
COUNTDOWN to PREPAREDNESS

**The Prepper's 52-Week Course to
Total Disaster Readiness**

JIM COBB



Ulysses Press

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*To Dad:
May it be a long time before you need to take another big
bite of that sandwich.*

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Foreword

Jim Cobb and I met because of my books and his voracious reading habits. I'm not sure how Jim came across my debut novel, *Ashfall*, but now that I know him better, I'm not surprised that he did. He's the only person I know who's as well read in apocalyptic fiction as I am, and he knows disaster- and survival-related nonfiction far, far better than I ever will.

Why should you care about Jim's fiction-reading habits? Well, fiction has an uncanny habit of predicting reality. In 1865 Jules Verne published *From the Earth to the Moon*, which correctly predicted every detail of the Apollo program except its propulsion system. Verne even forecast the location of the Kennedy Space Center—ninety-seven years before it opened. More ominously, in *Debt of Honor* Tom Clancy predicted the use of a civilian airliner as a weapon against the US government—seven years before 9/11.

I fervently hope that the scenario I fictionalize in *Ashfall*—the eruption of the Yellowstone supervolcano—doesn't become reality, but if it does, the book you're holding could save your life. And regardless of what I hope, the Yellowstone supervolcano *is* going to erupt again. Every time I meet a geologist—I've corresponded with five or six of them in the course of researching my own work—I ask two questions. First, will the Yellowstone supervolcano erupt again? And second, when? Each geologist I've spoken to has responded in the same way: Yes, Yellowstone will erupt again, and none of us has any idea when it will happen.

You have, no doubt, heard the aphorism that hope is not a strategy. If you're looking to progress beyond hope, to learn strategies for surviving the end of the world as we know it, then *Countdown to Preparedness* is a great place to start. You won't find any quick fixes in this book. Those who rely on quick fixes will be among the first to die. Disasters are by definition intensely stressful. They create conditions under which humans revert to routine—under stress, we can only perform actions we've practiced. This is why the military trains so relentlessly. In the heat of battle, soldiers can do only what they've internalized in their muscle memory. Preparation and planning are the *only* path to survival—for both soldiers and preppers.

Part of the genius of this book is that Jim breaks that preparation down into digestible weekly chunks. Over the fifty-two-week course he's planned for your benefit, you'll learn and practice critical skills, save for larger purchases, and build up your water and food stockpiles in a consistent, sustainable way.

It's fashionable in some circles to look down on preppers. There's now a whole television series that seems to be devoted to mocking them. But at its heart, prepping is nothing more than an extension of the motto I learned as a teenager in the Boy Scouts: Be Prepared. And while it's extremely unlikely that Yellowstone will erupt during our lifetime, we're virtually assured of facing a disaster of some sort. Global climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of weather- and ocean-related disasters. Because of the burgeoning global population, more people live in harm's way than at any previous time in human history. If everyone were well prepared for a brief disaster—a Hurricane Katrina or Sandy, for example—the world would inarguably be a safer place.

Every movement has its fringe elements, and preppers are no different. There are dozens of websites extolling the alleged virtues of ever-larger firearms without once mentioning the thousands of hours of practice needed to use those firearms effectively. The truth, of course, is that the best gun is one you can use effectively when it counts. The dinkiest pistol in the hands of an expert is a more dangerous weapon than an oversized rifle in the hands of a novice. Similarly, it doesn't matter how much food you stockpile if you don't routinely check and rotate your stocks. Spoiled food could be worse than none at all—if you're sick, you can't forage or defend yourself effectively.

This is one reason that Jim’s advice is so valuable. He isn’t trying to sell you any particular kind of gun or brand of freeze-dried food. He has no particular religious or political dogma to push. Instead, he’s relentlessly focused on what works. In this book, you’ll find solid, practical advice on how to get better prepared. Jim doesn’t just tell you to stockpile water—he suggests sources for free or inexpensive water containers and explains which kinds work best for long-term storage and why. He’ll help you develop a schedule for rotating perishable stocks (and almost everything is perishable in the long run). He even suggests a modest savings plan for preppers on a budget.

