

The Seven Step Survival Plan

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MARK GOODWIN

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“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

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INTRODUCTION

A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.

Proverbs 22:3

The world is a dangerous place, and that's not likely to change anytime soon. Wars, plagues, famines, earthquakes, and violent weather events have threatened our species since the dawn of time. Besides the usual suspects, our modern era has additional threats unique to our day and age. Many of these new hazards have risen from the very technologies that have allowed us to prosper. Vast water pumping systems allow us to have massive cities like Las Vegas and Phoenix in the middle of the desert. Cheap oil has enabled us to employ gigantic farming machines used to plant and harvest vast quantities of food, so we can spend our time on other endeavors. Our electrical grid allows us to build huge grocery stores where endless amounts of food may be stored and purchased at a moment's notice. These retail food facilities permit the growth of immense cities where people can live unconcerned with food production or storage. A common factor among these systems that have facilitated our way of life is their growing complexity. Complexity within a system compounds the difficulty of solving problems when those systems inevitably break down. The greater the complexity, the greater the possible difficulty in repairing a failed system.

What happens when these systems fail? How can a city exist in the desert if the reservoir dries up? What will be the cost of producing and transporting food if oil prices skyrocket due to supply shortages or geopolitical tensions? Where will those living in large cities get food if the electrical grid goes down for an extended period of time due to a solar flare, EMP attack, terrorist plot, or episode of cyber warfare?

In addition to these physical threats, we live in a world of unprecedented monetary experimentation. History books tell of the destruction caused by the Roman Empire's attempt to debase the currency, which resulted in the Dark Ages. In more recent history, we've watched

hyperinflationary events occur regionally across the globe. In 1922, Weimar Germany experienced a daily inflation rate of 21 percent. Prices doubled every four days. In 2007, Zimbabwe's prices doubled every twenty-five hours with a 98 percent daily inflation rate. The majority of people living in America don't think that could ever happen to the dollar, but most fail to realize that the dollar has lost 96 percent of its value since the creation of the Federal Reserve in 1913. The money printing policies of the Fed, which have caused the mammoth currency devaluation, have greatly accelerated in recent years. At the time of this writing, the Federal Reserve had paused publicized Quantitative Easing program, but was doing nothing to soak up the trillions in new Federal Reserve Notes that had flooded into the system. While the additional currency has yet to create a formal crisis, it represents a monstrous potential for destruction once it begins to be lent out through the fractional reserve banking system, which could allow it to grow to ten times its current nominal value. Because of the potential for a hyperinflationary disaster, sovereign holders of U.S. debt have continued to voice their disapproval of the irresponsible monetary policies of the American central bank. Even though we've not seen crisis-level inflation, that doesn't mean we don't see very significant levels of price increases at the grocery stores and for other necessary products. History has a large array of examples of currencies that have failed throughout the ages, but no examples of unbacked currencies that have stood the test of time. Every fiat currency from the past has collapsed. Statistically speaking, the chance of the U.S. dollar collapsing is 100 percent. The only questions that remain are, when will it happen, and how catastrophic will the event be? Hundreds of financial analysts and economic pundits predict that it may be quite cataclysmic and it may be soon. Among them are Former Assistant U.S. Treasury Secretary Paul Craig Roberts, Former Director of the Office of Management and Budget David Stockman, and Former U.S. Congressmen Ron Paul, Jerry Robinson, David Quintieri, Peter Schiff, John Rubino, Andy Hoffman, Eric Sprott, Rick Rule, James Turk, and Doug Casey to list only a few.

Just trying to imagine what the world would be like after a severe period of economic upheaval is a daunting task. Speculation about how that world would look is beyond the scope of this book, but it has been thoroughly examined in David Kobler's video series, *Without Rule of Law*, which is available on his [Southernprepper1](#) YouTube channel and in Mark Goodwin's post-apocalyptic fiction book series, *The Days of Noah*, *The Economic Collapse Chronicles*, or his latest EMP survival thriller, *Behold, Darkness and Sorrow*, available in paperback, Kindle, and audio editions from [PrepperRecon.com](#).

