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JUST FOR KIDS!

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"What are you doing?" Karen said from under the crisp sheets, "Are you okay?"

Brett was sitting on the edge of the camper bed peering through the slats of the mini blinds, "I couldn't sleep, something feels wrong."

Karen rubbed the sleep from her eyes, a yawn interrupted her reply, "Everything feels wrong lately, can you be a little more specific?"

Silence was her answer. Brett was too busy watching a field mouse scavenge food scraps from under a rabbit hutch nearby. He was empathizing with the mouse's struggle to survive.

"Okay just let me know if I need to get up and start running again," she said sarcastically, "apparently that's the answer for everything these days. Who knew there would be so much cardio in the apocalypse?"

"Not yet, but I'd be ready. We don't know what's ahead of us." Brett's answer wasn't very reassuring. As if to illustrate his gloomy outlook, a hawk raced in and snatched the little mouse in its razor-sharp talons. The little guy dropped his morsel as he was flown away to meet his fate. A couple of hens ran to fight over the morsel.

Brett's hand dropped away from the blinds and he moved to put his shoes on.

"Do you think we'll ever be able to not sleep in our clothes again?" Karen tugged at her twisted shirt under the sheet.

"I'm going outside to look around." Brett said as he stepped through the narrow bedroom doorway.
“Okay, I’m getting up.” Karen grumbled. The morning light in the small room revealed another framed photo on the wall. The image was a small happy family picnicking in front of the camper. Something about the photos made Karen feel like she was intruding in someone else’s home, but it felt more like a home that the owners would not return to.

As Brett stepped from the camper the smell of food caught his attention. He saw Joe in front of a little gas camping stove up on the wood porch of his trailer.

Joe turned when he heard the familiar sound of the camper door open and close. He was trying to decide what to do with his new guests. Out of an abundance of caution he had boobytrapped his door just in case they or anyone else got the idea to pay him a midnight visit.

“Good morning,” Joe said through a wry smile, “Sleep okay?”

“Mornin, yeah pretty good. It was nice to sleep on a bed again.” Joe wasn’t the only one forcing the friendly smile. Brett was just as wary as their new friend, and he lied about the good night’s sleep. He was on edge all night.

“Great, here’s some chow.” Joe slid several eggs on a paper plate next to some sliced heirloom tomatoes and some chopped potatoes from his garden.

“Wow, this looks great,” Brett took the plate, “seems like you’ve managed well given the circumstances.”

Brett’s observation struck a protective chord with Joe, but he played it off. “Just doing what I can, that’s all.”

Brett salivated as he took the plate, “Have you heard any news?”

“I was monitoring the prepper frequencies last night on the radio and heard all kinds of chatter about unrest and people fleeing the cities. Most of it was probably rumor but I’m concerned that things might get sporty around here if we aren’t careful.”
“What do you mean?” Karen appeared and joined the conversation, “Aren’t we way off the beaten path here? We walked through the woods for days to get here.”

“Good morning,” Joe handed her a plate of food with his reply, “I’m not sure which way you came in but right down that hill is a major road that heads into the city.” Joe gestured with a greasy spatula, “And that way is the highway, normally we would be able to hear the traffic.” He nodded in the other direction. “And right through those trees is a housing development. I think that’s where the gang was coming from.”

Brett and Karen looked at each other in surprise. “We are that close to other people? If the system has crashed that means a lot of people could be getting desperate.” Brett observed.

“Yup, hence the reason I went after you with the shotgun.” Joe flipped another egg as he spoke. “I was tired of being harassed by those jerks. I wanted to send a message.”

“Message received.” Karen rubbed the buckshot wound on her shoulder.

Joe raised his eyebrows sheepishly and turned off the little camp stove. “Did you call the police?” Brett asked between bites.

Joe chuckled at the question, “Yeah right. The last time I saw a cop was when they tried to set up a roadblock at the bridge a few days ago. Apparently, that didn’t go over too well with the people trying to get to their homes.”

“Why was there a roadblock?” Karen asked.

“No idea, but all that’s left of it is a shot up police car. Since then, not a cop in sight. Wouldn’t matter anyway, phones are down, the internet might be up but without electricity, there’s no connection.”
“What about neighbors?” Brett folded up his paper plate, “Have you tried putting together a neighborhood watch?”

Joe’s posture went sullen. “We had a couple of families that were working together over the last few days. But the gang went from house to house working their way up the hill. Some fought back and some just left. A few came this way to circle the wagons but…” Joe swung his gaze to the camper for a brief moment and then to an area off the edge of the yard. Several long piles of freshly disturbed dirt seemed to tell the story. His expression went from sadness to anger.

At that moment Brett and Karen connected the dots of the family photos they saw inside. The awkward pause in the conversation made it obvious that neither had any words to share.

Joe wanted to change the subject and collected the trash from breakfast. He separated it out to things he could compost, things he would feed to his animals and trash that had no use.

“Let me help you with that.” Brett offered.

“Thanks, I have to be conscious of the trash these days. Garbage trucks don’t come anymore, and the vermin seems to know it. If I can’t use it, I have to bury it. If I can use it, it gets washed or fed to an animal or dumped on the compost pile.” Joe said.

“Why not just burn the trash,” Karen asked, “isn’t digging more work?”

“Well, a couple of reasons. Burning trash gives off pollutants and dioxins that will settle on my vegetable gardens. Well, that’s what one of my gardening books said anyway. No sense in taking any chances. And, to make it worse, the smoke might be seen by people in the hills around us.” Joe scanned the ridgeline barely visible through the trees. “I don’t want any more attention.”
Brett and Karen were trying to grasp their situation. They thought they had found refuge deep in a relatively safe forest only to realize that they were right in the middle of the chaos. They struggled with the thought that only a couple days prior, a fatal battle had taken place right where they were standing. It seemed as though every time they managed to get even an inch of breathing room, they were thrown right back into the fray as more danger came their way. Today would be no different.

The sound of vehicles speeding up the gravel road echoed through the trees. A staccato of pops rang out, sounding like someone had set off a string of firecrackers. Brett and Karen stood confused, trying to understand what was happening but Joe didn’t hesitate. He reached inside the trailer door and quickly retrieved his shotgun and an AR-15.

“Do you know how to shoot either of these?” He asked the pair.

“It’s been a while, but I know the AR.” Brett answered.

Joe hesitated another second to decide if he should trust the new couple with a firearm. He judged the fear in their eyes and tossed the AR at Brett along with a small bailout bag that held some spare loaded magazines. He glanced at Karen, “Sorry, but I don’t have anything to give you.”

She pulled the sharp stick from her back pocket and held it up as if she had drawn the short straw.

“C’mon Clyde!” Joe released his German Shepherd from the chain and sprinted down the back porch towards the wood line with the others in tow.

The trio ran into the woods, heading towards a bend in the road that led back to the city. They caught a glimpse of two vehicles kicking up a dust cloud as they sped around the curve, heading toward Joe’s home.

“Get down!” Joe yelled when he saw the cars getting ready to pass near them. Brett and Karen dove for cover. Another volley of shots and the sound of tires on gravel turned into a series of thuds and tearing metal. The lead car lost control on the turn, slid from the roadway, and rolled several times down the embankment just feet away from the group.
The second car skidded sideways to a stop slinging gravel over the group’s heads. A spray of rocks pelted Karen who was slow to duck. Two men wearing goggles and bandanas bailed out and moved toward the crashed car with weapons at the ready. Shots rang out from the crashed car and the men on the road returned fire into the smoking vehicle.

“We need to do something!” Brett said as loud as he dared.

Joe looked at the crash and saw what appeared to be a woman trapped upside down in a seat belt and a man returning fire with a handgun through the rear window of the upside-down car. He nodded at Brett and they took aim to surprise the attackers from their flank.

Joe initiated the attack with a volley of several blasts from the shotgun. Brett squeezed the trigger to follow suit, but the AR failed to fire. He was confused until he realized the safety was still engaged. With the flip of the selector and some self-directed curse words he took aim and joined the ambush.

The two men were less than ten yards away when they were cut down by surprise. Brett slid back into his army training and ran up on the road to secure the kill zone and disarm the attackers. Joe quickly followed with Clyde by his side. The masked men had suffered fatal injuries, and there was nothing left to be done.

Karen had other plans and was already crawling to the overturned car to help the victims. She arrived to see the man trying to help his wife get unbuckled from her seat belt. Because she was hanging upside down, the buckle was jammed, and he started to panic when the belt failed to release. The man remembered he had a small rescue tool with a window punch and seat belt cutter on his key ring. He was trying to reassure the woman when Karen arrived at the car.

“Listen, I’m going to cut your belt and you’re going to fall but I think we can catch you.” The husband made eye contact with Karen in a non-verbal agreement to work together. “Are you ready?” She nodded nervously.
Between the three of them, they managed to cut the belt and ease the wife down without any further injury.

“Can you move?” Karen asked the wife.

“I think so.”

They heard some rustling and saw Brett, Joe, and Clyde sliding down the small hill to the crash site.

“Is everyone alright?” Brett asked as he crouched down to see in the smashed vehicle.

“So far. We need to get them out.” Karen said.

“What happened to your face?” Brett asked Karen.

She rubbed her face and realized what happened, “I was pelted when the car sprayed rocks everywhere. Why am I always the one who gets injured?”

“It wasn’t my fault this time.” Joe said from a safe distance.

The group helped extract the new couple from the smashed car and they all found a spot to rest after the ordeal.

“So, I’m Brett, this is Karen and that’s Joe,” Brett made the introductions, “I just realized, I hope you are the good guys in that chase. We apparently just went with the underdogs in that fight without asking.”

The realization that these two might be bad people hit Joe like a load of bricks and he held his shotgun a little tighter.

“I’m Adam and this is Jessica,” the man said, “we were headed south and got turned around. There was a roadblock at the old bridge down there,” he gestured over his shoulder, “those two tried to stop us but when we saw the guns we ran.”
“Was there anyone else?” Karen asked.

“Not that we saw.”

“There will be. If they were with the gang down in that housing development, they must’ve heard the gunfire,” Joe said, “they’ll come looking.”

Brett knew what had to be done. “Then we better clear the road and get rid of that car.”

“What about those men?” Jessica was way out of her element and she didn’t even realize it yet. “We can’t leave them; shouldn’t we call the police?”

“We’ve already had this conversation once today. No one is coming.” Brett said.

“I have a place for them,” Joe scanned the road for signs of trouble, “but we better get going before their friends come looking.”

The raised eyebrows from the rest of the group said what they were all thinking, why does he have a place for bodies out in the woods?

“What? We can put them in the other car, take them back, bury them and stash the car in the woods.” Joe’s answer did little to comfort those around him.

The new couple was trying to decide if they should go with these people or take their chances on the road alone. They chose the relative safety of going with their rescuers and would end up burying their first bodies that day.
Frequently, I am asked about the most egregious vulnerabilities in our nation’s critical cyber infrastructure. It’s not surprising, as I have spent the last 20 years focused on different aspects of information security within governments, NATO militaries, and the Fortune 100. I’ve been fortunate to have made my way from a 3rd tier helpdesk technician to being a specialized Cloud Identity Architect just as Identity has become the control plane for information security. In the journey, I spent 5 years defending one of the most attacked address spaces on the Internet, and I am all too aware of the numerous vulnerabilities presented by various types of phishing, social manipulation, poor software development practices, inadequate background checks, gaps and delays in account management and lackadaisical vulnerability patching.

When I am asked what keeps me up at night, I don’t picture an anarchist hacker with “mad skilz.” The systems that are key in our nation’s critical infrastructure are mostly not connected to the Internet. They are, instead, "air-gapped," which simply means that there is no connection between those systems and the Internet. Neither are there systems that connect to both at different times (Stuxnet’s path to the Iranian centrifuges).

Instead, what worries me is a series of what, to most people, are mind-blowing threats - embedded malware in hardware, backdoor access routines in firmware and drivers and other, more evil methods for achieving access and, ultimately, success for our enemies.

There is a worse one. The greatest concern is an individual who is exactly what they appear to be. A person that obtained their job without subterfuge and held permissions allowing them legitimate access to critical systems. When hired, they would have been a perfect fit for the job with exceptional skills and significant experience and references.

They would also have significant family in, or in a country adjacent to, China.