I will continue to hope that nothing similar to the disaster I depict in *Ashfall* comes to pass. But if it does, reading *Countdown to Preparedness* and completing the simple, no-nonsense strategies Jim Cobb recommends may well be the difference between survival and the nearly unthinkable alternative.

—Mike Mullin,

author of *Ashfall*, *Ashen Winter*, and *Sunrise*

Introduction

Back in late October 2011, the hype about the dreaded “Mayan prophecy” surrounding 12/21/2012 was in full swing. Although I wasn’t worried about these dire predictions, I did see them as an opportunity to get more people actively involved with prepping. The Countdown to Preparedness was born in December 2011 on SurvivalWeekly.com. I posted one lesson, complete with assignments, every week for the next year. I had it timed so the final lesson would post just before the predicted end of the world in December 2012.

While I’d hoped the project would garner a bit of interest, I was astounded at how popular it became. I fielded many e-mails and messages from readers who were loving the weekly lesson format. I got to hear how some folks had used these lessons to ease into prepping, making things much easier with their less-interested spouses. As time went on, more and more people seemed to be following the project. When we finally reached the end, I can’t say who was more disappointed, the readers or me. The whole project was truly a lot of fun.

Even before the final lesson was posted, I had people asking me if I was going to turn the online project into a book. I’d been thinking the same thing but was, at the time, eyeball-deep into final edits on my first book, *Prepper’s Home Defense*, and starting my second book, *The Prepper’s Complete Book of Disaster Readiness*. So, while the idea interested me, I had to push it aside to work on other commitments.

As I tackled my various book projects and other endeavors, I noticed a few books coming out, mostly self-published but some from traditional publishers, that had a similar theme, that of getting prepared within a certain time frame. Often, it was thirty days, or four weeks, or some other ridiculously short length of time. Unless you’ve already done most of the work ahead of time, there’s no way you could reach any real degree of preparedness in a month. That’s sort of like saying you could take a couch potato and have him or her win the Boston Marathon after a few weeks of training. I suppose if one has an unlimited budget and twelve free hours every day, one might be disaster-ready in a month . . . maybe.

Being better prepared isn’t, or at least shouldn’t be, just about buying stuff. Skills trump stuff every single time. The skills one needs to learn are vast and varied, from first aid to starting campfires, from weapon use and maintenance to food preservation. These aren’t things that can be learned overnight. It takes time, it takes energy, and yes, it does take some money.

Finally, early in 2013, my awesome editor at Ulysses Press, Keith Riegert, and I talked about the Countdown project. At the time, I was working my way through my third book with Ulysses, *Prepper’s Long-Term Survival Guide*. I told Keith that I wanted to do Countdown as a book and that if we were going to do it, we should do it sooner rather than later.

The basic idea behind the project hasn’t changed. If you follow each lesson and complete all the assignments, by the time you’re done you’ll be about as prepared as you can possibly be for any reasonably expected disaster scenario. With that in mind, don’t expect this to be all fun and games. There’s going to be a lot of hard work ahead, as well as some expense. Many of us preppers and survivalists have been at this for a long time now. If you’re brand-new to this whole thing, you have some catching up to do. But if you take it week by week, you’ll do just fine.

Now, quiet down. Class is about to begin.

How to Use This Book

Unlike most books you've read, this one isn't designed to go cover to cover in page order. While you could certainly go that route, doing so will detract from the learning process.

You'll notice the first section is titled "The Basics." No matter where you are in your prepping journey, no matter what time of year it may be as you're reading this, the lessons in "The Basics" are to be done first. They lay the groundwork for many of the future lessons.

Once you've finished the first ten lessons and assignments, move to the section that corresponds to the current season. You're welcome to skip around the book, if that's your preference, but some of the lessons are rather seasonal. For example, it makes little sense to plan out your garden in late summer.

Each week will bring you a lesson to be read, absorbed, and incorporated into your disaster readiness plans. This lesson is followed by a short series of assignments.

ASSIGNMENTS

TASKS

Each lesson includes one or more tasks to be completed. These tasks relate directly to the lesson. Some tasks require nothing more than a pen and paper, while others involve some work and/or expense.