With the thoughts of natural and man-made disasters or a post-apocalyptic landscape in mind, it makes sense to put together a plan and dedicate some portion of your time and resources to preparing to survive when the systems we depend on fail. It was with this mission in mind that we decided to write *The Seven Step Survival Plan*. One of the most overwhelming moments in life can be the second that you realize that life, as you know it, is teetering on the brink of disaster and you aren't prepared. Thousands of thoughts of what needs to be done race through your mind in an instant. The Seven Step Survival Plan will help you prioritize your efforts and get on a solid path to becoming more prepared for everything from a hurricane to the end of the world as we know it.

The plan is perfect for new preppers, but it will also be a great help to seasoned preppers as well. One of the traps that catch so many folks in the preparedness community is getting pigeonholed into one arena of prepping and neglecting other important sectors. For example, guys

love guns. It's easy for a new prepper to get into the guns and ammo zone and spend all of their time and resources on self-defense. Being able to defend your family, life, and property are extremely important, but we mustn't neglect food storage, water, and other equally vital preps. The Seven Step Survival Plan will help old pros bring balance back to a great survival effort that may have gotten overweight in one particular area.

Another common pitfall for the novice and the veteran prepper alike is to pull out all the stops and overspend on their personal survival plan. The Seven Step Survival Plan is dedicated to helping you make the most out of what you've got. We realize that most people are struggling to make ends meet, so we try to find low-cost solutions whenever possible.

For readers who may not be familiar with one or both of the authors, we'd like to tell you a little bit about ourselves.

David Kobler is a U.S. Army veteran who served in Iraq. He is the creator of the popular Southernprepper1 YouTube channel, which provides tons of free information on a full range of preparedness topics. Visitors to the Southernprepper1 YouTube channel can learn about everything from tactical training and communications to long-term food storage and homesteading. David's easy-to-understand instructions are delivered via videos produced from his own retreat property located deep in the hills of South Carolina. David was an expert advisor for National Geographic's Domsday Preppers and speaks at survival and preparedness conferences around the country. David is a long-time prepper who has a passion for educating others on how to prepare for whatever may come.

Mark Goodwin is a Christian constitutional author and the host of the Prepper Recon Podcast, which features interviews of patriots, preppers, and economists each week on PrepperRecon.com. Mark holds a degree in accounting and closely monitors macro-economic conditions to stay up-to-date with the ongoing global financial meltdown. The troubling trends in the political and financial landscape have prompted Mark to conduct extensive research within the arena of preparedness. In his popular prepper-fiction novels, he weaves his knowledge of economics, politics, prepping, and survival into an action-packed tapestry of fast-paced, post-apocalyptic fiction.

As you read the following pages it's important to set a personal preparedness goal that is practical and achievable. If you set the bar too high, you can end up neglecting other vital areas of your life and finances. If you set it too low, you may never reach the level of preparedness that you need in order to hedge yourself against calamity. If you look at preparedness as a lifestyle and incorporate the idea of constant improvement into your plan, it will go a long way toward pushing you in the direction of your goal. Seeking to be a little more prepared today than you were yesterday is a good strategy for getting ready to contend with whatever the future holds.

To make it easy to remember, we've labeled each step in the plan with a B letter word:

Step One: Body, Mind, and Soul

Step Two: Budget

Step Three: Bug-Out Bag

Step Four: Beans
Step Five: Bullets
Step Six: Bullion
Step Seven: Base

These steps keep the overall mission of prepping in focus, prioritize the different aspects of preparedness, and put the tasks into smaller, bite-sized to-do lists.

STEP ONE: BODY, MIND, AND SOUL

A strong body makes the mind strong. As to the species of exercises, I advise the gun. While this gives moderate exercise to the body, it gives boldness, enterprise and independence to the mind. Games played with the ball, and others of that nature, are too violent for the body and stamp no character on the mind. Let your gun therefore be your constant companion of your walks.

Thomas Jefferson

Step One might sound more like something you'd read in a self-help book than a survival book, but it is the most important step of all, and it deserves the highest priority. Trust me, we'll get to the fun stuff, but if you don't get Step One right, all of your other preparedness efforts will be in vain.