THAT IS WHERE OUR SCENARIO FOR THIS ARTICLE BEGINS.
The Chinese government is not like ours; they openly do unspeakable things to their citizens to accomplish their goals, secure in the knowledge that meaningful resistance is beyond the reach of the population they control. Welding citizens infected with the CCP Virus into their apartments to die, forced abortion, execution of dissenters (and billing the family for the round used to kill them), systematic rape, forced starvation, etc. are their modus operandi. These methods are standard and even expected in China. Their depravity, in pursuit of accumulation and retention of power, is boundless.

Let’s call the person at the center of this article, “Shénme.” Shénme holds a Master’s degree in Computer Science and specializes in integrating systems. She has significant experience and excellent references from employers in the United States and in China. She is highly intelligent and physically attractive. She even worked for a software company that devised some of the critical integration software used in the organization she will target. Shénme, herself, is also a perfect target.

Shénme was happy in her job. She had several friends/coworkers that she spent her off time with, and her manager was appreciative of her skills and relatively low salary. She lived the dream in SoCal and had even begun dating another developer with whom she could foresee a happy future, hopefully as a citizen of the United States.

Shénme was also a diligent daughter. She spoke to her father every Tuesday night. She knew her father enjoyed their conversations and looked forward to them. He was often alone on his nights away from the factory since Shénme’s mother had passed giving birth to Shénme’s sister.

Her parents had always wanted more children but had always worried that they would be unable to provide. This changed in 2003 when Shénme’s father joined the Party and was able to get a job at a new factory 200 miles away. They lived in a rural area in China and were therefore permitted to have a second child since their first had been a daughter.

One Tuesday night, Shénme called her father, and, on the call, she could tell by the way her father spoke that something was terribly wrong. Her father cut short Shénme’s attempt at small talk and abruptly told her that someone else needed to speak with her and put the other person on the line.
The narrative above is only one of many possible combinations. The compromised individual doesn’t have to be Chinese. I have seen evidence that this can also happen to citizens from other countries neighboring China. Chinese intelligence services have no fear of crossing borders and kidnapping people, nor do North Koreans, etc. The international news often covers such occurrences. Shénme, from our story above, is a Chinese national in the United States on a work visa. It could just as easily be a “Frank” that grew up in the American Midwest and subsequently fell in love with and married a “Shénme” whom he met in college. Her family could easily be leveraged in the same manner.
Even the strictest commercial background check will not identify threats like our theoretical Shènme. American companies and their management are so naïve that all they see is the low salary and high expertise, and they jump to possess it. Coerced, deep cover assets like Shènme may remain in place for years, never doing anything suspicious, until they are either moved by their handler or activated, becoming more and more trusted by the organizations they are there to betray.

If they are activated, it may be to simply steal information that they have legitimate access to or, in other scenarios, it could be to completely disrupt their company’s information systems at a key time.

They have no choice in what they do. If they are discovered, they go to prison, and their families are punished by the CCP. If they are not, the impact on their lives is still disastrous as the stress of their double life builds up.

That is what keeps me up at night. No hacking cell can do the long-term, undetected type of damage one of these assets can do. This is one of the greatest threats we face today in information security. American-based corporations spend, by some estimates, hundreds of billions of dollars per year on solutions to keep their companies secure, but every Chief Information Security Officer’s nightmare is insider hacking.

It is estimated that only ~20% of security breaches occur through outside hacking. The other 80% are due to actions by employees. To be fair, these actions may be something as simple as losing a laptop with company data or sending credentials to a hacker in response to spear phishing, but very few are complex scenarios such as the one above.

In Shènme’s case, she was directed to join a fictitious electrical company that controls the power grid for much of the Northeastern United States. That company then placed Shènme in a critical role that provided access to the systems that control the grid, helping them to integrate mergers and acquisitions. Even after being warned about the potential for “irregularities,” Shènme’s references, expertise, dutiful demeanor, beauty and subtle sharing of her dislike for her home country’s government convince them to trust her. It’s why she was chosen, after all.

The real concern, of course, is that it wouldn’t just be one Shènme. The larger concern stems from the expectation of multiple levels of Shènmes, spread across every company and governmental entity that our enemy’s plan call for disabling. Imagine the impact of the grid going down, governmental disaster communications going offline, and the financial systems of the largest banks and supporting government infrastructure dropping simultaneously, then “hiccupping” or flagging erratically. All would take varying times to bring back online and stabilize, but some, because of the people running them, might be unrecoverable for some time (sabotaged backups or recovery plans, for instance). The hit to markets would be severe, and disastrous stability issues would more than likely emerge within our society.
The worst part about this vulnerability is that American organizations are now addicted to these cheap resources and will fight tooth and nail to retain access. More than 430,000 Chinese nationals have traveled to the United States since January of this year (and there was a ban on travel for a portion of that time). They hold positions of importance in our corporations, government, our universities, and with consulting companies. Their advanced degrees are coveted by government contractors due to the requirement for such degrees written into our government’s procurement processes. The normalcy biases our civilian institutions are afflicted with is so strong that they are blind to the malevolent potential, even when presented with these scenarios by government authorities. Their pursuit of profit and rising stock prices blinds them.

The FBI, who are responsible for our nation’s counterintelligence efforts, would probably never identify Shênme. Her communications are entirely with her father, and, having been in the US for some time, this communication behavior would not raise any eyebrows. The infrequency of instructions and reports back would further reduce the likelihood of compromise. The first trip home would bring a fast crash course in spycraft.

It is only recently that deep cover threats like Shênme have been acknowledged in information security. Nobody likes to talk about it because there isn’t a reliable way to identify who may pose such a threat, and discussion of this nature immediately opens one up to charges of xenophobia.

What each of us can do is keep our eyes open for suspicious behavior. If you work in a critical, targeted industry, you may find that a Shênme sits next to you and goes out to lunch with you every day.

THE BEST LIE IS, AFTER ALL, ALWAYS A TRUTH WITH OMISSIONS.
Any person who has ever considered the possibility that they may have to ‘Bug Out’ has probably given thought to evacuation plans, final bug out location, needed supplies and gear, and many other critical areas of consideration for such an event. The one big question that seems to be looming on everyone’s mind is...at what point do I pull the trigger? At what point do I actually make the decision to load up and go?

I’m confident that the question of “when do we leave” is a question that has been on a lot of minds in recent weeks and months because it’s the big question that my buddies and I have been asking ourselves. Let’s face it, it is a big question. For a lot of us who have bug-out plans, we actually love our current dwellings, however imperfectly located. My home is my castle, where family memories have been made for the past 6 or 7 years. It is my place of refuge and leaving it behind is not a decision that I’m going to make lightly. In fact, I will stay in my home (in town) until it is absolutely no longer viable. The question we must ask is, where is that line between staying and going?
To answer that question as best I can (I don’t think any one person actually has the right answer for everyone’s situation), I’ll share with all of you an experience I recently had. As I write this, it is the first part of May 2020, and regardless of how far into the future you are reading this, I think it’s a safe bet to assume you are well aware of the COVID-19 pandemic that has plagued the world.

It will take a little time to tell you about this experience simply because I want to start from the beginning of the planning stages.

In the spring of 2019, we (American Survival Co) planned an international survival course training event in Costa Rica. I’ve worked with my good friend Alberto Lopez who owns Costa Rica Survival before, and we wanted to do a joint Jungle / Coastal survival course together. Alberto is a great friend and having a local resident on board is a great benefit for these classes. Once the course was planned and scheduled, it was simply a matter of the clock ticking down to an amazing trip to Costa Rica! The course was scheduled for March 7-17, 2020.

Fast forward to late January / early February, and we all started to hear more rumblings about how the coronavirus might or might not impact us here in the United States. At that point, I didn’t really get the feeling that the virus was on the radar of too many Americans, and very few people were actually beginning to show concern.

About three weeks out from our trip (around the 7th or 8th of February), I started to pick up on little bits of information coming in from various news sources, and through my network from across the U.S. The things I was hearing were beginning to concern me. At that point, the worst of the virus was still in China, but I was concerned about projections of how the problems in China were going to impact the U.S. as a ripple effect. The things I was hearing through other “HUMINT” (human intelligence) channels were concerning me as well. Of course, there were a ton of rumors, speculation, and false information circling, but if you build relationships with trustworthy, reliable people who aren’t prone to crying wolf, a lot of B.S. is filtered out before it ever reaches you.

To boil it down as simply as I can, as a general rule, the more consistently you hear a certain thing and the longer it remains in circulation while the other B.S. rumors and speculation gets washed away, the more likely it is that you want to pay attention to it. Sounds super simple right? Well, it really is that simple. The real key is that you have to pay close attention to the information very early on to have a head start before the masses begin to act. Study the information’s likelihood and staying power. Does this piece of information seem to be coming in from multiple sources? Is this piece of information generally consistent in its content? Have I been hearing it for a while now? (It could be a few days or a couple of weeks depending on the information and how serious it is). Using these simple considerations, you’ll be surprised at how much sooner you can “predict” what’s coming than the general public.

So, back to the trip...I was picking up what I considered to be enough intel about what may be coming down the road to at least be concerned about leaving the U.S. for 11 days. My main concern was something happening here in the U.S. while I was gone and me getting stuck in Central America, being unable to keep my family safe. I also had to consider my students! What about their safety and their families? As a leader, it’s critical to give consideration to those things as well.

At one point, I actually considered canceling the trip just because of what I suspected was coming (panic buying, people becoming unruly, etc.), but it hadn’t come to that point quite yet. Ultimately, I decided that the most reasonable course of action based on my concerns was to ensure that we could get out of Central America quickly if we needed to.

SO HOW DID WE MAKE OUR EVACUATION PLAN?

I contacted Alberto (it’s always great to have a local contact) and discussed our options. I told him what I suspected was coming and told him that if he could use his local contacts and guarantee pickup and evacuation at any time of the day or night, we were a go. Because we had a local contact in the area that I trust, this part actually required very little work on my part other than reviewing the evacuation plan and ironing out any issues that I may have seen. Alberto contacted me once he had assets in place and we went over the plan. Our trip would take us to southern Costa Rica near the Panamanian border to a remote jungle and then eventually to a remote coast for survival training. Multiple resources would be on standby if we needed to use them for extraction ranging from jeeps, boats, and vans from various sources. I made sure to have plenty of cash on hand as well so that if one of our links would have failed, I’d have money in hand to pay a local for a ride, etc.
We also modified the training plan a bit. We could still head off into the remote jungle for training, but it was a must that I would be able to gain access to a cell phone signal at least once a day in order to check comms and evaluate the information I was seeing. I set up unlimited international calling and data before the trip (it cost me $10 per day) so that I could monitor the situation back in the U.S. as well as to see if things were heating up in San Jose, the capital city we'd need to fly out of. With the emergency evacuation plan in place, we were ready to go.

Without a local contact in place, this would have been a lot more difficult and time-consuming. Not impossible but definitely more concerning without established relationships in place to have confidence that your ride will actually show up when you make the call.

At this point, I'm really hoping that you are seeing a trend... pre-planning! We can't just hope everything will work out on its own. We need to try to identify potential problems long before they arise and have plans A, B, and C in place just in case the worst does happen.

When we arrived in Costa Rica, there was only one confirmed case of COVID-19. We spent the first night in San Jose and departed the next morning on a 6-7 hour journey down the southwest coast. We arrived in the jungle base camp without incident, and the next day and training began. I was able to get cell service in a nearby river (really, what we'd more likely call a big creek) and no, I didn't misspeak when I said "in" a nearby river. I literally had to stand in the middle of the river to gain a cell signal.

For the next 5 days, I would make my way down to the river in the morning and in the evening to gather whatever information I could through Facebook, texts, news sites, and even a few phone calls. With each new day, I saw more information come to light that concerned me, but it wasn't enough to pop smoke and bailout yet.

However, on the fifth morning, more information came to light that was cause for serious concern. Not only was panic buying in the U.S. at full force, but it was also starting to happen in San Jose as well. Alberto used his local sources to gather information as well, and the sum total of information we were coming up with just didn't look good. For example, a huge portion of Costa Ricans earn a living through tourism. That morning alone, 8,000 excursions had been canceled according to the network Alberto was tied into. If half of a country's economy is directly related to tourism and tourist spending stops abruptly, how long do you think it takes to impact the local economy and the people? Things like that can create desperate people who become capable of things they normally wouldn't do. So, we decided to meet with the students and give them a breakdown of the information we'd picked up. No one thing, in particular, was really a deal-breaker. It was a combination of various information from multiple sources that, when totaled, concerned the team.