SAVINGS

Each week, you'll be asked to set aside a certain amount of money into what I call the Prepper Savings Account. There will be a few higher-priced items you'll be asked to purchase. Setting aside a little money each week will help you acquire those things when the time comes. If you can't afford to set aside the suggested amount in a particular week, just do what you can and try to make up the difference later. It would be best if this money were set aside as cash, rather than sitting in a bank. Cash will give you the ability to make purchases as needed at rummage sales and such without needing to hit an ATM first.

WATER STORAGE

Water is a key element of any survival plan. Each week, you'll be asked to store a certain quantity of water. While the amounts are small each week, they add up quickly.

GROCERY LIST

Each week, you'll also be asked to purchase a few food items. Occasionally, they will be nonedible supplies. These purchases are in addition to anything else you'd buy that week for your overall disaster plans. On average, you should expect to pay under \$20 for the groceries specified each week.

I suggest that you pick a day of the week, say Sunday, and commit to visiting this book every week on that day. Have a notebook next to you so you can jot down notes for what you need to do that week. Don't be afraid to dog-ear pages, use a highlighter on the text, or make notes in the margins. If, by the time you've finished the book, it looks beat to hell, then you did it right!

BUYING IN BULK

Shopping at a warehouse store will often stretch your buying dollar. But it comes at the cost of sometimes having to lay out a substantial amount of money at one time. Many people just don't have the funds to spend on case lots of canned goods and other items. If you can afford it, feel free to visit one of these stores every month or so to stock up on the items listed in each week's lesson. But by purchasing just a little bit each week, you'll still be able to come out ahead in the long run.

A couple more things before you get started. First, if you reach a lesson where you've already earned the merit badge, so to speak, that's fine, but don't just take the week off. Either move on to a new lesson or revisit a past one. Idle hands and all that. Second, consider yourself free to work ahead, too. If a particular lesson and assignment take you only a short time to accomplish, go ahead and move to the next one, if you'd like. It's far better to work ahead than to fall behind.

Finally, should you at any time need encouragement, have a question, or just want some guidance, you're welcome to e-mail me: Jim@SurvivalWeekly.com. I'm happy to do whatever I can to help you achieve your preparedness goals.

SECTION I

THE BASICS

WEEK 1

Lists, Lists, and More Lists

To move forward, it's best to know where you are now. After all, it's difficult to give someone directions if you don't know where he or she is starting out from, right?

Your first assigned task on your journey to preparedness is to make lists of what you already have in your home or is otherwise available to you. Some folks prefer to handwrite such lists in a spiral notebook. Others may choose to make some sort of spreadsheet on their computer. Heck, for all I know there may be apps out there for smart phones that will do this as well. I suggest going the pen-and-paper route. This way, you can still access the information during a power outage.

Here are the lists I want you to make.

FOOD STORAGE

Go through every cupboard, shelf, and even your fridge and freezer. Mark down every single edible item in your home, from individual spice containers all the way to that turkey you bought on sale before Thanksgiving. Next to each item on your list, write down how old it is, estimating as needed. Be diligent in your efforts; don't overlook anything. The idea here is, what if a disaster hit and what you have on hand is ALL the food you have for your family? No emergency runs to the grocery store; all crops you may have are pulled. Naturally, this list is in flux, since it'll change as you prepare meals and such. That's OK, don't worry about it. Just write down everything you have on hand at the time you're making the list.

SAMPLE FOOD STORAGE LIST

- 4 cans of beans
- 10 cans soup
- 2 lbs flour
- 1 lb sugar

WATER STORAGE

Next, list how much water you have stored. Include water bottles you may have scattered throughout the house and in the fridge. Find out the capacity of your water heater as well as your toilet tanks. If you have rain barrels and they're holding water, go ahead and add them as well. If you have water-purification equipment, such as a Berkey filter or purification tablets, list them here too.

SAMPLE WATER STORAGE LIST

- 10 gallons of bottled water
- 50 gallons of water heater water
- 30 gallons of rain catch water

-
- 30 water-purification tablets

FIRST AID/MEDICAL SUPPLIES

Adhesive bandages, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, gauze, over-the-counter medications, anything medical-related should all go on this list. For things that have an expiration date, such as meds, add that to your list.

