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Survival FAQ - In the Beginning, the Threat Analysis

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Welcome to misc.survivalism and this FAQ. This FAQ is designed to help people new to the concept of survivalism formulate some plans that will lead them to gaining the experience, knowledge and materials they will need to be safe and secure in their lives. Other FAQ's will address some of the philosophical issues involved, and specific fields of study (food preservation, etc.) that might be of interest. Whenever possible, we will provide pointers to the FAQ's of other newsgroups - if we tried to reinvent every wheel, we'd never get anywhere.

Others can tell you why you want to survive, and if it's a good or bad idea. I think that survival is better than any other alternative, and so I will do everything in my power to maximize the chances of my family and myself to survive. I presume that you have some serious interest in the subject, or you wouldn't be reading this.

This FAQ is specifically designed to help you develop your own specific threat analysis. This threat analysis will describe for you the things that you are most concerned about happening to you. Threats are different to each person or group, and they change with time, the environment and your level of preparedness. For example, in the 1970's I was particularly concerned with three main threats to my safety, earthquakes (I live in southern California), global nuclear war and economic collapse (remember the sort of inflation we had back then?). Since then, my circumstances have changed so that I'm better prepared for an economic disaster (although by no means completely ready, yet), I personally feel that global nuclear war is not a high threat, (although attack by a terrorist with a nuclear device is a concern), and I still worry about earthquakes (still in So. Cal). Your threats and concerns will be different than mine, and personal threat analysis will of course be different. You might live in areas that don't have too many earthquakes, but are subject to hurricanes, or severe winter snows, or something else. You may be better prepared for the future than I am. And, you may be willing or unwilling to take some of the steps that I am willing or unwilling to take - personal defense, for example.

DISCLAIMER: Use at your own risk. Disagree with me civilly, or don't disagree with me at all - I enjoy a good discussion, but I don't get paid enough to get upset. Finally, much of what follows is based very closely on a book by Bruce Clayton, Ph.D. called Life After Doomsday. The book is very good, excellent even, within it's limits - it was written around 1980, where the nuclear threat was much more significant than it is now, and the structure of the US military has changed so that some of his maps and information about various military installations has changed. Also, the threat then was from the Soviet Union, I doubt that the Russian Republics are as much of a threat today. Clayton offers explanations on why he makes certain choices, and they're excellent - just change the assumptions to fit the current facts. I tried to write to both Clayton and his publisher, asking for permission to use his material, both letters were returned undeliverable. [Note: I've contacted Dr. Clayton and am discussing the possibility of incorporating more of his book into this faq. - RDeC].

The first step:

This analysis will be a long-term process - It's best to write it down! Get a notepad and a pencil or two, probably an eraser will be handy as well. This may take several weeks, altogether, for the preliminary steps. Once you have them, you'll be modifying your lists often.

Who are you planning for? Are you single, married, with kids, expecting kids, extended family, pets, friends, neighbors? You first need to define the universe of people you're worried about. What sort of problems does that universe present? Does someone have chronic health needs? Is there an infant that requires diapers and formula? List the people on a piece of paper, then list the special needs they have.

Next, on a separate sheet of paper, list all the things that concern you. Don't worry about putting them in any order, and don't worry about their relative likelihood - just write them all down.

Some things to think about:

Natural Disasters:

- * Weather
- * Floods
- * Drought
- * Winter Storms
- * Hurricanes
- * Tornadoes
- * Heat
- * Climate changes
- * New diseases (new forms of diseases)
- * Wildfire
- * Avalanche

- * Mud slides
- * Earthquakes
- * Volcanic activity
- * Tidal Surges (Tidal Waves, Tsunamis)

Man-made Disasters:

- * Political Disasters
- * Riot
- * Foreign invasion of the US
- * Martial law
- * Totalitarian government
- * Environmental Disasters
- * Hazardous Materials spills
- * Nuclear material or plant accidents
- * Dam failures
- * Water / Air pollution

Economic Disasters:

- * Depression
- * Inflation
- * Loss of your job / income / home

War

- * All out nuclear
- * Limited nuclear
- * Terrorist nuclear
- * Chemical (see also Haz Mat)
- * Biological (see new diseases)

