



The Ultimate
10-STEP
SHTF
PLAN

What to Do Immediately After Any Disaster



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The Ultimate 10-Step SHTF Plan: What to Do Immediately After Any Disaster

Many people are waking up to fact that there are very-real threats facing our security and freedom every day. These include terrorist attacks, natural disasters like hurricanes, grid failure from EMP, economic collapse, rioting, and much more. Faced with these threats, mindful people are preparing by putting together disaster kits and stocking up on supplies. But I wonder how many of these people would really know how to *respond* to a disaster.

React vs. Respond

Before I get into the steps which need to be taken after a disaster, I want to point out the difference between *reacting* and *responding*.

Reacting is the immediate emotional actions right after a disaster occurs. It is impulsive. It is unaware. It is short-sighted. Most people will react when faced with a disaster.

By contrast, responding is deliberate and solution-based. People who respond to disasters are the ones who come out safe and alive.

There is a good story which illustrates the difference between reacting and responding:

At a restaurant, a cockroach crawls out from somewhere and lands on a lady. She immediately jumps up, screams with her arms flailing, and tries to get the cockroach off of her. Her reaction is contagious and the people sitting near her start to get up and flail around too. The next thing you know, everyone in the restaurant is in a panic.

In the chaos, the cockroach goes flying into the air and lands on the waiter. Instead of screaming, he pauses. He looks at the cockroach on his shirt. Then he grabs it with his fingers and throws it out of the restaurant.

Was the cockroach responsible for the chaos? No. The chaos was caused because the people *reacted* to the situation. By contrast, the waiter *responded*. He paused, assessed the situation, and acted based on his observations.

When SHTF, you can bet that most people are going to react. If you want to come out safe (physically and mentally), then you've got learn how to respond to disaster situations!

10 Steps to Take After Any Disaster

Some disasters can be predicted. For example, if you live in Florida, you better expect hurricanes and take steps to prepare in case one hits. But other disasters can't be predicted or even fathomed – who could have imagined the terror on 9/11?

Disaster planning is all about being flexible. So, there can't be any specific set of steps to take. You might find yourself following out some of these steps concurrently. Or, some steps might need to be repeated – like if new information about the disaster causes you to change your course of action, or your gear gets destroyed and you've got to gather essential supplies again.

These 10 steps won't tell you exactly what course of action to take in a specific disaster, but they will guide you through the crucial steps which need to be taken in *any* disaster situation so you can respond.

Step 1: Get In Touch with Your Loved Ones

Today, we are really spoiled by cell phones, the internet, and easy communication. We've gotten so used to being able to contact someone anytime, anywhere, that most of us would be completely unprepared in a disaster situation where communication systems go down.

If you don't already have one in place, I highly recommend establishing an emergency communication plan with your family. Here are some of the things you will need to consider:

- Have a backup to cell phones. HAM radios are a good alternative which will work when cell phone communications go down. Keep them in your home, work, and vehicle. You can also consider FRS or MURS radios as they don't require a license.
- Establish a meeting point in case of emergencies.
- Establish a backup meeting point in case the first meeting point is not safe. You will also need to establish a time period to wait before heading to the backup meeting point, or a signal which will be left at the primary meeting point to inform others that they should instead go to the secondary point.
- Know what the emergency plan is at your kids' schools.
- Do practice drills of the communication plan so you can be sure everyone understands what to do. It will also help prepare children for an emergency situation.

Step 2: Control Emotions

Remember what I said about the difference between *reacting* and *responding*? Most people will react in an emergency situation because they will let their emotions get the better of them. The key to making your way through the emergency steps is staying in control of your emotions.

This is NOT going to be easy. Even the most hardened soldiers can panic when faced with a true SHTF situation. When you panic, you will get tunnel vision and make rash, short-sighted decisions. You will react instead of respond.

One way to prepare yourself mentally for SHTF situations is to use the military technique of *Emergency Conditioning*. This is a practice in which you visualize a disaster situation in vivid detail. For example, a soldier might visualize combat with all of the bullets flying everywhere, the loud bombs going off, the screams, and smell of burning. The idea behind Emergency Conditioning is to trick your brain into believing that it has already gone through the event. Then the event won't be as difficult mentally when it really does occur.

Take some time to visualize worst-case scenarios. Close your eyes and imagine the details. It might seem like a weird practice, but it really does help people ready themselves mentally for disaster situations.

What if you are in the midst of a disaster and someone in your group is panicking? Or what if you are panicking? Follow these tips:

- **Never say "It will be okay."** This just dismisses their emotions instead of addressing them. Things aren't "okay." When they realize this, it will be harder for them to deal with the situation.
- **Ask what the worst-case outcome will be.** This will help put things in perspective and make the situation less scary. For example, if you have to flee into the wilderness, the worst-case scenario might be "We will have to sleep in the rain tonight until we can find shelter tomorrow."
- **Focus on your resources and accomplishments.** In a disaster, you can't predict what will happen next. All of these 'what-ifs' can be very stressful. Instead of focusing on the unknowns, focus on what you do know and have already done. For example, "Everyone is together. Everyone is safe. We have shelter and food for tonight."