SAMPLE FIRST AID/MEDICAL SUPPLIES LIST

- 3 boxes (100-count each) adhesive bandages
- 4 tubes antibiotic ointment
- 5 packages rolled gauze
- 1 blood pressure cuff

HYGIENE: Here, I want you to include how many rolls of toilet paper you have, how much soap, shampoo, and other basic necessities. Sure, humans survived centuries without deodorant, but it sure is nice to have, isn't it? Especially if you have teenage boys in the house. Don't forget toothpaste, toothbrushes, and floss.

SAMPLE HYGIENE LIST

- 6 bars of soap
- 2 bottles of shampoo
- 2 packages of baby wipes
- 34 rolls of toilet paper

TOOLS

Forget all the battery-operated or electric power tools. Just list hand tools—hammers, handsaws, screwdrivers, crowbars, that sort of stuff. Yes, duct tape is a tool and should be included. Other types of tape? Um, not so much.

SAMPLE TOOL LIST

- 1 curved claw hammer
- 1 straight claw hammer
- 3 pliers (standard)
- 2 pliers (channel lock)
- 6 slotted screwdrivers (various sizes)

MISCELLANEOUS

Here's where you list the odds and ends. Include anything that you feel will be an asset during or immediately after a disaster and that wasn't covered previously. Things like batteries, camping equipment, propane grills, that sort of thing.

SAMPLE MISCELLANEOUS LIST

- 1 gas grill
- 2 propane tanks for grill (1 filled, 1 empty)
- 2 bags of charcoal
- 1 tent

Please realize that making these lists isn't something you can accomplish in just an hour or so. Like anything else, to do the job right takes time and effort. Once these lists are complete, take a well-deserved break.

The next step is to determine the shelf lives of what you have on hand. With some foods, that's rather easy. But for many items that can be difficult to figure out. And I'm not talking about the "best by" dates printed on the packages here either. I'm referring to how long the items will actually last. One great web resource for this is found on the Organize Your Life website (www.organizeyourlife.org/expiration.htm). This site lists just about everything you can imagine, from foods to household cleaners. Using that website or another source of information, go back through your lists and determine as best you can when the items you currently have will no longer be viable. Obviously as you acquire more supplies, you'll be using the current items first.

WEEK 1 ASSIGNMENTS

TASKS

Create your master lists—Food, Water, First Aid, Hygiene, Tools, Miscellaneous. Keep them handy and add or edit them as you go along in your daily life. No, you don't have to jot down a note every time you use a teaspoon of garlic powder. But as you use up supplies or add to them, adjust the lists accordingly.

SAVINGS

Start your Prepper Savings Account by setting aside \$20.

TOTAL PREPPER SAVINGS ACCOUNT:

WATER STORAGE

Begin storing water for emergencies. Either purchase a case of bottled water or fill two empty 2-liter soda bottles (2 liters is roughly a half gallon) per person. Put them in the back of a closet or in the basement, somewhere cool and dark, to inhibit the growth of bacteria, mold, and other nastiness on or inside the bottles.

TOTAL WATER STORAGE:

GROCERY LIST

- 3 cans vegetables, your choice
- 2 cans fruit, your choice, but stick with those packed in water or juice, rather than syrup
- 2 cans meat (tuna, chicken, beef), your choice
- 2 cans soup, not condensed (they require water)
- 1 canister oatmeal or one box of flavored instant oatmeal
- 1 treat, such as a bag of chips or hard candy

WEEK COMPLETED

Date: _____

WEEK 2

Out with the Old

Most of us would agree that most of us have . . . way . . . too . . . much . . . stuff. Clothes, books, movies, gadgets, paper clutter, the list goes on and on. The typical American home is just swimming in stuff we don't need, don't use, and could easily get rid of without ever missing it.

This week, you're going to start purging. See, preps not only require investments of time and money, they require space. Having a year's worth of food on hand is wonderful, but do you want all of it sitting in boxes in your living room?

This is one assignment you won't likely be able to accomplish in just one week. You'd quickly become overwhelmed trying to do that. Instead, make this an ongoing project and work on it a little at a time.