Terrorist Attack

- * Kidnapping
- * Hijacking
- * Attacks on the infrastructure (water, electricity)
- * Hostage taking
- * Sabotage (see nuclear accidents, Haz mat)
- * see also WAR

Others:

- * House damage or destroyed due to fire or accident
- * Family subjected to crime
- * Robbery
- * Burglary
- * Car jacking
- * Kidnapping

Once you have all the possible threats written down (don't be worried if

you come up with new threats as you work on it, it's a dynamic process). Write down what that threat will mean to you and your lifestyle - what will you have or not have, what will you be able to do or not be able to do, what will you need (even if you already have it). Finally, rank them in the order that YOU perceive them to be a threat. For example, if earthquakes are your most serious threat, put them as number 1. You may have things that you think are equally threatening - in that case, rank them both at a number - this isn't supposed to be hard.

Do you see why having a notebook (or better yet, a computer) to do this with is handy? Don't get frustrated if you have a couple of false starts, deciding part way through a list to completely start over. This is a good indication that your knowledge and awareness is expanding, and the knowledge and experience that you gain will serve you well. I've been personally studying the entire survivalism field pretty consistently for more than 20 years, and I still learn new things, and I still add to my list of things to learn, skills to master and materials to buy.

You should now have a prioritized list of the hazards that you think are significant. This allows you to devote your time, money and energy resources to the most important things first. With this list, you can start deciding what sorts of preparation you need to do to meet the threat. For example, let's say that hurricanes are your most significant concern (presumably you live in hurricane land). Hurricanes can cause power outages, block roads, flood or damage homes, cause temporary food shortages, create a big mess, etc. So, what do you need to survive?

What now?

All survival and survivalist preparation can be broken down into several broad categories, knowledge, skills, experience, and materials. So, list the things that you need in each area for the threat - for knowledge, you need to know how to prepare, the skills you need are in preparation for hurricanes (boarding / taping windows, first aid, home repairs), you get experience by practicing the skills, and the materials you need are things like plywood, masking tape, water storage containers, food that doesn't require refrigeration, etc. Do this for each threat area.

The kinds of skills and materials you need can be very widespread. Depending on the threat you're planning for, you might want the ability to recreate civilization as we know it. This is almost certainly impossible for one person, or even one family - there are too many skills needed, and too many kinds of specialty equipment and materials, for one person to be competent at them all. This is why survival groups or small communities are almost always preferable. You don't always need a veterinarian, for instance, but when you do need one, a plumber won't do.

As you complete this list, you'll find that certain things are needed for many different threats. First aid skills and materials are always useful, you may find that they show up for every category. Stored food and water might be needed for many things as well, while having and operating a chainsaw might only be needed for a few.

You now have a roadmap of the skills and materials, that you need to become self-reliant. The longer you pursue the field, the more information that you'll decide you'll need. For example, you might decide that you need to be proficient in emergency first aid, food preservation (drying, smoking, canning, pickling) , animal husbandry, engine mechanic, construction (design and building), fire fighting, sailing, fishing, computer programming, ham radios, weaving cloth, sewing, tanning leathers, bee keeping, accounting, trading, cabinet making, farming, dentistry, childbirth, small military unit tactics, advanced emergency medical treatment, improvised explosives, hunting, trapping, welding, metal working, power production and generation, telephone systems, and almost anything else you can think of.

Where to get trained: In addition to the various courses that are from time to time discussed on the internet, your local community probably offers a wide variety of courses that will help you in your quest.

Check with your local community college, high school adult program, community center, or other educational programs. Just don't expect to see a category called "Survivalist Training". Your local fire department probably offers training in CPR and first aid, and if you can join, they'll offer you more and better training. The local law enforcement agency may offer training as well as your county's civil defense / emergency preparedness office.

Where to get experience: The best way to learn some skills is to do it. This can be difficult, since your plans may be based on skills you simply can't even start learning, yet. For example, learning to grow food is not hard, but it does require some dirt and space. You may want to learn how to fix small engines, but can't take your car out of service. There are lots of other examples.