Step 3: Gather Information

You need information in order to determine your course of action (COA). There are a lot of ways to gather information about the situation.

- Turn on the radio. What are emergency announcers saying about the situation? Are there evacuations taking place? Are they instructing people to stay put?
- If your radio isn't working, determine whether the problem is just with your neighborhood or if the problem is wider spread. If cell phones still work, you could check this by calling friends who live far away.

- Look outside! You can get a lot of information just by analyzing your surroundings, such as to see whether your neighbors have power, whether there is smoke in the distance, and whether the sky looks normal (sign of solar flare or EMP attack).

Step 4: Determine the Biggest Threats

When a disaster strikes, there are going to be a lot of threats occurring at once. There are also going to be a lot of *potential* threats. For example, if the grid goes down in the middle of winter, you have the immediate threat of how you will keep your family warm without power. But there is also the threat that rioting and looting will soon break out.

Thinking about all of these threats can be overwhelming, and send you into a state of panic. As I mentioned in the section about controlling emotions, it is a good practice to ask yourself *what is the worst that can happen*.

Imagining the worst-case outcomes might seem pessimistic, but it is key to surviving any disaster. If you just focus on the positive and say things like “everything will be okay,” then you will find yourself utterly unprepared to deal with what is to come next.

Make a list (write it down if you have to) of all of the *current* threats facing you now, and also all of the potential threats which could arise. This will allow you to balance them so you can determine the best COA.

Step 5: Take Stock of Your Resources

You have more resources than you realize! Even if you didn’t pack a Bug Out Bag, or don’t have a stockpile of supplies in your basement, you still have a lot of resources at your disposal. It just requires a bit of creative thinking.

Take these examples:

- In the Bosnian war, residents stuck during the siege of Sarajevo survived winter by making stoves out of 5-liter tin cans and burning furniture.
- During the recent Nepal earthquake, one man was trapped in rubble for a week but survived by eating flour and water found in containers nearby.
- An Arizona woman survived being trapped in her car during a blizzard for 10 days by curling up into a ball to preserve heat and ate snow for water.
- A New Zealand woman survived being lost in the woods by drinking her own breast milk and burying herself in dirt at night to stay warm.

Step 6: Determine Your COA

Once you know what threats you are facing and what resources you have, you can start making a Course of Action.

This isn't going to be easy.

You will have to weigh the immediate risks vs. long-term risks.

You will also have to weigh a lot of unknown variables.

For example:

A nuclear bomb goes off 100 miles from you. Your basement will offer some protection against radiation. You have enough food and water stockpiled for about 30 days. EMP doesn't seem to have affected your car, so your vehicle is drivable.

COA 1:

You decide to stay put in your home. You risk radiation poisoning by staying so close to ground zero, but you determine that the risk of trying to flee and getting stuck in traffic is greater. You also determine that your family isn't prepared to survive in a wilderness Bug Out location, since you don't have proper gear, knowledge, or defenses in place.

COA 2:

You decide to immediately flee. There is a risk of getting a high dose of radiation poisoning as you flee, but you determine that this beats the long-term radiation poisoning that you'd get by staying so close to ground zero. There is also a risk that you will get stuck in traffic trying to leave, but you have carefully planned your escape route and monitored traffic so feel confident you will be able to leave. You have also prepared a Bug Out location and a wilderness survival pack.

These are just very generalized descriptions of what courses of action you could take. There are also many other potential COAs (such as joining an emergency evacuation taking place, going to friends' homes instead of bugging out in the wilderness, etc.). Each COA has multiple risks associated with it and unknown factors. You've got to do your best to determine which risks are the greatest for your unique situation and capabilities.

Step 7: Get Your Gear

Hopefully you've planned for a disaster and your gear is waiting for you when a disaster strikes. There are two types of disaster gear you need in case SHTF: *Bug Out Bag* and *Hunker Down Stockpile*.

Your Bug Out Bag (BOB) is a backpack filled with all of the gear you need for situations when you've got to GO and survive in the elements. You should have at least 3 days worth of supplies in your BOB. This will include:

- Tent or plastic tarp for creating a survival shelter
- Sleeping bag
- Fire starter
- First aid kit
- Flashlight
- HAM radio
- Emergency food and water
- Water filtration system + water storage (like water bottles)
- Spare change of clothes + rain jacket
- Weapons and tools (a knife at minimum)
- Toilet paper and basic hygiene items

Bug Out Bags needs to be packed light so you can flee while wearing them. This makes it very difficult to choose items. My advice is to pack multi-tools to cut back on space. Also, the more you learn about wilderness survival techniques (like how to make a survival shelter out of a tarp), the fewer supplies you will need to bring with you.