I won't bore you with every little detail, but I do think it's important to share some of the details so that you can get a bigger picture of what we were seeing. On top of the panic buying (and fighting in some cases) in the U.S. and Costa Rica, international flights in and out of Europe had been halted the night before. For security reasons, I can't disclose who but, a significantly wealthy and well-known individual had canceled their quickly approaching trip to Costa Rica. This was a person with access to far more and better intelligence gathering abilities than I. I'm talking about a person with private jets, yachts, helicopters, etc. If anyone could get out if things got bad, this person would definitely have the resources to evacuate...and they had canceled their trip. Italy was getting hit really hard with the virus, and the number of cases in Costa Rica had increased from one to 25 over the last 4 days. Some travelers were actually being quarantined in Costa Rica for a minimum of two weeks before they could leave the country. It wasn't looking promising.
We met with the students and basically told them all the information we'd picked up on. We told them our intent wasn't to scare them or to freak them out but that it was important that they were made aware of what we were seeing. It was important to make an informed decision about continuing on for the next 6 days or to break camp and head home while we could still get out. Ultimately, all of the students were on the same page, and we made the decision that the best course of action was to get out of there as soon as possible.

I walked down to the river and attempted to call the airlines to find out about changing tickets for an earlier flight. However, a day or two earlier, flights had been restricted from Europe, which ultimately created a situation where the airline's phone system had become overwhelmed. At the time, I could only assume people trying to get home from Europe had bogged down the system. No problem, I had a data plan! I could just change my flight online! Evidently, the same problem was happening with their website as well, so we couldn't get any information as to whether or not we could even change our flights. Of course, I became more concerned that we weren't the only ones in Costa Rica that were picking up on all the information floating around. With it being the height of the tourism season, I was beginning to suspect that a lot of others may have come to the same conclusion, and it would cause a huge bottleneck at the airport.

At that point, our best option was to make a break for it and just hope that we wouldn't encounter chaos at the airport. Alberto started making phone calls to local assets that were in the same page, and we made the decision that the best course of action was to get out of there as soon as possible.

Normalcy bias has also been called analysis paralysis, the ostrich effect, and by first responders, the negative panic.

If we had done what most humans do and just queued off of the baseline behavior of people around us, it would have been easy to drop our concerns and go right back to having fun and enjoying our trip. Understanding that normalcy bias has been the demise of countless people is a great motivator for ensuring you don’t fall victim to it. I can tell you with certainty that we were not going to queue off of the baseline behavior around us.

Once we boarded the boat with our gear, the ride took us about 30 minutes out on the ocean before we turned up the Sierpa river in one of the most remote parts of Costa Rica, the Osa Peninsula for another 45 minutes. We arrived in the town of Sierpa and docked at a small restaurant while we awaited our next transfer onto a van that would carry us to San Jose.

About an hour after making the call, jeeps arrived at our jungle base camp. We loaded all of our gear, broke into two groups and headed off to the coast about 16 miles away to make our next connection. We arrived at the beach and waited about 45 minutes before a boat literally backed up onto the beach for us to load up. While we waited, we observed a lot of tourists around the beach going about their day. We'd been in a pretty remote spot without interaction with anyone outside of our group. Obviously, as far as we were concerned, it was time to get out of dodge. On the other hand, here were all of these people without a care in the world. There were no obvious signs of them being concerned or even aware of things happening in the world. This is where human normalcy bias can be dangerous. Let’s pause here to make sure everyone is up to speed on what “NORMALCY BIAS” is because it’s an important concept to understand. The following definition is from Wikipedia and pretty much sums it up.

“Normalcy bias, or normality bias, is a cognitive bias which leads people to disbelieve or minimize threat warnings. Consequently, individuals underestimate the likelihood of a disaster, when it might affect them, and its potential adverse effects. The normalcy bias causes many people to not adequately prepare for natural disasters, pandemics, and calamities caused by human error. About 70% of people reportedly display normalcy bias during a disaster. The normalcy bias can manifest in response to warnings about disasters and actual catastrophes. Such disasters include pandemics, motor vehicle accidents, natural disasters like a tsunami, and war.

Normalcy bias has also been called analysis paralysis, the ostrich effect, and by first responders, the negative panic.

After 5 hours of waiting, our transport arrived, and we were off to find out what the situation at the airport was like. It was still a crapshoot as to whether we could get our tickets changed to a sooner flight, but one of Alberto’s contacts at the airport had at least confirmed that traffic hadn’t gotten crazy there yet. When we finally arrived at the San Jose Airport, all was calm. In fact, it was not busy at all. It was about 11:15 p.m. when we arrived and made our way to the ticket counter to see if we could change our tickets. There was a flight that would be departing at 1:15 a.m., and we wanted to be on it if we could. Without any fuss (or additional cost), they promptly changed our tickets to the new flight, and we headed to a mostly empty gate to await our flight out of there. We boarded the plane without incident and were on our merry way. After a short layover in Dallas, we were on the last leg of our journey. A short 45 minutes later, we touched down at our home airport in N.W. Arkansas.

When we finally arrived at the San Jose Airport, all was calm. It was still not busy at all. It was about 11:15 p.m. when we arrived and made our way to the ticket counter to see if we could change our tickets. There was a flight that would be departing at 1:15 a.m., and we wanted to be on it if we could. Without any fuss (or additional cost), they promptly changed our tickets to the new flight, and we headed to a mostly empty gate to await our flight out of there. We boarded the plane without incident and were on our merry way. After a short layover in Dallas, we were on the last leg of our journey. A short 45 minutes later, we touched down at our home airport in N.W. Arkansas.
Now that the story is told and you have the details for our considerations and decisions for how we responded, the big question is...did we make the right call in cutting the trip short?

Let’s break it down in what the military would refer to as an A.A.R. (After Action Review) or a Hot Wash.

We didn’t know how bad it was going to get with unrest at home or in Costa Rica, but the dominos were certainly in place to fall. All of the signs were there to see (for anyone paying attention) that the situation could turn bad very quickly.

The day before we were supposed to fly home, the Costa Rican government shut down the borders to the country. There was a lot of chaos with tourists trying to get out of the country, and from what I understand, quite a few were stranded there for a decent amount of time.

In fact, as I write this, there are still Americans stranded outside the U.S. in Central America and some other places trying to get home. We are talking about people being stranded for a period of weeks and even months.

If we’d have stayed the full duration of our trip, would we have been stranded? Maybe, maybe not, but it’s evident in hindsight that it was a very real possibility. What if things had progressively gotten worse in the U.S. while we were stranded in a foreign country unable to get home to our families? It was ultimately an assessment of risk versus reward - simple risk assessment and risk management. It is wise to err on the side of caution, especially when the stakes are high.

Looking back, would I change anything that we did or the decisions we made to evacuate the country? No way! We had plenty of concerning evidence to warrant making the call we did! We are talking about some pretty serious implications had things went the other way, and we’d stayed.

With that story told, I want to come back to where we began this article. How do we know when it’s time to bail? At what point do we abandon our home, apartment, condo, etc. and make a break for safer territory? That my friends is the question of the year for 2020!

I’ll leave you all with something I read in a book by Lawrence Gonzales called Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why. In one of the chapters, he talks about multiple groups from around the country who had planned big white water rafting trips. These groups were from different locations and didn’t know each other, but they’d all come to this big river for the white water rafting adventure of a lifetime!

Many of them had planned this trip for over a year, traveled great distances to be there, and had spent a lot of money as well. When the morning came for them to put their rafts in the river (there were multiple guide services being used), the river levels were beyond high. There had been a gully washer, or as some would call it a hundred-year storm that had created conditions in the river that were so rough, there wasn’t even a white water classification for it. As the separate guide companies were evaluating the river with their clients, decisions had to be made.
A few guides took one look at the river and told their boat crews that it was simply too dangerous to attempt as they watched huge logs tumble down the river in front of them. They told the adventure seekers that they understood what an ordeal and expense it was for them get there but that it was just too dangerous to chance it.

The guides made the final call, and they weren't willing to risk the danger level in the pursuit of a good time.

There were two or three guides, though, that allowed their customers to talk them into putting their rafts in the river and heading off for adventure! Those guides were experienced. They stood there looking at the river conditions and knew exactly how dangerous it was, yet they went anyway. They allowed inexperienced people to talk them into a disastrous decision because they didn't want to miss out on their fun after all the trouble they'd gone through to get there.

The very people who were in charge of safety allowed people without a real clue of the dangers to persuade them, and the price they paid for that mistake was high. Quite a few people died in the river that day. The dead included guides and adventure seekers alike.

What made those adventure seekers insist on heading down the river even after they were told how dangerous the situation was. There are probably multiple reasons, but one that sticks out to me is that they were over-invested. The guides over-invested in keeping a customer happy and the customers over-invested because of all the planning, time, and money spent leading up to the trip. They were so invested that they weren't willing to recognize undeniable information right in front of their eyes. Information that was so critical, it was literally the difference between life and death, and they'd simply ignored it altogether in the pursuit of fun.

Hopefully, the time won't ever come where you have to decide to stay or bug out, but if it does, take the time to evaluate the information you have. Information changes frequently, so use the most current and accurate information to guide your decision-making process. Don't allow yourself to be overly invested in a plan, idea, or staying home until it's too late to leave simply because of something you thought versus the information that was staring you in the face.

I truly hope you gained something from this article and that you take something away from this that you can use to make sound decisions if the time ever comes.
Technology is a wonderful thing. When I was a kid, if someone told me that I would have a small device I carried around in my pocket with the answer to every question I would ever have, not to mention access to all manner of info I shouldn’t have access to I wouldn’t have believed them. I would probably have made a joke about Captain Kirk’s communicator. But that is the world we live in now. From how to cook Mongolian beef to how to change a tire, every question we have is discovered using nothing more than our thumbs.

But what happens when you no longer have access to that technology? How will you then find answers to questions? While books aren’t sexy or cool, they are an invaluable resource. Hands-on experience is your next best bet. I have a friend who is learning to use a mowing scythe, so he’ll be able to feed his livestock. He’s reading books on rotational grazing and fencing off his land now to ensure he can keep them going through the winter. He’s buying and reading books and learning the skills he knows he will need, and he’s doing it now.
This is all the more reason to **BUILD YOUR LIBRARY** and to do so now. And you don't have to run out to Amazon and start ordering books. Of course, that is one quick and efficient way to get a library. And if you have the funds, go for it. If your budget is a little tighter, there are other ways. Used bookstores are a great resource for books that most people do not read today. As is the library, when they circulate out old books and sell them for pennies.

Look for old books at flea markets and garage sales. Estate sales are another good hunting spot. Look at the offerings, particularly in the tools department. If someone has a collection of old hand tools or old kitchen wares like cast iron and hand-turn apple peelers, ask them about books. They probably wouldn't even think anyone would be interested in granddad's dusty old books, and the whole set could be bought for next to nothing.

While the internet still works, you can download the myriad of PDFs that are out there. For instance, a Google search for military FM manuals will yield several FTP (File transfer) sites that will allow you to download all of them in PDF. Then print them out and put them in binders, creating an instant tactical library.

Google books is another source to find out-of-print books. You may have to pay a small fee, but these too can be easily acquired and saved. When time permits, print them out as well. You can save all manner of books in this way, and if you have an iPad and a faraday cage for it, you can still access that device no matter what happens.

Bear in mind, the internet doesn't have to be gone for its usefulness to be severely reduced. We could suddenly find ourselves under a Chinese level of censorship that severely limits the ability to search certain topics and could even result in a very unpleasant visit from people in uniforms. One thing you should be doing now is using a VPN for your internet searches. This masks your IP address and makes it harder to find you. You can increase your security level by using an anonymous search engine like Duck Duck Go or, and only if you're running a VPN, try using something like Yandex. This Russian search engine often produces results Google will never come up with.
The last method I’ll mention takes time and effort to produce. It is also one of the best resources you can have on the older ways of life. That is to sit down with your elders or the elders in your community, turn on a recording device, and talk to them. This method will obviously yield a lot of useless information that you will have to wade through. But it will also yield extremely valuable information on how to do the old ways by those that have actually done it. Reading something in a book is nothing like actually doing it. And they can point out all those little ways that can save you time and calories. Not to mention it’s a hell of a way to spend time with your elders that will pay dividends not only to your knowledge but also to them. Because someone took the time to sit and talk to them.
Laurence Gonzales’s bestselling Deep Survival has helped save lives from the deepest wildernesses, just as it has improved readers’ everyday lives.