Generally, you can offer your services as a volunteer to any one of a number of organizations. For example, if you're not sure how to cook for large groups of people, volunteer at a food bank, meals-on-wheels, or church group, and learn! If you want to learn how to build houses (and fix them, and how to use tools), organizations like Habitat for Humanity are available, just looking for helpers. You'll learn some skills, but more importantly, meet people who can show you more tips and tricks. Organizations like the American Red Cross usually need disaster workers, first aid instructors, etc., and they'll train you.

Also, it may not be practical to study your specific area of interest, but can learn something that's closely related. If you don't have a field to farm, how about a back yard you can start growing a few

vegetables in? If you're an apartment dweller, and don't have a yard at all, you can grow some vegetables, or even just flowers, in window boxes. You probably can't provide all your food needs from a window box (unless it's a huge window), but you can start finding out what it's like, what works, and what doesn't.

Commercial Schools.

In general, survivalist and survival oriented commercial schools are an iffy proposition. There's no standards for the course content, and some instructors seem to think (and worse, teach) that they're way is the only one true way to do something. Schools like this are dangerous, and should be avoided. Survival, and Survivalism, is the art of the possible - there are lots of ways to build a shelter, depending on what you have available, the time available, and the weather you need to be sheltered from, no one style is ideal. No one idea is right in the entire spectrum of knowledge and learning, and it's up to the student to be aware of the different styles and schools of thought. Some schools are also quite expensive, and the worth is left to the student to determine.

Areas that schools can be a great benefit in include shooting and firearms. The more famous schools, like Thunder Ranch in Texas, and Gunsite in Arizona, have taught thousands of people how to be the most proficient with firearms they can be. They offer a graduated series of classes to take a student from little or no experience to being phenomenally quick and accurate with all sorts of firearms, but these schools are not quick or cheap.

Materials.

It's almost impossible to completely develop a list of everything that you might need to survive. Even the US Military, which has a great deal of experience in people living in strange places under less than ideal circumstances, finds that they neglect something or other, and things they thought were important weren't. It's possible to have a pretty good idea of what you need, though, with a little diligence and effort.

Keep track of everything you buy for a year, including food, toiletries, cleaning supplies, clothes, etc. Don't get too worried about doing it for a year, although you should track it for a full year - peoples appetites change over a year. You can start preparing with one quarter's list, you just might be modifying it. It's more important to get started than it is to wait hoping to get it all perfect in one attempt, and find that time has run out. After a period of time, you'll have a good idea of what it takes to live and support yourself for that period. You can begin stockpiling based on that list, after you take into account the changes that are almost a sure thing - if you have small kids, they'll grow up and eat more, for example.

Inventory what's on the shelf. Don't worry too much about things that

have been there for a long time. In general, if you don't have to replace things within a year they aren't a significant part of your diet, and you don't need to store them (except perhaps as a barter item).

Practice with new things.

Buy some flour, and practice making breads and things from scratch. Buy some whole grains, and a grinder, and make your own flour. It's critically important that you know how to use these sorts of foods if you're going to make them a part of your survival plans, especially for children.

Getting the stuff -

Develop a rotation program - whatever you get, when you put it in storage, date it using a waterproof pen or pencil, then use the oldest first. This will keep the freshest for emergencies. Food - for fresh and canned, get one extra every time you buy something. This includes common toiletries such as soap, toothpaste (and tooth brushes), etc. Clothing. First of all, save old things that might be a little too ragged for regular use. Buy sturdy clothes. Learn to patch things, and store the required materials (spare buttons, needles, thread, scissors, etc.) You might even want to learn to knit, and store the required materials. Books: The most comprehensive listing of books that might be useful for survival and survivalists is posted once or twice a month on the internet, in the misc.survivalism newsgroup. It has hundreds of both non-fiction educational books, and fictional motivational books. Barter: You may think that by having lots of stuff you'll be able to barter for everything else that you need.

Tools:

Your roadmap will list many items that are best considered tools. Things that you might not normally need, such as hand tools, first aid and medical equipment, rope, farming implements (shovels, rakes, etc.), kerosene or white gas lanterns, chain saws, power tools, repair materials, etc. You can start determining what you need, and putting these items on your list, with expected quantities. Have a section to keep track of both the things you need, and the things that you have and where they are - you'll be surprised at how easy it is to forget that you've already got something, and how hard it is to find when you need it. This list is by no means complete or comprehensive, but it does give an idea of some things that you may want to start stockpiling.