Your Hunker Down Stockpile is for situations when you will need to wait out a disaster at home. You can be more generous with this stockpile since you won't be fleeing with it on your back. It is recommended that you stockpile enough supplies for 30 days. At minimum, you will need:

- 1-2 gallons of water per person, per day
- Canned, dried, and instant food for 30 days
- Basic cooking supplies + off-grid cooking method (like a camp stove)
- Toilet paper and a toilet (your toilet won't work when the plumbing system is down!)
- Flashlights or other off-grid lighting
- Weapons
- Medicines
- First aid kit
- Bleach and/or water filter system

Remember that the supermarket shelves are going to empty quickly after a disaster strikes! If you don't have supplies, you will have to determine whether it is worth facing the mobs and chaos to go to the supermarket to get supplies. Sure, you can always disinfect toilet water to drink in emergency situations, but you don't want to come to this! So stockpile supplies *before* an emergency occurs.

Step 8: Secure Shelter

Shelter is one of the core things you need to survive. Shelter is what will protect you from the elements like rain, snow, and cold. It is what will protect you from enemies. It is what will protect you from predators like wild animals. A good shelter can even protect you from radiation poisoning.

One of the biggest decisions you will have to make after SHTF is whether to *hunker down* or *bug out*. This refers to the choice between staying at home or fleeing into the wilderness.

Most preppers imagine themselves bugging out into the wilderness. Once there, they will set up a camp and wait until the chaos has died down. Then they will return to civilization and restart a new, better society.

As appealing as this scenario sounds, bugging out is a bad choice for most of us. Do you really think you will be able to survive months or even years out in the wilderness? Hunting is a lot harder than you'd think, and you won't have much food to forage in the winter. Before then, you'll probably get a bad case of diarrhea from eating a poisonous mushroom (those mushrooms are hard to identify correctly!) and could die of dehydration.

Another point worth mentioning is that there aren't many true wilderness spots left. When I go backpacking, I almost always bump into other backpackers – even at 5000 feet and way into the wilderness! When SHTF, a lot of people will probably flee into the wilderness, so it might start to get a bit crowded out there.

There are some serious SHTF situations when bugging out might be worth the risk – like if you live in a city and mass rioting is starting. Or if a hurricane is on the way and you need to flee (but then you'd probably go to a relative's house or hotel far away rather than flee into the wilderness). Yet, for most disaster situations, it is best to hunker down at home. This is why I am such an advocate of stockpiling emergency supplies at home.

If you are young, fit, and believe you and your family are capable of surviving in a wilderness bug out situation, then *make a bug out plan*. Scout out your bug out location in advance, have your Bug Out Bag ready to go, and for God's sake, make sure you've got maps of the area!!!

Some tips about securing shelter in SHTF situations:

- Learn how to make survival shelters in the wilderness; these can be made with a plastic tarp or with natural resources like branches
- Learn how to protect yourself from the effects of radiation from a nuclear attack; your survival shelter might just be your bathtub!
- Learn how to defend your home from looters and attackers; you'll probably want some barb wire in your stockpile of supplies!

Step 9: Secure Food and Water

Since you were smart enough to think ahead, you've got a supply of food and water stockpiled in your home and packed in your Bug Out Bag. But these stockpiles will eventually run out. What will you do then to get food and water?

Of the two, water is much more important than food. You can go about a month without food, but only 3 days without water before you die. And before those 3 waterless days are up, you will already be incoherent and crazy from thirst.

Every prepared person should have a good water disinfection and filtration system in their emergency supplies. There are 3 ways you can make dirty water safe to drink (note that these don't apply to water contaminated with radiation):

1. Boil water for a minimum of 15 minutes. This should be enough to kill most pathogenic bacteria, viruses, and protozoa. If the water is cloudy, let it settle first and then filter it through a paper towel, coffee filter, or clean cloth.
2. Use a water filter. I have a small camping water filter in with my gear. You can also learn how to make your own water filter out of grass, sand, and charcoal.
3. Add 6 drops of bleach to each 1 gallon of water. Use this method for situations when you can't boil or filter water. Let the water stand for 30 minutes after adding the bleach before you drink it.

As for food, it will help if you know how to identify edible plants. There are even many edible plants in urban environments (did you know that you can eat roses and dandelions?). Hunting is going to be a lot more difficult than you think. Don't plan on hunting a big buck, though you might be able to get a fair amount of small game from snare traps and fishing is an option near rivers and lakes. And don't forget that most bugs are edible and a great source of nutrients!

Step 10: Stay Sane

Finally, remember to stay sane through this disaster. I've talked to a lot of people who have survived various sorts of disasters (ranging from fleeing wars to natural disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes). Believe it or not, but most of them say that the hardest part wasn't going without food, nor enduring the cold. Most of them say that the hardest part was waiting it out.

How would you stay sane while waiting out a nuclear blast for 30 days in your basement? Or waiting out riots in your wilderness Bug Out location? Or trapped in your apartment while a war rages on outside?

Think about how Anne Frank wrote in her diary while hiding in the attic for 2 years. Or how prisoners of war draw on walls to pass the time. I highly recommend packing some form of entertainment in with your survival supplies. Some books, a journal, or a deck of cards will do the trick. This way, you can keep your mind sane while the rest of the world goes crazy.