You are your number one survival tool. You are a three-part being made up of your body, mind, and soul. These three aspects work together to become an incredibly sophisticated survival machine. God has granted you this awesome three-part device, but it is up to you to take ownership of it and keep all of its components in good working order.

BODY

You need to be able to depend on your body to get you out of harm's way. You may need it to procure food and water in a TEOTWAWKI or a the-end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it situation. Looking overweight or weak can make you stand out as a target in a crisis. You don't need to start training for the Olympics unless you have the twelve hours a day to dedicate to such an aspiration, but start doing what you can to be healthier now. Getting in shape includes trying to maintain a healthy body weight and developing muscle and cardiovascular endurance.

Fitness doesn't have to be hard, but it will require discipline. Eat reasonable portions and plan your meals. Cooking is a very valuable and often underrated survival skill. Preparing meals at home will help you develop a great skill and put you in control of the ingredients that are going into your meals. Eating right is about finding healthy foods that you like. Fresh fruits and vegetables should make up a large portion of your diet. When preparing meats, look for recipes that use broiling or sautéing rather than frying. Take it easy on the starches like bread, pasta, rice, and potatoes, and choose whole-grain options whenever possible. Avoid highly processed foods and poor-quality foods like those sold at low-cost fast-food restaurants. Keep a tight rein on fats and sweets. For those of us who fight the scale, fad diets may take off the weight temporarily, but it always comes back. We have to create a lifestyle that's healthy and enjoyable.

If you have the space, gardening will build resilience in three areas. It will build personal resilience as you get exercise from planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting your garden. You'll eat much higher quality food than you find in the grocery store as well. And, a garden can assist with financial resilience, since you'll save money on fresh produce, which you won't have to buy. Gardening will build basic resource resilience when you're able to produce even the smallest percentage of your own food.

Push yourself to get or stay in shape. Pick an activity that you enjoy. Walking, biking, running, and swimming are all great cardiovascular activities. A half an hour of cardio each day will enhance your ability to survive the everyday work week by reducing stress as well as give you an advantage in a post-apocalyptic world.

The winter prior to the writing of this book was one of the worst on record, particularly for the northeast. Heavy snow fall accumulated on roofs and caused them to cave in. Residents were forced to shovel the snow off their roofs to keep them from collapsing. Unfortunately, several of those people had heart attacks, as the strenuous activity of moving snow was more exercise than they were accustomed to. People in coastal areas have similar issues after tropical storms. The increased activity involved with clearing downed trees is too much stress for the heart of someone who doesn't make a priority of exercising regularly.

Martial Arts serve as a form of physical exercise while providing a valuable security skill. High-impact martial arts may be too intense for some people's joints, or classes may be prohibitively expensive. An easy solution to both of these hurdles might be cardio-kickboxing. Many local gyms offer cardio-kickboxing classes, included in the membership price, which are designed for participants of all ages and fitness levels. You can follow along at your own pace. If you don't live near a gym that offers classes, there is a wide array of cardio-kickboxing classes available for free on YouTube, which will allow you to get a fantastic workout in the comfort of your own home.

Strength training will help you to become more physically resilient and give you the power you need to perform manual tasks in a crisis. Stronger muscles work to support weak joints. Work within your limitations; everybody can't be a power lifter. One of author Mark Goodwin's personal limitations is arthritis. He works out with light weights three days a week. He finds that he has much less pain when he makes the gym a priority. When he skips a few days in a row, everything starts to get tight and lock up. Running would kill his knees, but he is able to put in thirty minutes to an hour on an elliptical glider several times a week, which provides the same cardiovascular

workout as running. Swimming is another great exercise for people with back pain or arthritis. Do what you can when you can. Because you can't do everything doesn't mean you can't do anything.

According to the CDC, the top three causes of death are heart disease, cancer, and respiratory disease, in that order. Heart disease can be greatly reduced by maintaining a healthy weight and exercising. Cancer may be the cause we have the least control over, but the odds can be mitigated by a healthy lifestyle and a diet rich in fruits and vegetables. Respiratory disease is primarily caused by smoking. This is a no-brainer. Yes, it's tough, but it is absolutely devastating to your health and your finances. Smoking will also put severe limitations on your ability to move fast and far if the need should arise. If you smoke, quitting should be your number one priority in prepping. As with all addictions, it will be a lot easier to quit smoking now than after it hits the fan.