Start with your coat closet. My own rule of thumb when it comes to clothing and outerwear: if I haven't worn it in the last year, away it goes. Naturally, you may have some specialized gear, and you don't need to get rid of that. But you don't really need six different winter parkas, five light jackets, and four pairs of boots. That vacuum cleaner that stopped working three years ago? Either fix it this week or get rid of it. The bags for the vacuum cleaner you owned ten years ago and don't fit what you have now? Bye-bye.

From there, move through the rest of the closets in your home. If the clothes don't fit right now, toss them in a box. The only exception should be if you have kids and you plan to pass down clothes from one child to another. Otherwise, get rid of them. The clothes, not the kids.

Eventually, you need to go through every closet, every drawer, every shelf in your home. Think about it like this—if you get rid of something, you no longer need to dust it, store it, or deal with it.

Supplies for a hobby you gave up years ago? See ya later!

Movies you've seen and realistically don't plan to watch again? That's precious shelf space right there! This goes double for those of you who still have VHS movies but don't have a working VCR!

Books? OK, this is the one I struggle with the most. I have tons of books I haven't read yet. I have boxes of books I've read and hope to read again someday. I also have shelves and shelves of books that I should get rid of. And I'm doing so, but very slowly. And, should any of my faithful readers be looking for a home for any books featuring some sort of end-of-the-world plot, please drop me a line.

What do you do with all this stuff that you want to go away? Movies, books, and other things that are still in decent shape you might consider selling on eBay or Craigs-list. If you go that route, take whatever money you make and put it toward preps.

Stuff that isn't quite as good, you might think about unloading at a rummage sale in a couple of months. But promise yourself that anything that doesn't sell still has to go, one way or another.

Things that might not be worth much money but still have a lot of use could go to someone in a local Freecycle group.

FREecycle

Freecycle is a great way to get rid of stuff you don't need and sometimes to acquire stuff you do. The system works via e-mail. Go online and surf over to www.freecycle.org. There, you can search for active groups in your local area.

Once you've joined a group, you'll receive e-mails from people who either have stuff they want to discard or are looking for specific items. If you see something that interests you, send the owner an e-mail to discuss it. When you have stuff to donate to someone else, you'll send an e-mail to the group with that information, then wait for replies.

Generally speaking, the system works fairly well. These groups are full of great people. Occasionally, you'll run into an administrator who takes his or her role entirely too seriously and rules the group with an iron fist. This person will demand that you follow a certain format and admonish you if you so much as forget to cross a t. Gotta take the good with the bad.

Whatever is left can go to Goodwill, the Salvation Army, or the trash (which is probably where much of it truly belongs).

WEEK 2 ASSIGNMENTS

TASKS

Begin wherever you like in your home and start purging. Get rid of the stuff you don't need to make room for the stuff you do. Be vicious and cutthroat. Sell what you can and put the money toward prepping. If it won't sell, it goes to Freecycle, thrift stores, recycling, or the trash.

SAVINGS

Add \$10 to your Prepper Savings Account.

TOTAL PREPPER SAVINGS ACCOUNT:

WATER STORAGE

Two 2-liter bottles of water per person or one case of bottled water for the household.

TOTAL WATER STORAGE:

GROCERY LIST

- 3 cans vegetables, your choice
- 2 cans fruit, your choice, but stick with those packed in water or juice, rather than syrup
- 1 can chili or stew, your choice
- 1 package or jar of gravy mix, your choice
- 1 jar of peanut butter (if allergic, substitute an allergen-free version such as SunButter)
- 1 box of granola bars, protein bars, or equivalent
- 1 gallon cooking oil (vegetable oil is preferred, for longer shelf life)

WEEK COMPLETED

Date: _____

WEEK 3

Basic Water Storage

Clean, potable water is a life necessity. Our bodies need it to survive. We use it to clean ourselves, preventing illness and infection. We also use it to prepare food. Having plentiful water after a disaster cannot be overemphasized.

Experts say that we'll need one gallon of water per person per day. To my way of thinking, that's almost absurdly minimal. I'd suggest at least one-and-a-half to two gallons. More is always better.

The problem is that water is heavy and can be difficult to store in mass quantity. You can't shrink it down either. It takes up a lot of space.

CALCULATE YOUR WATER NEEDS

Regardless of where you live, at a minimum, your family should have ten days' worth of potable or purifiable water per person on hand at any time. For a family of four, that amounts to **eighty gallons of water**. That's four twenty-

gallon water bottles. If you have limited storage space in your home, that might be the maximum you can store.