Its mix of adventure narrative, survival science, and practical advice has inspired everyone from business leaders to military officers, educators, and psychiatric professionals on how to take control of stress, learn to assess risk, and make better decisions under pressure.
Each time the threat of a hurricane or a blizzard is announced on the local news, a predictable horde of panicked shoppers will rise from their armchairs and head to the grocery store for milk, bread, and toilet paper. Unable to satisfy the sudden surge in demand, the store’s shelves are quickly emptied. This is inconvenient for the shoppers who arrive a few hours late, but it’s a familiar scenario that most of us have encountered, and it’s not a "life or death" situation. Once the weather clears, the shelves are restocked, and normal buying patterns resume. But what happens when the emergency is bigger than a storm and the interruption in supply is more than just a hiccup in the chain of production, distribution, and consumption? What happens when the food supply dwindles (or stops altogether)? While books aren’t sexy or cool, they are an invaluable resource. Hands-on experience is your next best bet. I have a friend who is learning to use a mowing scythe, so he’ll be able to feed his livestock. He’s reading books on rotational grazing and fencing off his land now to ensure he can keep them going through the winter. He’s buying and reading books and learning the skills he knows he will need, and he’s doing it now.
During the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, we have seen more empty store shelves than most of us can remember. While there are still many foods available in the average grocery store, certain popular dry goods (like flour, rice, and pasta) and certain fresh foods (mainly meat) have been in short supply. While we all hope that the shortages are over soon, we just don’t know what’s going to happen. Things could easily get worse as the impact from the pandemic continues to unfold. With farmers discarding crops due to an alleged lack of demand and killing animals because there aren’t enough people to process them, meat and produce shortages are happening now and are expected to continue in the coming months. Despite the stimulus checks and other relief efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, some cities have thousands of people waiting in line at food banks and other charitable organizations.

This worldwide virus is just one example of a situation that could damage or destroy the “status quo” for food (and other supplies) here in America. Unfortunately, this virus isn’t the only threat. There is a frightening assortment of scenarios that could impact our food supply as a nation. Just to name a few, an EMP, warfare, or economic collapse could cause the stores to be empty for weeks, months, or even longer. It’s a grim set of circumstances to consider, but we must consider them. As long as our supply chains can be affected by illness or natural disaster in the United States, we need to continue our efforts to be more resilient and self-reliant. I know it’s scary to think about the food running out, but let’s turn our worry into motivation. Let’s prepare ourselves and do something about it.

**GET TO KNOW YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN**

There are a lot of steps required to get from the food being grown in the field to the food sitting on your dinner table. Even if the food is a relatively “whole food” (like meats, fruits, and vegetables), someone has to grow it, someone else harvests it or kills it, someone else transports it, someone else sells it, and then, you finally take it home. More complex foods (like processed food) have even more people involved, as they require many ingredients that are sourced globally, most of which need more packaging, warehousing, shipping, and planning. To grossly simplify it, the supply chain is a vast and interconnected web, and it’s a fragile web.

In former times, food producers would try to predict the future demand for their product and make plans accordingly. Today, rather than guessing how much you will sell and paying to store extra food in a warehouse somewhere, the JIT (Just-in-Time) logistics model is used by many corporations. In this system, waste is cut back, and warehousing costs are reduced. But the JIT inventory system has one huge disadvantage – it’s precarious. When there’s an interruption in the raw materials, supply, or production, the ability to deliver “just the right amount at just the right time” will get backed up and stop. There’s not much excess anymore either. Many food and drink items are not produced until the order is paid for by the distributor, and delivery is carefully timed. This system is very profitable in a world that’s running like clockwork, but when a monkey wrench gets thrown into the works, it can all fall apart.
I know everyone can’t have their own gardens and livestock, so I’m not going to expound on the benefits of survival gardens and raising your own meat. The value of those activities is evident if you have the land to do it. I know it’s not always possible to feed yourself through foraging, hunting, fishing, or trapping. Even if you are amazing at those complex skill sets, there are days when you will come home empty-handed, and the results are unpredictable. When I suggest that you make your own supply chain here, I’m not asking you to become your own producer. I’m recommending that you become your own middleman.

Since it’s hardly ethical or practical (or legal) to raise your own beef cow in a tiny apartment or keep it on your balcony, you could get together with a few friends and buy a steer from a small local farm. FYI, a steer is a male cow with his testicles removed, which increases weight gain, among other benefits. Now you know the lingo. Your friendly neighborhood rancher should be able to help you find a place to have the steer processed locally, and then you can divvy up that fresh, delicious beef with your friends. Yes, you’ll have to make a bunch of phone calls, and “half of a steer” isn’t cheap, but you’ll be set for months with beef if you invest in a freezer or know how to pressure-can the meat. Small local chicken producers, pork producers, and other types of farms are even more likely to be of benefit. Many of them can sell more manageable portions of meat, already processed, and directly to consumers. Similar arrangements can be made to buy directly from greenhouses and farms, particularly CSAs (community supported agriculture farms). When you buy a CSA membership, they agree to provide so many pounds of food on a regular schedule. The pick-your-own fruit and vegetable farms are also an option, though these tend to be pricy. The bottom line is that you don’t have to be a hunter or forager to get meat and vegetables during a crisis, you just have to be creative about designing your own local food supply chain.
YOUR SERVICES ARE NO LONGER REQUIRED

By Tim MacWelch

With many businesses closing their doors (forever) in the wake of COVID-19, a significant percentage of our nation is currently unemployed. Many other people are “under-employed” right now, and it’s a short trip to go from reduced hours to zero hours. Getting fired is a crippling blow to many families, both financially and emotionally, but there are things you can do about it (besides trying for unemployment). Here are some helpful things you can consider when your services are no longer needed.

CUT YOUR LOSSES

So what’s the first thing to do when you get furloughed or fired due to a disaster, economic crash, or pandemic? When the axe falls on your job, cut your losses. You’ll need to take a very hard look at your finances and determine the things that are essential and the things that can go. Stop eating out at restaurants. Turn off your cable or satellite television. Cancel those memberships you aren’t even using. Most Americans are suffering a financial version of “death from a thousand cuts.” We may have a few large bills each month, but it’s all the little things that really take a toll on our budget. If you really want to minimize your losses, you’ll even cut out your vices. Stop smoking and give up drinking alcohol, coffee, and soda. I know this is a lot to ask, especially during the stressful times of job loss, but these little savings can combine to have a big impact on your finances.
EMBRACE FOOD SECURITY

You know that stockpile of long-term food you’re supposed to have? Job loss is one of the most likely scenarios that would cause you to dip into it. The average American household spends between $300 and $500 dollars on food each month. Since these statistics include the very poor, it’s safe to say that middle-class households spend even more each month (I know we do). That’s a lot of money, especially when none is coming into the household. That’s also a lot of food (2,000+ calories per person per day). The best way to secure food in this type of crisis (and many other scenarios) is to have food on hand already. Staple food items like rice and pasta are long-lasting, filling, and cheap. Stock up when times are good, and you’ll have plenty when times get tough. If you didn’t do this, then consider hitting a local food bank or church pantry. Don’t let a head full of pride give your children an empty belly. Those charitable outlets are there for just such an occasion.

CREATE A HUSTLE

For those who are willing to work and don’t have too inflated of an opinion of themselves, there’s usually work to be had (but it’s probably not going to be in your chosen field). I was speaking with a friend recently about the government furloughs of 2019. He was out of work from a sophisticated white-collar job but went looking for work immediately – in all sectors of the job market. He landed a job with a moving company and made some quick income while many of his colleagues sat idly and watched their savings dwindle. Don’t be too proud. Take whatever you can get. If you’re not too worried about the pandemic and you have a functioning vehicle, start driving for Uber or Lyft. If you have an old skillset that is now in demand (like construction), dust off your tools and look for a job. Turn your current side hustle into a full-time gig or get a brand new job. If you want the money badly enough, you’ll find some way to get it. You may even have to start selling off possessions. Just make sure it isn’t anything that you can’t live without.
BATTLE OF THE BILLS

How do you figure out which bills to pay first (or at all)? Remember your survival priorities. In the wilderness, they go shelter first, then water, then fire, then food. Overlay that on our situation, this means that your mortgage is more important than the cable bill, and your water bill is more important than your mobile phone service. I know this will be a tough sell for certain family members (especially the kids), but it’s a necessary hierarchy. Pay your mortgage, electric bill, and water, then let the others fight over your financial scraps. You can certainly call the different companies involved to ask for different payments or other options. **IT DOESN’T HURT TO ASK.**

BUILD AN EMERGENCY FUND

After the furlough of 2019, which had a major impact on my household, I damn sure created a dedicated emergency fund. I had built up funds like this before, only to knock them back down when someone in the family needed a big-ticket item. Not anymore. I keep a fixed amount in an account just for emergencies. I don’t touch it for any other reason. Now, this isn’t something you can put together while you’re broke, but when that money does start flowing again, pay “yourself” before you pay anyone else. This isn’t money wasted on some frivolous expense. This is your “rainy day” fund, and it should be used only for that purpose. Consider a local credit union for the bulk of the fund (for easier access) and keep a secret cash stash at your home (for those spur of the moment emergencies). Start off with any amount you can earmark for emergencies, then build up your fund to an amount that covers one month’s mortgage. If you can, keep building it from there. For once, you’re not pissing away your extra money on a trip or something flashy, this money is for you to have a cushion in a time of need. And it is buying you something. **IT’S BUYING PEACE OF MIND**
Meet the new, ultimate ride-share stroller, pivot xplore all-terrain stroller wagon. This new riding experience provides extended use by accommodating 1 or 2 Kids up to 5 years old. The pivot explore easily transforms from a stroller to a wagon by flipping the handle.

- Push or pull, decide on the fly. It’s easy to adapt your ride with a flip of the handle
- All-terrain wheels give you the freedom to go from pavement to beach and beyond
- Canopies with UPF 50+ help shield your child from the sun’s harmful rays
- Spacious storage: easy access basket to hold all your child care essentials. Rotates into the wagon when only one child is seated
- Storage inside and out keeps everything you need within arm’s reach -from water bottles to diaper bags
HOMEPATROL-II COLOR TOUCHSCREEN SIMPLE PROGRAM DIGITAL SCANNER

By Uniden

DESCRIPTION

• The Uniden HomePatrol-2 is one of the most popular Digital Police scanners on the market. This model lets you quickly hear communications systems used by Public Safety, Police, Fire, Ambulance, Aircraft, Military, Weather, and more.

• Simply enter your zip code and Home Patrol-2 does the rest. Whether it is across town or across the street, HomePatrol-2 keeps you informed.

• Digital Capable, receives all unencrypted, non-proprietary radio systems including APCO-25 Phase I and Phase II digital, Motorola, EDACS, LTR, conventional analog and P25 digital channels. Covers USA and Canada. Optional GPS receiver also available.

INCLUDED IN THE BOX: HomePatrol-2 Scanner, Flex Antenna, Desk Stand, USB Cable, 4 x AA NiMH Rechargeable Batteries, SMA to BNC Adapter.

PLEASE NOTE: an AC or DC power adapter is NOT included. To power the unit and/or charge the NiMH batteries, it comes with a USB cable. Please use this cable to connect your HomePatrol-2 to a standard Smart Phone USB Power Adapter (not included) or connect it to your computer’s USB Port with DC5V power output (not included).

POWERPIE 20000mAh POWER BANK

By ElecJet

DESCRIPTION

• SUPPORTS MOST FAST-CHARGING PROTOCOLS – PowerPie can fast-charge the newly launched Galaxy Note10+ at full speed from 0 to 79% in only 30 minutes (PD3.0 PPS mode). The USB A port can also refill your iPhone or any smartphone at its maximum speed of (QC3.0, 18W max).

