can find the links at www.sensiblesurvivor.org.

Author Biography



Chris has 30 years of leadership and disaster mitigation experience with the United States Army. His military career includes international, operational, and logistical assignments with the Active Component, the U.S. Army Reserve, and the U.S. Army National Guard. He and his family have lived through nearly a hundred emergencies, natural disasters, calamities, and all around bad situations. Some of the more memorable include the Loma Prieta Earthquake, Hurricane Katrina, a local wildfire that forced an evacuation from their home, the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo, and the Covid-19 Pandemic where Chris lost his brother. He and his wife, Cathy, are the parents of seven children and many grandchildren.

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