If you live in an area that's susceptible to catastrophes like hurricanes, blizzards, or earthquakes that could disrupt water supply for up to a month, you should plan to have more water on hand, up to thirty days per person.

Discuss with your family what you can realistically store in the space you have. If you follow all the storage goals in the weeks to come, you'll end up with about fifty-two gallons of water *per person*. That's potentially enough for three full months of off-the-grid (and pipes) living. If you don't have the space to store that much water, simply come up with a realistic, safe goal and then cut off your storage there. Don't forget to rotate your water supply if you're not purchasing sealed water. That'll keep your water safe and potable.

Look back to the list you made for how much water you have stored right now. Did you include the contents of your water heater? The average water heater holds about thirty gallons or so. That's enough to last a family of four a few days, and it's likely already there, without any planning on your part.

How many days could you last on the water you have stored right now? Do the math, I'll wait. If you have four people in your family and you have forty gallons stored, at two gallons per day you have enough for five days. And that's figuring nothing more than occasional sponge baths for cleanup.

What are the best ways to store water? I like to use cleaned-out soda and juice bottles. A two-liter bottle is roughly half a gallon. I like them because they're both easy to store and not too cumbersome to use as is. There are, of course, containers specially made for storing water. I know several discount retailers that sell seven-gallon containers in their sporting goods sections, and those containers are nice to have. Most of them have a built-in spigot, making them easy to use. But again, water is heavy, and even a seven-gallon container takes a bit of oomph to move.

You could, of course, purchase commercially bottled water. But this can be expensive, and the water isn't much better than what's available in many homes free from the tap. That said, for some people this might be the most feasible option.

Some folks advise that if you have the time to do so in an emergency, you should fill up your bathtub. Not a bad plan, but how many of you have bathtubs clean enough to drink from at any given time? Of course, the water from the tub could be used for other purposes such as cleaning. What you'll want to do, though, is cover the filled bathtub to keep dust and other stuff out of the water. You can buy shower curtain liners at most dollar stores, and these would work well for that purpose. Just drape one over the tub and use books or something on the sides to keep it in place. Also, if you go this route in an emergency, use only the cold faucet tap so you don't empty your water heater.

THE WATERBOB

There's a product specifically designed for storing emergency water in the bathtub. The WaterBOB is a large plastic bladder that you roll out on the bottom of your tub, then fill from the faucet. It holds up to one hundred gallons and comes with a handy siphon pump for transferring the water from the bladder to pitchers or jugs. Since it's sealed, there's no worry about debris falling into the water.

This would provide an excellent backup to your other water storage. But it should only be considered a backup. Obviously, it'll work only if the faucets are still running. Should you not be home at the time of the initial crisis, you might miss your window of opportunity to fill the WaterBOB. So keep storing water as instructed.

You can find the WaterBOB at this website: www.waterbob.com.

STORING YOUR WATER SAFELY

Your water should be stored in an easily accessible location. A basement is OK, *if* you're ready, willing, and able to carry that water up and down stairs. A better solution might be closets, pantries, that sort of thing. Someplace cool and dark is best.

Stored water also needs to be rotated regularly. Figure on a six-month schedule for rotation. Use the old water for houseplants, pets, and gardens. This doesn't apply to commercially bottled water. Kept sealed, this water will stay fresh pretty much forever.

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT WATER STORAGE

As we go through each of the following sections, you'll be instructed to continue setting aside water for each member of the family, one gallon per person per week. However, it's also time to start rotating your supply to ensure that the water you're storing doesn't get stale.

Here's what you should do. Your water should be stored in such a way that you can easily determine which bottles are the oldest. Going forward, you'll remove one gallon from your storage and pour it into the water dish for the pets, use it for cleaning, or pour it into the garden. You'll then replace it with two gallons of fresh water. This replaces the gallon you took out as well as adds another gallon to storage. This way, you're constantly using up the oldest water as well as adding fresh to the stockpile. Note: Do *not* use milk jugs. They're not designed for long-term storage and degrade rather quickly, developing pinholes in them.