Finances:

Most likely, whatever you think your threat(s) will be, your financial condition will be a significant factor. I personally feel that an economic disaster (including a nationwide depression, and possibly

hyperinflation) is a strong possibility, and if you agree you should do whatever you can do prepare for it. With societies current "enjoy now, pay later" mentality, and the absolute fact that almost nobody in the US has any significant liquid savings (your home doesn't count, since in an economic disaster you wouldn't be able to sell it for your mortgage cost), we are all in trouble. Combine that with the impending crash of Social Security (the current 1996 average monthly payment for social security is around \$900) and people not having any long term savings for retirement, we're in a dangerous position.

In the near term, do everything you can to remove any short-term (credit card, auto loan, home-equity loan) debt that you have. This doesn't mean getting a "bill consolidation" loan, it means cutting up your credit cards, getting a second job for you and your spouse, and paying the debt off. Once you have no regular expenses except for telephone and utilities and perhaps your mortgage, you're in a better position to survive than most everyone in the US.

Are there times for short-term credit? Certainly, but not as a way of life. I have to laugh (or cry) when I see people at the grocery store, paying with their credit cards. It's OK so long as they pay the bill off completely each month, but how many people do that? How many people do you know that are just increasing their credit card debt, and so long as they continue to pay the minimum every month, the credit card companies will keep increasing their limits and giving them new cards.

I personally never buy any product on my credit card if it won't be around when the bill arrives, if I can. I pay cash for gasoline and restaurant meals, and use my checking account for almost everything else except airline tickets, hotels, and renting cars. It's one way I use to "sanity check" a purchase. It also means that I have large unused balances on my credit cards, available for some emergency that might require me to break my rules. Save all the cash you can, do without things that aren't necessary for your life. Instead of buying a new car, maintain the one you have. Invest your money in your future - by getting the things you'll need for it, and by reducing your dependence on forces and factors that you have no control over.

In the longer term, in addition to your home, you might want to start collecting hard assets, including pre-1964 "junk" silver coins. They're called junk silver since they have no collectors value, but are (almost) pure silver. You might still occasionally see silver coins in circulation (if you're incredibly lucky), if you do then snap them up. Otherwise, you might start buying a few, dimes and quarters, as you're able to. But, don't pay a huge premium over the bullion price. Get a book on precious metals investing to find out more. Once you have some silver, you might want to hedge your bets buy getting some gold. Again, don't pay a huge premium over the bullion price, and be very careful of what you're doing. Gold is too concentrated a form of wealth to be very useful in an economic crisis - silver is probably better.

Major investments: Your planning may lead you to decide that you need to make some very serious investments. You may decide that your security requires you to move from the city you live in, and find a retreat. You may decide that you need to buy a new or different vehicle, or some items that have little use in your life other than survivalism. If your personal threat assessment and roadmap leads you to this conclusion, be careful. You don't want to get yourself into financial difficulties while you're trying to prepare yourself for survival. Other than that, the resources listed in the `misc.survivalism` `books.list` are much better able to describe the things to look for, and watch out for.

Other sources of information:

Books:

In addition to *Life After Doomsday*, which is a good primer on most everything, I maintain two lists - one is a summary of well over one hundred books on all topics relating to survivalism, and another is a list of several hundred mail order sources of equipment. These are posted every two weeks (approximately) to `misc.survivalism`.

`Misc.survivalism` is also a good place to ask questions, with a wide variety of people to provide answers. This is both good and bad, sometimes the people are not as competent as others, and may steer you the wrong way. But, there will usually be others to correct the misstatements.

One of the more interesting ways of learning about some of the threat, and preparation, that's available is the cyber-book *The Gray Nineties*, by Jim Rawles. This book is currently available on the internet from <http://www.teleport.com/~ammon/gn/cover.htm>. While I don't necessarily agree with all of Jim's assumptions and plans, he has written a good story about the plans and lives of several people after an economic collapse in the US.