• BACKUP POWER SOURCE FOR LAPTOPS – The TRUE 45W USB C PD output rapidly charges your MacBook or any USB Type-C laptops at emergency (PD3.0 PPS mode supported).

• COMPACT SIZE WITH ULTRA-HIGH CAPACITY – By utilizing the ELECJET exclusive JetSafe technology, the PowerPie is designed to be a small size that is easy to carry.

• Thanks to the TWO-WAY FAST CHARGING FEATURE, PowerPie can recharge itself from 0 to 100% in just two to three hours at 45W.

• TIME-SAVING CHARGING – PowerPie works perfectly with pass-through charging. You can easily connect your PowerPie to a genuine laptop charger and another USB A device at the same time. Let PowerPie and your mobile device get charged rapidly (45W input + 10W output simultaneously).
**Nesdr SmaRt V4 Bundle**
By Nooelec
$37.95

**Description**
- Premium RTL-SDR bundle includes newly designed NESDR SmaRt in beautiful brushed aluminum enclosure, re-designed antenna base with 2m (6.5') RG-58 feed cable, and 3 antenna masts. Proudly built by Nooelec in the USA and Canada! Full 2-year product warranty
- A wide variety of improvements on other designs, including ultra-low phase noise 0.5PPM TCXO, RF-suitable voltage regulator, custom heatsink, 2 silicone pads and SMA female connector
- Designed from the ground up to reduce USB port occlusion. Run multiple NESDR SmaRt side-by-side with any USB-compliant device, including tightly spaced embedded devices like the Raspberry Pi
- SDR frequency capability approximately 25MHz-1700MHz. Frequency range can be extended down to 100kHz or lower with the Ham It Up, available on Amazon (Product ID B009LQT3G6)
- An 8pc SMA adapter set and carrying case is also available on Amazon (Product ID B073JT98RR).

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

**2021 Road Atlas & National Park Guide**
By Rand McNally
$19.34

**Description**
- Pinpoint the best in the best: America's national parks. With essential information and tips, hundreds of photos and maps, and a complete Rand McNally Road Atlas, the 2021 National Park Atlas & Guide is all you need to have extraordinary park experiences.
- Features: A four-color, 132-page National Park Guide details the best of the best in each park from trails, drives, and natural wonders to programs, museums, and lodges.
- Park inset maps highlight key points-of-interest.
- Hundreds of photos capture the essence of each park. A completely updated 2021 Road Atlas makes mapping out and taking trips a breeze!
- Update maps of every U.S. state and Canadian province and an overview map of Mexico.
- Road construction and conditions contact information for every state conveniently located above the maps. Mileage chart showing distances between 90 North American cities and national parks along with a driving times map. Tourism website and phone numbers for every U.S. state and Canadian province on map pages.
- Dimensions: 10.875” x 15.3125”

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW ON AMAZON](#)
Our nation’s electrical grid is a lot like your favorite grandma. She’s always been there for you, whether you recognized her value or not. She has worked day and night to make your life better, providing warmth, and hot meals. But sadly, it’s time to face the bitter truth. Both grandma and the electrical grid are getting old. They are both made up of aging parts and systems. They are overworked, worn, and vulnerable to many different threats. Now I can’t speak to your grandma’s health (which is excellent, I hope), but I can speak about the power grid. It’s unimaginably complex, and with that complexity comes vulnerability. It’s only a matter of time before a large chunk of “the grid” goes offline for days or weeks (or even longer). As individuals, we can’t control whether the grid goes down locally from a severe storm or whether it goes down nationally from a cyberattack; but what we CAN control is our reaction to this threat and how we behave during the actual event. Planning and preparedness are your best solutions to the threat of a major blackout, and the time to get dead-ass serious about your preparedness is right now.
CREATE A PLAN

Luckily for those of us with interest in preparedness, our "blackout plan" will look a lot like our earthquake plan and all of our other disaster plans. In the event of a prolonged power outage, we'd need to be able to provide for all of our basic needs. We would hope that these needs can be met in the relative comfort and familiarity of our own homes, but our plan should also allow for some kind of exodus (just in case things get ugly). For example, one "knock-on" effect of a blackout would be crime. A higher population means higher crime, so bugging out of the city or suburbs should be a facet of your plan. Here are seven things to include in your blackout emergency plan.

ASSESS YOUR NEEDS  Get out some paper and make a list of all of the things in your life that would be impacted by a blackout. It’s a lot of things for most people. Cooking, heating, cooling, light, food refrigeration, and communication are just a few. For example, three-quarters of Americans get their water from a well on their own property (an electrically powered well). When the power goes out, the water stops flowing. This is just one of the things you’ll have to supply for yourself.

BUILD A TEAM  No one can do it all, and stand guard over the homestead 24/7. Find out which of your like-minded friends has complementary skills and see how they’d feel about working together. You don’t all have to live under one roof during a blackout, but it’s great if your team members live close.

CREATE A COMMUNICATION PLAN  Getting your news during a blackout may be as simple as turning on the battery-powered radio. Then again, it may not. Determine which ways you can get information from the outside and how you can communicate back and forth with your family/team.

ASSEMBLE YOUR SUPPLIES  You can’t put a puzzle together if you are missing a bunch of pieces. Get the gear and supplies you need and organize them in a safe place in your home (or bug-out location) – before the lights go out!

PLAN FOR A BUG OUT  We’ve provided a huge amount of bug-out content at Survival Dispatch, so review this material and get your gear ready for a sudden exodus.

DETERMINE YOUR RESUPPLY OPTIONS  Consider how you’ll replace things as they run out and get the skills and supplies to make it happen. This could be hunting and fishing to put protein on the table. It could be gardening and foraging for plant foods. These all work best when you have the experience and the right supplies to make it happen. By the way, how will you get that water out of your well when the power goes out? Hint – Google "LEHMANN'S OWN GALVANIZED WELL BUCKET," and you’ll see one option.

TEST THE PLAN  You won’t know if your plan is a good one until you test it out. Don’t wait until you’re in an actual crisis to figure out that you’re missing something, or you made a miscalculation.

The last thing on our list was a test, and here it is. FLIP OFF THE MAIN BREAKER IN YOUR HOME'S ELECTRICAL PANEL and go for a day or two without the warm glow of electricity. These "grid down" weekends don’t need to be scary, especially if you have kids or other family members who aren’t on board with preparedness. Once the breaker goes off, see if each family member can act as a useful member of the team (or at least avoid being a liability). Can you keep the kids from opening the fridge every five minutes (and letting out the remaining cold air)? Can you recharge your devices when they run out of power? There a million little things you’ll learn during a test, and while these may be annoying at the time, there’s no better time to discover the flaws and gaps in your plan.
EXTRA HAZARDS DURING A BLACKOUT

Looting and pillaging aren’t your only physical threats during a blackout. There are other hazards that come with power outages, and we need to keep these extra threats in mind.

COOKING FIRES The number one reason for home fires (under normal conditions) is cooking, so we should always take extra care when cooking under challenging conditions. With the power out, you may be forced to cook with camp stoves and other alternative heat sources. Always do this outside, and take extra care in the storage and dispensing of fuel. Never turn your back on your cooking activities. At best, something will boil over or burn. At worst, you just lit your house and the whole neighborhood on fire.

OTHER FIRES The fifth most common cause of house fires is the humble candle. With the lights out, you can expect more than a few candles to be lit in your neighborhood. Yes, candles look great, and some even smell nice, but each one represents a threat. Instead of burning candles, focus on battery-powered lighting to reduce your chance of fires. You are also at risk for fire (and horrible injury) when you try to refuel hot generator engines. No one in your household will want the generator to go down, but you should let it cool for 15 minutes before you attempt a refuel. Why is this so dangerous? If you splash gasoline on a scorching hot muffler or bare electrical wiring, or an unfortunately timed back-fire occurs, you’re going to be on fire. Going 15 minutes without power won’t kill anyone in your household, but slopping gas all over your hot generator could kill you!

CARBON MONOXIDE This sneaky substance forms when you have combustion occurring in an enclosed space. Don’t run your generator in your garage or drag the hamburger grill indoors for winter heat. Carbon monoxide can kill.
UNABLE TO RESPOND

By Justin Case

Many things can affect emergency response times. And in different areas, we see different “normal” response times when you call 911. What are we prepared to do if and when we make that call, and those services are unable to respond?

Currently, as this is being written in early May of 2020, the world is still near the beginning of the SARS-COV-2 pandemic. Many jurisdictions have already altered the responses of their agencies, be it fire, police, or EMS, in response to the new world that we all find ourselves in.

If you have not called 911 in a while, you might find out that new questions are being asked of the callers in most areas. Dispatchers now ask callers questions related to COVID-19, such as has anyone involved in the call have COVID-19, fever in the last 24 hours, cough, sore throat, difficulty breathing or body aches during the previous 24 hours, has anyone at the scene been in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19? These are some of the CDC Guidelines that anyone can access, and many agencies are attempting to protect their first responders by having as many of those questions as possible answered before help arrives on the scene.

The smaller the jurisdictions are, the fewer resources they usually have available. So, these agencies are attempting to ramp up the protections and cautions for the first responders who end up on those scenes. As you can imagine, they will be taking more precautions on calls involving someone who has tested positive for an infectious disease, whether it means higher levels of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) or just limiting the amount of personnel who enter a premise.

Fire and EMS work hand in hand in most jurisdictions and will have a medical director from one of their local hospitals that directs their response to calls and sets up the needed protocols. In many areas where assisted living centers are involved in calls, EMS providers are limiting the number of responders who enter those facilities, and generally, they are wearing their highest level of PPE before entering, both for their protection as well as trying to prevent bringing anything inside with them as well. Generally, firefighters responding to fire calls are not in the closest of contact with many people and are usually wearing their bunker gear when they work. They will likely continue to rely on social distancing as their main caretaking procedure when fighting fires.
IN THE LARGER POPULATION AREAS, we see some questionable government overreach where agencies are being asked to cite, fine or arrest people who are violating these Emergency Orders that are being put in place by states, counties, and municipalities. The vast majority of law enforcement have little desire to go out and enforce these things, but you can sure bet that they are getting a lot of pressure from those pockets of government that put the orders in place and have all of the busybodies calling and complaining to the mayors, governors, and county commissioners. It is one of those things that happens to roll downhill. In the long run, I suspect that there will not be many of these EO’s that stand up to Habeas Corpus, and most people would be encouraged to contest these cited or arrested violations in court if they make it that far. Many of them are already being dismissed and thrown out of court all over the country.

For the most part, law enforcement is looking to limit community contact as much as possible. Many agencies do not have large PPE supplies to burn through with constant community contacts throughout their shifts, days on end. There will always be some unavoidable calls to respond to, such as anything dangerous like major accidents involving injuries or disabled vehicles, assaults, robberies, kidnappings, and murders. Many agencies have pushed a lot of the other less prioritized calls towards phone reports and online reports if those are offered in those jurisdictions. Those types of calls entail thefts, burglaries, property damage, identity theft, stolen or abused credit card information, and such.

I suspect that we will see permanent changes for how first responders and agencies respond to calls going forward from now on. Most jurisdictions are finding out that they have limited numbers of first responders to call upon in normal times, and now when some are taken out by quarantines, those dwindling numbers of available first responders are shocking to many communities. Almost certainly, people will see some increased response times for many calls, whether it be due to lack of staff, more calls in any given area, lack of equipment when their vehicles go down or a change in PPE posture for the responders themselves. All of those things add up to increased time.

SO HOW DOES THAT TRANSLATE TO THE PEOPLE IN COMMUNITIES THAT RELY ON THESE SERVICES? PEOPLE SHOULD BE BETTER PREPARED TO HANDLE AT LEAST THE INITIAL ONSET OF AS MANY PROBLEMS AS POSSIBLE AS IF HELP WAS NOT AVAILABLE OR TIMELY.