But if you're storing purchased bottled water, rather than filling your own containers, there's no need to rotate the supply. Commercially bottled water will remain fresh as long as the seals on the bottles are not

broken. So, if you're storing cases of bottled water that you've bought at a warehouse store or grocery store, you can skip the whole rotation thing and just concentrate on building up your supply.

WEEK 3 ASSIGNMENTS

TASKS

1. Determine a water-storage goal, in terms of how long you feel you may need to provide for your own water needs in the event of a disaster. Calculate how much water you should have stored. Remember, you'll need 1.5 or 2 gallons per person per day.
2. Work out a plan to achieve your storage goal. Begin or continue to gather containers that'll work for your situation. Be sure they're clean.
3. Figure out a rotation schedule. What you want to avoid is dumping large quantities of your stored water all at once. The six-month rule is a guideline, not set in stone. Use up and replenish a few gallons each week to keep your supply fresh.

SAVINGS

Add \$10 to your Prepper Savings Account.

TOTAL PREPPER SAVINGS ACCOUNT:

WATER STORAGE

One gallon (or two 2-liter bottles) per person or a case of bottled water for the household.

TOTAL WATER STORAGE:

GROCERY LIST

- 3 cans vegetables, your choice
- 2 cans fruit, your choice, but stick with those packed in water or juice, rather than syrup
- 2 cans meat (tuna, chicken, beef), your choice
- 2 cans soup, not condensed (they require water)
- 1 jar of jelly or fruit preserves
- 1 jar pasta sauce
- 1 box or canister table salt
- 1 package nuts, dried fruit, or trail mix

<p>WEEK COMPLETED</p> <p>Date: _____</p>

WEEK 4

Get Home Bags

Assembling a Get Home Bag, often called a Bug Out Bag, a Get Out Of Dodge (G.O.O.D.) Bag, or just a backpack survival kit, is often one of the first things a new prepper does as part of his or her journey to preparedness. But I deliberately waited to present this lesson until I addressed some of the other basics. Quite simply, you're more likely to need your supplies at home than when you're out and about.

With that said, a Get Home Bag is a vital component of your plan, and it's time to put one together if you haven't already done so.

The first step is not, as some may think, to purchase a backpack. Instead, you want to work in reverse. First, gather what you feel you should have in a Get Home Bag, then find a suitable pack for the contents. Otherwise, you run the risk of either buying a pack that's too large, which then psychologically compels you to fill it, or buying one that's too small to carry what you truly need.

A Get Home Bag has one purpose: to get you from Point A to a safe location, on foot if need be, by providing for your basic needs. These needs include water, food, first aid, and shelter/warmth. Most experts suggest having enough supplies to last you three days or so.

Water is one of the most important needs to be met. But water is heavy and difficult to transport in large quantities. A reasonably fit person can probably carry two liters of water without too much trouble. It's best to split this into two bottles. First, this allows you to balance the load, and second, should you come across a source of water you'll want and probably need to refill your supply. With two bottles, you can treat "new" water in one bottle while still drinking from the second. What's the best way to treat found water? A supply of water-purification tablets will suffice in most cases. There are also water bottles available with built-in filtration you may want to consider. Berkey does make a small, portable water filter that, while pricey, cannot be beat for quality.

Next up is food. For your Get Home Bag, stick to things that require little to no preparation. Since you can't predict the circumstances in which you'll need to rely on your kit, it's best not to worry about cooking. Remember, this is one time when you want to pile up calories, so forget the diet. Calories are what fuels the body. Stock your kit with dried fruit, nuts, granola bars, crackers with peanut butter, hard candy, and protein bars. Some people like to store MREs (Meals Ready to Eat), but I find them too bulky for most folks. The idea here isn't to put together a three-course meal but to stay alive.

Your first aid kit should be extensive without being too large to handle comfortably. Think about the most common reasons to use a first aid kit. For scrapes, bruises, stomach upset, strains/sprains, slivers, blisters, you'll want to have plenty of supplies like adhesive bandages, pain relievers, antibiotic ointment, gauze, elastic wrap, tweezers, alcohol swabs. Don't forget the over-the-counter remedies for nausea and diarrhea. Things will be bad enough if you're trying to find your way home on foot, without having to deal with a case of the squirts.

Warmth and shelter are very important needs to be met. Hypothermia can kill, and it'll sneak up on you. Be proactive on that front. Carry a few space blankets. I've found that the ones made by Heatsheets are among the highest quality. They'll help you retain body heat as well as ward off the elements. A wool cap will keep you warm even while wet. Gloves are essential during the colder months. Put together a fire-making kit as well, including butane lighters, strike-anywhere matches, and ready-to-use tinder like dryer lint. Seal those things

in a plastic bag to keep them from getting wet. With luck, you won't have to spend more than a night or two outside, but even a single night can be a trial without a campfire.

There are several other odds and ends to include in your Get Home Bag.

- A good-quality, sharp knife
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses and a wide brim hat
- Hand sanitizer, which works great as a fire starter because of the high alcohol content
- Toilet paper (take out the cardboard tube and crush the roll flat)
- Paracord. Many uses, from helping build a temporary shelter to lashing items to your pack
- Flashlight or headlamp. Having both is ideal. Don't forget extra batteries.
- Small portable radio. Depending on the emergency, it'll probably be beneficial to gather news on the situation.
- Bandanna. Several uses from a sweat rag to tourniquet.
- Extra socks and underwear. Both for comfort and hygiene.
- Empty, extra ziplock plastic bags. These have many uses.
- Compass and maps of your area
- Cash and coins. Again, you have no way of knowing exactly what the crisis may be that results in you having to rely on your Get Home Bag. Could be you'll come across a working vending machine or pay phone. You may also need to pay for transportation if that becomes an option.
- Self-defense weapon(s). If you're on foot during a disaster, there's a significant chance that someone may try to take what you have.

LET THERE BE LIGHT

One of the best flashlights I've come across is the Maxxeon WorkStar® 330 Hunter's Pocket Floodlight. Just a bit longer than a Mini Maglite, it uses three AAA batteries. With just a small LED bulb, it puts out around 140 lumens. If you're like me and have no real, quantifiable way to know just how bright that is, let's just say you don't want to shine this in your eyes. You'll be nearly blinded for a while if you're that foolish. Find it at www.maxxeon.com.

Now for a bag to carry all of it. A backpack is usually the most efficient option. Find one that's both comfortable and durable. This is one case where you probably don't want to just stuff everything into a pack you found during the back-to-school sale at Walmart. Instead, you want something with a frame to help balance the load across your hips and back. Put everything into your pack and walk around with it for a while. Get used to the weight as well as to how it sits on your body. Make adjustments as necessary.

Another, less attractive, option is a duffel bag. While better than nothing, it'll cause you to walk unbalanced, increasing the chance of a stumble. I know a few people who use wheeled luggage, like the small suitcases you might use as an airline carry-on. I'm not sold on those—they aren't meant to be used on rough terrain, and if you have to carry them, they're pretty darn heavy.

THE SHEMAGH SCARF

You might consider adding a shemagh scarf to your bag. This traditional Arab head scarf is tremendously useful. It's much larger than a typical bandanna, at around forty square inches. You can use it as a cold-weather scarf, a head wrap, a face mask, or a crude water filter. You can even wrap a few items inside it and tie it to a stick to complete that hobo costume! In all seriousness, American troops stationed in the Middle East quickly discovered just how useful a shemagh scarf is and carry one everywhere. You can find these scarves in over a dozen colors and prints, even camouflage if that's your thing.

Organizing the gear in the Get Home Bag is important. You don't want to have to dump out all the contents just to find your sunscreen. One great way to organize the supplies is to use smaller bags and pouches within the pack. I get most of mine from www.SurvivalResources.com. This company offers a wide range of handy pouches, tins, and other containers for keeping things together in your pack.

The Get Home Bags should be stored in your vehicle(s), given that the purpose of them is to get you from elsewhere back home. They aren't going to do you any good if they're sitting in the closet at home and disaster strikes while you're at work. Keep them in the trunk or the backseat, whichever is more convenient. If you opt for the backseat, you may wish to use an old blanket to cover the Get Home Bag, so as to avoid tempting a thief. Plus, that guarantees you'll have a blanket in the car in case you get stranded, right?

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