CONCERNING MEDICAL PREPAREDNESS AND FIRE PREVENTION, many businesses now have AED’s (Automated External Defibrillator) available to provide life-saving treatment for someone suffering a sudden heart attack along with various levels of First Aid kits. Many times, the effectiveness of using these items comes down to people’s training or familiarity with them. The NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) reports that fire departments across the nation are responding to fire every 24 seconds and that home fires still cause the majority of all civilian fire deaths, civilian injuries, and property loss (June 26, 2017). There are many polls and articles, usually done by insurance companies as you would imagine, that track how many homes have fire extinguishers and who among them would know how to use them. They mostly agree that renters are the least likely to own fire extinguishers, and many people are not knowledgeable on how to use them in the first place. Neighbors, friends, and online videos can go a long way toward helping many of those who are uncomfortable in their use. Plus, there are many new, very easy to use fire extinguishers available at most home building supply stores nowadays.

You will always hear people in the preparedness community tell you to get training and the importance of getting that medical training could very well save the life of yourself, a loved one, friend, neighbor or complete stranger one day.
CONCERNING PERSONAL SAFETY/SECURITY, many parts of the country recently emptied their jails of their "low-level offenders," which could translate into a lot of different types of criminals being released. Those same jurisdictions are also making certain crimes into PR (Personal Recognizance) bonds, which means no money to get out of jail, just their promise to show up for court similar to receiving a citation. That means many criminals are truly using the revolving door aspect of the judicial system currently. I suspect that overall, across the country, we will see property crimes go up significantly during this time. Locally in my area, it is a double-edged sword. We are seeing a fairly normal number of thefts and burglaries, maybe a small increase, but we are also seeing an increase of the thieves being caught due to a high number of victims and witnesses being home and reporting the in-progress crimes.

I have always suggested that people improve their personal security and, in several layers, when possible. On the exterior of homes with the grid up, the use of bright lights, cameras, and motion sensors are always good investments and deterrents. On hardening the structure, I highly recommend the use of any of the various brands of door plates, such as Door Armor brand and decent quality locks, to slow would-be burglars or attackers down. Noisy dogs, if possible, alarm systems, door bars, or extra latches and locks all help slow the bad guys down. Having a good neighborhood watch program in place or creating one now is always a good idea depending on your neighborhood (if I lived near a known criminal element or people of questionable character, I probably wouldn't be asking for their help watching my home for me). Paying attention to your surroundings through your neighbors or any of the many online resources such as Nextdoor.com and Neighbors Apps can also be helpful as well as looking into any crime stats made available by your local law enforcement agencies.

Of course, you cannot talk about personal security without talking about self-defense and its many aspects. Self-defense can include situational awareness, martial arts, less-lethal weapons, and tactics as well as firearms. All of them, including situational awareness, require some training. Some jurisdictions require people to jump through a lot of hoops for firearms, probably even for the less-lethal weapons, different ammunition, and magazines of different capacities. These are all things that need to be considered for each person and their families where they live. And just like the medical and fire prevention, the ability to be proficient with self-defense requires not only training but also education in its use, as there can very likely be legal consequences if or when they come into play, again, especially depending on where you might live.
With the increase in emergency calls, the reduction of responders through various circumstances, and the new world we find ourselves, it would behoove many of us to be better prepared to be the first responder for ourselves, our friends, and loved ones as we can. When our local first responders get overwhelmed, we could very well find ourselves asking, "WHO DO WE CALL?"
Long gone are the days of news broadcasters. They died at least a decade ago and maybe two. Today we live in a world of pundits. The nights of the family gathering around the TV to watch Dan Rather or Walter Cronkite are a thing of the past. It would appear that most people today watch one of the big 24/7 news stations that agree with their political views, which is about all that is discussed. No matter the issue, as can be seen in the recent pandemic coverage, it will be turned into a political issue to either bash one party or praise the other.

But all is not lost. With the death of professional journalism (by death, I mean the loss of any semblance of impartiality), came a surge of blogs and websites where what are often referred to as citizen journalists jumped into the pool. However, in the polarized society that’s been so carefully engineered for us, even these news sources are biased to one degree or another. How is one to know what is real news, and what is a pundit’s personal or corporate opinion?
This is where you have to use your head and some logic. Personally, I look for three confirmations from three separate sources that all relay the same basic info. If you can find more than four, even better, it will only strengthen your confirmation. However, in all of these, there will be bias. And it’s up to you to sort the wheat from the chaff.

Use Google Alerts to track news in your area. Look it up, and it’s a simple process to set up, and then it runs in the background and gives you a daily dump of intel to wade through. Keep your tags as precise as you can to prevent an overload of information that can cause paralysis through analysis. Look for the common threads and then search from various search engines to find the original source and use that information to make your own decision.

Twitter is a very valuable tool. Set up an account and start looking for people to follow that report on things you’re interested in. This is one of the most valuable tools I personally use. I follow people from all over the world. When border tensions between China and India kicked off, several of my normal intel sources on Twitter picked up on it. They then began retweeting locals in the area of the confrontation. I then followed them, cutting out one stop in the game of telephone that we all know so well.

As you begin to build your own intelligence network using open source intelligence, OSINT, you will be more informed and generally much faster than the MSM will ever be capable of. I’ve broke stories here in the US a full four hours before the MSM ever mentioned them using these very methods. However, do not jump the gun. Just because one of your preferred sources puts something out doesn’t mean it’s true. You need confirmation first. Request additional details, look to others in their area or check out people responding to the comment. Once you’ve found your confirmation and verified the source, it’s a pretty safe bet something is up.

One point worth mentioning here. If you start a Twitter account to use for intel purposes, and this goes for any platform really, stay out of the comments. Read them to get the temperature of the event in question, but avoid commenting if you can. Remember, everyone has an opinion, and in today’s world, the wrong one could create all manner of trouble for you. You could be doxed or worse, banned from the various platforms for questioning the party narrative. Just like with Ham radio, it is often more valuable to listen than to talk. You have two ears and one mouth for a reason, use them in that ratio.
The last source I’ll bring up is shortwave radio. If you have a Ham radio, you can listen to broadcasts from all over the world. A cheap shortwave radio will do the same. Purchase a small external antenna for it because reception inside a building will be nearly nonexistent and scroll through the frequencies at night, as this is when those frequencies perform best. You will hear a lot of international talk.

Remember, the vast majority of this is state-sponsored propaganda. US stations are putting it out just as there are Russian and Chinese stations operating transmitters in English, so don’t be fooled. Use it as another resource.

In the end, deciding what is real information and what is propaganda comes down to you doing the legwork. It’s not easy and takes some time. But the points mentioned here can make it almost automated for you. But it’s still up to you to make the judgment, and sometimes, you’ll be wrong. Learn from those mistakes. Intelligence and the analysis of it is a top priority for any government around the world. It is incumbent on us to decipher the fact from the fiction. Understanding when we’re being manipulated takes a critical, thinking human, like you.
If the coronavirus has taught us anything, it’s just how fragile the global supply chain is. In military operations, logistics is the very first thing to be sorted out. You cannot send troops to fight if you cannot keep them fed, hydrated, and resupplied. And notice which two things I listed first. The frontline action is the only the smallest portion of an operation.

We should be learning lessons from this. If logistics is that important to military operations, it should be to us as well. In a world of Just-In-Time (JIT) inventory, too many people suffer normalcy bias; the grocery store was full yesterday, so it should be today and tomorrow as well. While the recent situation has changed that mentality for many people, the sad thing is that most people have very short memories. As soon as the media tells them everything is fine again, they’ll stop thinking ahead. We see this every hurricane season in Florida so, I know it’s real from firsthand experience.
Going back to the COVID-19 madness when, for whatever reason, the entire nation decided they needed toilet paper above all else, we all saw just how fast supply can run out, and there may not be a resupply. My local grocery store still does not have a full aisle of paper products. And that’s one really sad example. As humans, we do not need TP to live. We need water, food, shelter, warmth, and security. Nowhere on that list is TP.

Meat became a little scarce, as did some fresh produce. This event should have been a wake-up call to the world that we are not living properly. This reliance on daily resupply is a gamble. I have friends that shop for their food every single day. If they didn’t drop by the market on their way home, they wouldn’t have a thing to eat that night or the next morning. That is a very dangerous reliance on an overly complex system that is far more fragile than they imagine. Here again, these people are stuck in normalcy bias.

Planning ahead, stocking up on foods you normally eat, every day, is only prudent. The potential disruptions to the JIT system are staggering. And it is literally everything you need to survive unless you are already growing your own food, keeping livestock and heating and cooking with wood heat. What would you do if you woke up tomorrow and found out that there was another pandemic or other emergency, and companies like Amazon have been nationalized and will only supply the government and their agencies? There would be a run on the stores immediately, food, water, gas, and other essentials would vanish in hours. What’s your plan to deal with it?

While we can never store enough of anything, no matter how much you have, it will run out someday. Figuring out now how you will deal with the day you run out will soften the blow to your life. You will still be affected by the event, however, by storing food and other supplies, your crash landing will be a lot softer.
Many in the preparedness community had things they needed for them and their families already in place to weather out the many complications brought on by our current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic as it began showing itself in early 2020. They typically had plenty of food, water, or ways to filter and otherwise obtain potable water, fuel storage, medical preps, self-defense options, and possibly communications and threat intelligence capabilities. Some even thought to have places established to where they and their families could bug out to. It came as quite a shock to many people fleeing their densely populated areas for, they believed to be safer, less populated areas when they began running into literal roadblocks.

One of the early stories to hit the national news was the Outer Banks islands of North Carolina. Property owners from all over, especially from the DC, NY and NJ areas, had previously purchased and owned many of the properties on the Outer Banks and were attempting to flee to their second homes to try and ride out the early stages of the pandemic as rumors of sheltering in place and store shortages were beginning to dominate the news. On March 17th of 2020, Dare County, NC, announced that it was shutting down the two bridges onto their island to all visitors. On March 20th, they extended that to all non-resident homeowners as well. That quick change was brought on by the locals realizing that their island population was growing by leaps and bounds in their "off-season" which they were not prepared for. The few grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants, and service stations were overwhelmed by sudden demands that they had also not planned for at that time of year, stressing their small islands' ability to maintain essentials for their normal population. The blockade resulted in the non-resident homeowners doing a different variety of things to gain access to the island as well as a lawsuit against the county, which is still awaiting an outcome here in May of 2020. Some people were paying island residents or people working on the island to smuggle them and their families onto the island in vehicles as passengers and by boat before local law enforcement began watching for that as well. The slower, but ultimately more effective technique became the non-resident homeowners changing their addresses through the DMV to the addresses of their second homes. They would then return to the blocked bridges with a paper copy of their addresses on the island and be allowed on since it clearly showed them having a state-recognized address on the island, one of the county’s requirements.
It also made the news quite early on that Louisiana was having large amounts of confirmed cases of COVID-19 and that it began to worry the surrounding states. Texas’s governor dispatched state troopers to all roadways entering Texas from the Louisiana border to begin in late March. It mandated that Louisiana residents provide an address where they would be quarantined for the following 14 days, to be followed up by State agents during that time. At the same time, the governor of Florida had also set up roadblocks along I-10 targeting motorists with Louisiana license plates entering their state as well. They, too, were requiring the visitors to self-quarantine for 14 days, just like Texas. The risks of those violating those state’s self-quarantines were large fines and jail time up to 180 days. There were different jurisdictions in many states that came up with ordinances that had hefty fines related to violating travel restrictions and some cases of threats of arrest.

Nearly every state in the United States saw some form of travel restrictions or had problems with “visitors” or the non-resident property owners arriving in the “off-seasons” in the usually rural area of their respective states. Local ordinances were created to prevent people from using AirBnB and similar house sharing or rental services after the outset. Many places began developing the “Us versus Them” problems that resulted from the influx of people fleeing from the high-density population areas. Like the Outer Banks islands, those small communities began to see above-normal stress on their medical systems, grocery stores, and other necessities. This problem is not unique to the United States as there are many similar stories from all over the world about small communities being overwhelmed by people fleeing to the less populated areas. We also saw early on the flight restrictions being placed on country after country, causing some people to get stranded in foreign lands or unable to take advantage of their passports to flee to safety in some distant location.

I remember that James Wesley Rawles in “How to Survive the End of the World as we Know it” book, highly recommended that instead of people trying to play the guessing game of trying to figure out when to bug out, to instead find a way to live and work from your bug out retreat. Followers of John Mosby at Mountain Guerrilla blog and many cornerstone preparedness manuals know that he and his family have done exactly that. And not only has Mosby moved into a rural mountain area near family and friends, but he has made it an important point to build a community there through helping neighbors, providing training and garden produce from his property, making sure to use local businesses for their family’s purchases and making himself available to call on for help if need be. He has established himself and his family as locals to the community and has their trust and, maybe, more importantly, their support when need be. Mosby also recently wrote a Patreon article concerning “Ratlines,” where he had to come up with a series of people that were either friends, former students or friends of friends which he had to trust enough to help get his wife and a family member back home from the west coast as some of the travel restrictions were starting to be put in place across the US.
Many of these travel restrictions were directly related to the pandemic to prevent or slow the spread of the virus, but there could be similar restrictions put in place due to economic conditions or social unrest in the near future. From the few real-world travel restriction stories mentioned above, you can see that each one might require a different response to how to overcome the problems presented. The things they all seemed to have in common though was timing. When is the right time to bug out and already to have enough supplies stored up or brought with you so that new problems aren’t created in those smaller communities that you are fleeing to? It would be best to already be established as a “local” where you are going, but you definitely don’t want you and your family to be viewed as a new burden. These recent lessons provided around the country should help fine-tune many bug-out plans by emphasizing more thought being placed into the planning part of your bug out plan. Not only having additional routes to arrive at your destination but also how you might go about either avoiding, circumventing, or defeating some sort of travel restrictions before you get turned around.
Much like fires, floods, and tornados are forces of nature, the trash we produce is a force of human nature — a seemingly never-ending supply. The lights blink out, water stops, the world grinds to a halt, and the trash bin still fills.

But as with many of our preparations, we can take action to ensure that we can manage our garbage in an uncertain future.

THE FACTS

According to the CDC, Americans produce approximately 5.91 pounds of trash per person per day. Going by that estimate, the pile-up of trash on our curbside could potentially reach 732 pounds for a family of four in only a month! And most of us rely almost entirely on some variety of scheduled trash pickup to handle our waste.

KITCHEN SCRAPS AND WILDLIFE

An estimated 13% of our daily waste is kitchen scraps. That means that roughly 95 pounds of the trash pile are made up of food. This is a huge hazard to any prepper. Depending on your area, 95 pounds of food could mean bear, wild dogs, raccoons, boar, or even just rats will be closing in on your home. And all of these opportunistic foragers/hunters come with their own set of problems for us.

The most common bears in the Americas are easy to manage when avoided, but they are powerful creatures when motivated by food. The surplus killing behavior of wild dogs puts our children and any livestock, small or large we may have, at very high risk. Opossums, raccoons, and wild boar will shred our stack of trash bags making a bad problem worse, and each can present their own issues to our small livestock and gardens.

And lastly, the list of diseases directly transmitted by rats on the CDC’s website is eleven items long. Not to mention the predators they attract as a lower part of the food chain.

SO, WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT ALL THIS TRASH BEFORE IT BECOMES A PROBLEM?
SELF HAULING
The first thing you can do to prepare yourself for a system shut down is to include the local landfill into your Area Study. Where is it? Who Owns it? What are the fees? The majority of these landfills have programs in place that let you deposit your own trash. It could be free, or on a by the bag or by the pound basis. If the disaster we face is flooding, blizzards, tornado damage, or even union strikes, that are simply keeping the garbage trucks from running. Taking the garbage to them could very well be your best option. And it’s easy. Go find the dump and do a practice run with a few bags of trash to get the lay of the land!

SHORT TERM STORAGE
A great temporary solution to dealing with your garbage is storing it. Drums with a sealable lid are excellent for this. Keeping in mind that your curbside can will hold between 64 and 96 gallons depending on its size. It’s easy to make the calculations on how many drums you’d need on hand to store your output for a few weeks.

BURN BARRELS
If just burning your garbage seems like an easy solution, think again. Studies have shown that one back yard trash pit produces as much Dioxin as a full-scale municipal waste combustor burning 200 tons a day. Dioxins are a family of chemicals that have been shown to cause many health issues, including immune deficiency, hormone imbalances, and cancer. Also, keep in mind that burning backyard trash is illegal in much of the country. My personal recommendation is to avoid burning household garbage all together unless there is no other option.
COMPOSTING

The EPA estimates that 24% of our trash is compostable! Obviously, we aren't all set up to compost meats, and depending on your family's diet, this number will vary a bit. But for the sake of argument, let's say that 176 pounds out of our giant 732-pound pile are compostable through various means. So, having an active compost pile or vermiculture bin is a big step in the direction of preparing for a system shutdown!

Most people are capable of handling composting kitchen scraps and paper waste, but what do we do about meats and food oils and those other products that can't be easily processed? When left unseasoned, most meat scraps can be cooked and fed to the family dog as a treat or even a part of their diet. Any other “difficult” compostables can be buried with three foot of dirt over them to ensure they won't cause any issues or attract pests and predators. With a yard and a pair of posthole diggers at your disposal, you can easily get rid of difficult compostables. And if composting just isn't your bag, you can use this method to dispose of all your kitchen scraps.

PRO TIP: If you decide to bury your trash or scraps, you’ll want to be aware of where you are digging to avoid utility lines. You can call 811 for a free site survey ahead of time and take photos of where they mark your utilities for later use. You'd be surprised at the networks of cables, wires, and pipes just a shovel spit deep in the dirt.

Recycle

Traditional recycling doesn’t solve your problem of waste buildup but properly cleaned sorted, and crushed recycling won’t cause you any issues for the foreseeable future. It’s a good way to bring the bulk of that mountain of trash down to a manageable level. And remember, reusing is recycling!

WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF IT?

With 24 percent compostable and roughly 30 percent recyclable, that leaves us with 418 pounds left in the pile we began with. The good thing about this number is that it’s based on the good times. And once there is less coming into the home, the pile will naturally add up a little slower, and with a little elbow grease will be more manageable.

TRASH COMPACTORS

Trash compactors are a great way to reduce the bulk if not the weight of what’s left of your trash output. And if your plan is to make regular trips to the dump, having one of these machines could help make those trips less regular.
TRASH AS INFORMATION

The packaging is covered in labels and marketing designed to get your attention in the store. Attention-getting labels keep working long after you have emptied the box. We’ve all heard the rule about not putting the box for your new Hi-Def TV out with the trash because it advertises to everyone that you just bought something fancy and could make you a burglary target.

The same goes for all other boxes, bags, and mail.

Did you just buy long term survival food? How about guns and ammo? Part of your operational security is to be mindful of the clues you are piling up at the curb for the world to see as they pass by. Break down those boxes and turn them inside out, remove address labels on anything you give away. Shred junk mail that could be used to steal your identity and look at the trash you set out by the street. What does it say about you? What papers are loose in the can to blow down the street as they are dumped over or poured into the back of a big dirty truck?

At the end of the day, some thoughtful planning, reducing your output, recycling, and a little composting is not only good for the environment, but it also makes good prepping sense for the future!
A season into the COVID-19 pandemic, it's clear that life as we knew it isn't coming back any time soon. The threat of disease hangs over us, many mandatory closures are still in place, and the national unemployment rate is the highest it's been since the Great Depression. In stressful times like these, people grow desperate for resources and angry at their lack of control over what's happening. And, unfortunately, some of those people turn to crime—preying on those around them. Everywhere people are gathered in close proximity, even in the safest neighborhoods, unsettling things can start to happen.

Crime isn't a problem you can solve alone. It's a community-wide problem, and it needs a community-wide solution. But you can be the catalyst for that solution, while at the same time turning your biggest liability (the people you are surrounded by) into an asset (those people are all potential allies). How? You can organize your community into a neighborhood watch.

WHAT A WATCH IS - AND WHAT IT ISN'T

For as long as humans have existed, we've gathered in groups for mutual protection. Hunter-gatherer tribes left sentries awake to watch for predators while the others slept. Towns in medieval England appointed watchmen from among the populace to keep the streets secure after dark. And since the 1970s, American communities have partnered with law enforcement to help reduce local crime through the National Neighborhood Watch (NNW) program.

Whether you choose to register your watch as part of that program or not, its guidelines offer a good starting point for what you can realistically and safely accomplish as a group of concerned civilians.

THE TRADITIONAL GOALS OF A NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH ARE TO:

- Watch for criminal activity in a neighborhood and report it to law enforcement
- Spread safety information and promote best practices for crime prevention, home security, and emergency preparedness
- Strengthen community bonds by uniting residents around a common purpose

Many neighborhood watches organize periodic patrols of their neighborhoods or set people to watch entry points or common areas. Some advise residents on how to protect themselves and their homes and how to report suspicious activity when they see it. And some have expanded beyond crime prevention to help with other local problems like littering, idle youth, and homelessness. The more you work alongside your neighbors, the more you'll come to know and trust each other, and the better off you all will be in any scenario requiring mutual aid.

One thing that neighborhood watches don't do is train citizens to respond to crime. In fact, the NNW program actively discourages its participants from doing so. It's just too dangerous, both for yourselves and for anyone you might identify (accurately or not) as a criminal. Plus, depending on your jurisdiction, intervening with force on behalf of a non-family member might fall outside the bounds of legal self-defense. If there's any chance an encounter could turn violent, it's best left to the professionals, who have extensive training in resolving such situations with a minimum of bloodshed. Your job as watchers is to extend their capacity by summoning them where they need to be (or improving security measures and conducting visible patrols, keeping them from needing to be there in the first place).
HOW TO START A WATCH

1. MAKE A PLAN

The first thing you’ll want to do when starting a neighborhood watch is to see if one already exists. (Two places to check are the listings on the NNW website, https://nnw.org/find-a-watch-program, and your homeowner’s association or local government.) If so, there’s no need to reinvent the wheel. Find out who’s in charge and ask how you can help—in times like these, they’ll be glad to have new blood and fresh ideas. But if there’s no such group, read on.

Before you contact anyone about joining your watch, you’ll need to figure out two things: the scope of the project and how you’ll introduce it to prospective members. At this point, it’s too early to pick watch posts and separate out roles—besides, you might end up recruiting people who can do that better than you. But you should determine what area your watch will cover (so you know where to recruit from) and a general idea of what it will do (patrols, information sharing, classes for residents, etc.). And you should also plan how you’ll persuade your neighbors to get involved. Start with a few sentences explaining what the watch will do, why it’s needed now, and how they can get involved—something like this:

"Hi, I’m [your name], and I live [down the street]. I’m organizing a neighborhood watch to help prevent crime and keep our neighborhood safe. Would you be interested in joining us?"

If any crimes have happened in your area recently, you can mention them to express what you’re concerned about. And you should have answers ready for likely questions, such as "Is this legal?" (yes), "What will the time commitment be?" (it depends on your group’s plans, but as little as an hour or two each week), and "Who’s in charge?" (you’ll vote on that at your first meeting).

Last, if they’re interested, invite them to an interest meeting for the watch. Figure out a date, time, and place for it before you head out: soon, but not so soon that people can’t make it, and at a convenient time like a weekday evening or weekend afternoon. Outdoor locations are safest at the moment: perhaps a local park, cul-de-sac, or residential parking lot. And you can offer incentives for showing up, like snacks, drinks, or someone to watch the children while the adults talk.

2. SPREAD THE WORD

Once you’ve worked out the initial details, find a few like-minded, trustworthy people to help spread the word about the watch. You can start by posting flyers for it on phone poles, bulletin boards, and local email lists or web forums. But to make sure you reach everyone you and your helpers will want to go door to door with the message described earlier. (This has the added benefit of introducing you to everyone—and the first step to securing your neighborhood is knowing who belongs there and who doesn’t.) As you talk to people, stay calm and friendly, and keep your message brief, focused, and apolitical. Now’s not the time to bring up controversial issues like gun rights or police tactics. Whether or not your neighbors share your opinions, the fact remains that you’re the people best positioned to watch each other’s backs and offer help in a crisis, so you’ll need to set aside any differences and cooperate. And if anyone seems concerned by your plans, make it clear that the only goal of this watch is neighborhood safety—for all residents—and that you intend to operate fully within the law.
3. HOST AN INTEREST MEETING

With luck, you’ll have a good turnout for the watch’s interest meeting. As the instigators, you and your helpers will want to sit up front to facilitate it. However, given the state of the world right now, this may also be an online video meeting. No matter the meeting format it is important to remember that at this point all you are facilitators. You might well be the logical candidate to lead the watch, but unless and until the rest of the group appoints you to that role, you’re just a concerned neighbor with ideas to help keep the community safe. And if others have different ideas, you want to hear them too.

Present the gist of your plans for the watch (where and when it will patrol, whether/how it will coordinate with local law enforcement, what else it can do to help secure the neighborhood, etc.), and then open the floor for suggestions. You might be surprised who speaks up: it could be the old lady who’s always out pruning her bushes (that she deliberately planted in a defensive arrangement), or an intrepid teenager who knows all the hidden ways in and out of the neighborhood, or an immigrant family that survived civil unrest in their old country and has lessons to share. Hear them all out and note down any good ideas (and who might be able to implement them).

Once the group has agreed on a general plan for the watch, it’s time to choose the leaders who will execute it. You’ll want at least one, to direct activities and coordinate with law enforcement on the group’s behalf. You might also want to designate more roles, like second-in-command, patrol scheduler, record-keeper, or event coordinator, all of whom can work with the leader to develop your final plans. The best candidates for leader will have law enforcement or military experience (the more they know about security and crime prevention, the better), good interpersonal and organizational skills, the respect and trust of most people in the neighborhood, and the ability to delegate.

Once the leader is appointed, all that remains is to wrap up and send everyone home—with homework! There’s a lot each member can do while the leadership team finalizes the watch plans. First, and most importantly, they can figure out and tell the leaders how much time they can devote to the watch and when that time will be (days, nights, weekdays, weekends, etc.). Second, they can see if they have any gear the watch could use, like surveillance or trail cameras, flashlights, alarm devices, walkie-talkies (useful if the phone system goes down), or anything else the leaders might request. And third, they can evaluate the security of their own homes and habits and see what they can do to harden them up, like installing or repairing outdoor lights, checking the locks on ground-floor windows, remembering to keep all doors locked (including garage and basement doors), and storing valuable items indoors and out of sight. You can even send them home with a checklist, like the ones found in this guide: https://www.nnw.org/sites/default/files/Partnership%20for%20a%20Safer%20Community.pdf. And, of course, let them all know the date of the next meeting and who to contact with questions in the meantime.
4. FINALIZE THE PLAN

You and your fellow watch leaders will also have a lot to do between the interest meeting and when you officially launch the watch. First, you’ll have to survey the area to determine where and when to deploy your watchers. Which parts of the neighborhood see the most traffic (vehicular or otherwise)? How do people enter and exit the area? Roads are the obvious paths, but pedestrian routes like sidewalks, trails, cut-throughs, and even gaps between houses should also be on your radar. What are the normal patterns of activity (when are the sidewalks busy vs. empty, when are most houses occupied, who gets up early, who stays out late, etc.)? You have two goals here: to establish a baseline for “normal” that you can compare with later events, and to figure out when your neighborhood is most vulnerable to crime (and thus when your watch is most needed). For example, most burglaries happen during the day when houses tend to be vacant. Be sure to incorporate any useful information from the interest meeting into these plans.

Second, collect your watch members’ responses about their availability and equipment, and use them to make a preliminary schedule for the watch. Depending on your plans, you might have a variety of roles, like patroller, sentry, dispatcher/central contact person, or event support. You may also want to appoint block or shift captains to supervise normal watch operations in their respective locations or times of day (these should be responsible, committed people willing to provide training and lead small groups). Also, if you can, identify anyone among your members with emergency medical training and arrange for at least one of them to be “on-call” whenever the watch is operating, to provide care if needed until an ambulance shows up (which might take longer than usual these days). And make sure everyone has everything they need to carry out their roles; if not, the watch may need to buy new gear or arrange for it to be shared among the group.

Third, work out a chain of command and communication procedures for the watch. You’ll probably want to designate dispatchers, either watch leaders or other trustworthy group members, to pass information between watchers, leaders, and neighborhood residents as needed. These dispatchers should have contact information for as many people in the neighborhood as possible, even non-participants, in case they need to send out urgent warnings (for example, if a house is on fire or an assault is taking place). Text messages and email are the most universal means to contact people, and there are several mass-text and email-blast programs that can help you reach many people at once. You could also set up a Slack workspace, Facebook group, or Twitter account if those platforms are popular in your neighborhood. And if you’re concerned about phone or internet service going out, you could set up a radio broadcast system or arrange a contact tree (in which the dispatcher passes a message in-person to a couple of other households, who then each pass the message to a couple more households, and so on until everyone has been notified). Whatever systems you set up, be sure to test them before you need them—you don’t want to find out during an emergency that half your messages don’t reach their intended recipients.

And fourth, if you choose to do so, register your new group with the NNW program (for instructions, see https://www.nnw.org/node/10) and reach out to your local law enforcement to let them know you’re operating. Invite them to send a representative to your launch meeting—they can review your plans, help train members, and offer advice on how to run the watch group and how you can best support them.
5. LAUNCH YOUR GROUP

By the day of the launch meeting, you should have most of the logistics figured out. All that’s left will be to assign roles to your watch members, train them in their tasks, and settle any last-minute scheduling conflicts. If you have several different roles, you could start this meeting with the information everyone will need to know, then separate out by role for more specific instructions.

AT A MINIMUM, EACH WATCH MEMBER SHOULD KNOW WHO’S IN CHARGE OF THE WATCH AS A WHOLE, WHO’S LEADING THEIR PARTICULAR BLOCK/SHIFT/TEAM, AND WHO TO CONTACT IN THE EVENT OF:

- Emergencies (a crime is being committed, people are in danger, or someone is hurt): 911, then the watch leader or dispatcher
- Suspicious activity but no urgent threat: your local police department’s non-emergency number, then the watch leader or dispatcher
- Questions, comments, or routine status reports: their team leader, the dispatcher, or another designated person

Patrollers and sentries should know where and when they’ll be keeping watch, what to look for, and what to do when they see it. Review with them some common suspicious behaviors and normal activities, such as the following:

SUSPICIOUS:
- Someone peering into cars or house windows
- A car driving loops around the neighborhood or idling in front of a house without anyone getting out or coming in
- Someone carrying a weapon
- A stranger poking around the foundations or fumbling with the locks of someone’s house
- Two people showing up in separate vehicles, exchanging packages, and quickly departing
- Open doors, broken windows, or any other signs of tampering or forced entry

PROBABLY NOT SUSPICIOUS:
- Joggers (if they’re moving in a straight line and largely ignoring their surroundings, they’re most likely just out for exercise)
- Someone poking around the foundations or fumbling with the locks of their own house (with the caveat that domestic violence is one crime in particular that tends to increase during an economic downturn. If Mrs. Neighbor has to kick out Mr. Neighbor and change the locks on him, she should absolutely notify a trusted figure on the watch)
- Yard or maintenance crews (although if the homeowner is absent and anything about the crew seems off, you might want to call the homeowner to make sure the crew is supposed to be there)

Encourage watchers to remain alert while on patrol and avoid listening to music, using their phones, or getting drawn into long conversations. And when they do see suspicious activity, they should remain calm, get themselves and anyone else present to a safe location, and report what they saw in as much detail as possible. (For example, “Around five minutes ago, I saw three men jump over the fence of 703 Maple Avenue and run off toward Main Street. One was carrying a half-full black trash bag, and another held what appeared to be a handgun.”) Also have them include any identifying details they remember about the people or vehicles involved (for people: sex, age, height, weight, skin color, hair color and style, scars or tattoos, and clothing; for vehicles: make, model, color, license plate number and state, and any distinctive decals, dents, or bumper stickers). For more information, see chapter 6 of the NNW manual (available at https://www.nnw.org/sites/default/files/documents/0_NW_Manual_1210.pdf).

By the end of this meeting, everyone should understand their role in the watch and feel comfortable performing it. Send them home with any equipment they’ll need, the date and time of the next watch meeting, and a schedule to keep them going until then.
6. WATCH, WAIT AND ITERATE

With luck, all the effort you put into planning your watch will pay off, and your first few weeks in operation will go smoothly. No plans are perfect, though, so you'll likely learn a lot about what works and what doesn't pretty fast. The leadership team should keep track of any problems or confusion and review them before the next meeting to see if any watch procedures need to change.

As your watch continues, make sure to hold regular meetings (at least once a month) to review your procedures, discuss any incidents, collect feedback from the participants, and maintain interest in the program. Be sure to thank watch members for the time they volunteer and recognize any exceptional efforts. As long as they feel their work matters and is appreciated, they'll be glad to keep it up.

Organizing a neighborhood watch group and keeping it going will take a lot of time and effort. But in return, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you're doing all you can to keep your household safe and secure in these uncertain times. And you might just sleep easier knowing that your neighbors have your back.
Welcome to THE FORT! When we were kids, most of us had a special place to play, imagine, create stuff, and learn how things work. We gathered our friends and unknowingly learned about working together and sometimes fighting it out until we figured out where we fit in. It could’ve been a treehouse, a bedsheets tent, or maybe a secret clubhouse, but IT WAS OUR PLACE, AND WE LOVED IT!

THE FORT is a section of THE INSIDER where kids of all ages can go to find out where they fit into the big world of self-reliance. Each month we’ll create content that is geared toward our kids and drawn from the issue’s topic. The idea is for kids to get hands-on experience, build confidence, and learn things not always taught in school.

The skills we present in The Fort are meant to be done with others, and most of them should have an adult involved in to provide safety and supervision. Each skill will introduce multiple components, from critical thinking to planning and mostly a lot of fun. This is a great opportunity to bring family and friends together to do new and exciting things.
Your team has been preparing for hard times and that’s a good thing. The news has reported that some of the systems that we take for granted have begun to fail. We don’t usually think too much about where our trash goes once we put it out to the street. The other service we usually ignore is electricity. We just flip the switch and the lights come on. Would you be ready if the lights didn’t work and the trash never gets picked up?

Your situation is that both of those services are beginning to fail. The lights blink off more these days due to brownouts. That means the lights go off for hours at a time even if there is no thunderstorm. You also noticed that when you took the trash cans out to the street the other day, no one ever came and took the trash away. This can lead to bad smells and can attract wild animals that will dig in the trash and make a mess and cause diseases.

MISSION:

Your mission is to find a way to provide light in your fort without electricity. What could you do to make safe light for the inside of your fort? You have several options available depending on your age and abilities. Younger survivors can locate a flashlight or LED lantern and learn how to change spare batteries.

Older survivors can choose to collect the parts to build their own survival light using batteries, wires and flashlight bulbs. You can go to the store; order parts online or even reconfigure an old light into a fun project. Do not use live electricity or dangerous components. Your mission is to learn how to use batteries, wires and small bulbs to build a survival flashlight.

Your second mission is to learn how to reuse different items that your family might toss in the trash. For example, you can use kitchen food scraps to make garden compost or start a worm farm to make garden soil. If you have small farm animals like chickens or rabbits you can feed them some of the food waste to save money on pet food.

You might be able to fix or reconfigure other things made out of plastic or metal. For example, food cans can be a camp stove or hobo drink cup if the edges are smoothed down for safety. Other trash that cannot be used for anything could be buried deep enough that animals can’t dig it up.
MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Flashlight batteries
- Small wires
- Flashlight bulbs
- Electrical tape
- Wire nippers
- Scrap materials to build a project lamp
- (Alternatively) Purchase a junior electronics project kit
- Book or instructions on how to build simple electric projects for kids
- Book or instructions on how to build a worm farm or compost bin
- (Alternatively) Purchase a worm bin
LESSONS LEARNED

• How to build a simple electrical circuit
• How to use a flashlight and change the batteries
• Electrical safety
• Basic electrical theory
• Simple construction and engineering
• How to be independent
• Self confidence
• How to overcome challenges when building things
• How to reduce waste, reuse and repair things that might be thrown away
• Alternatives to commercially purchased items

SAFETY:

• Always have an adult help with sharp tools and things that can cause fire
• Wires and batteries can make sparks and fire be careful and do not leave batteries in projects
• Never allow wires to touch both ends of a battery or there could be fire
• Wear safety glasses
• Prevent burns
• Do not work with house electricity, it can be very dangerous to touch
• Teach children electrical safety and how to identify hazards such as frayed wires and loose plugs
• Be aware of other small children around tools and materials
• Clean up your work area when you are done
We Hope You Enjoyed This Issue of Survival Dispatch Insider.

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