Alcohol and drugs will put you at a severe disadvantage. Besides the health implications and resource drain, mind altering substances will cause you to be less aware of your surroundings. Being intoxicated and the edginess that accompanies the cravings of a sober addict both inhibit the ability to make good decisions, a skill that is crucial in any calamitous situation.

Just because the doctor gives it to you doesn't mean it's good for you. For terminally ill patients, there are few alternatives to highly addictive pain medication. This is often the case for people who have suffered traumatic injuries as well. For those who have to take opioids for pain, we encourage you to push yourself to learn to get by on the smallest dosage possible. If we experience a severe collapse, medication may become hard to get or completely unavailable. Plan accordingly.

Recent studies show one in ten Americans are on antidepressants. Some of these people may not have any other solution, but many more could avoid this by getting exercise, maintaining a consistent sleeping schedule, and eating right. A portion of the people on antidepressants is our returning service men and women who have served in very stressful environments overseas. They have spent time in very abnormal circumstances having to perform very abnormal tasks. This takes a hard spiritual and psychological toll. Unfortunately, the only tool available to the doctors who treat them is to prescribe medication, much of which is not fully understood as to how it affects the brain. Everyone is different, but depression is a spiritual condition. For some, the cure can come through faith and prayer. When the option is available, people can work with their doctor to get on a program that will wean them off antidepressants.

Regardless of what solution is right for each individual, everyone has to take medications into account for their preparedness plans. If medications become unavailable, a dramatic shift in dosage of antidepressants could cause serious mental instability.

St. John's Wort is a natural supplement, available at any health store, which can help with depression and is not addictive nor does it have the side effects associated with many prescription anti-depressants. For people who have trouble turning their thoughts off at night and can't sleep, melatonin and valerian root are natural alternatives to sleeping pills. Since natural supplements don't require a prescription and store well, it's easy to stockpile enough to have on hand for a worst-case scenario. These supplements are available over the counter and are not addictive.

If we were to suffer a collapse, you would be operating in one of the most stressful situations of your life, and at the same time, you would be unable to get a fix from your vice of choice. Even if you are able to obtain the substance for your particular addiction, it will come at an extreme premium, which will eat away at your resources much faster than it presently does. In a crisis environment, addictions and their drain on resources jeopardizes everyone around you. Quitting your addictions will never be easier than today, and it's the single best thing you can do to be more resilient.

Oftentimes, addiction is more than we can handle on our own. We need help and support. Family and church communities are great sources of support. If you or someone you know needs more than your church and family can provide, there are tons of faith-based programs that deal with addiction recovery. The Salvation Army and Teen Challenge are both national organizations that have recovery centers all over the U.S..

MIND

Quick thinking will help you survive everything from the idiots we share the road with, to an active shooter scenario or a complete collapse. We can train our minds to be more resourceful by trying to solve problems with what's on hand before running to the hardware store or buying a replacement item. When things break around the house, see if you can fix it yourself before you call the repair man. Some things aren't as complicated as they look. While learning to do it yourself, you'll train your mind to be more resourceful and build your skill set as well as save a few bucks. When you have a need around the house, keep your eyes open for discarded items that could potentially fulfill that need. For example, try to find old decking on bulk trash day or discarded cement blocks from demolition sites to use for the walls of a raised bed garden or compost bin. It saves money in the present and trains your mind to look for uses of otherwise discarded objects.

The fact that you're reading this book shows that you've decided to add to your knowledge base. There are hundreds of great books on different specialized areas of preparedness. While we'll touch on several of these topics, we recommend reading up on communications, backup power systems, wild edibles in your area of the country, water procurement and purification, gardening in your agricultural zone, first aid, and alternative medicines. Besides books, YouTube is a fantastic resource for learning. Of course David's SouthernPrepper1 YouTube channel has some fantastic teaching videos on all things preparedness, but there are tons of channels that focus on specific aspects of prepping like guns and ammo, medical, solar, and homesteading.

In learning new skills, it's important to recognize what type of learner you are. Some people tend to learn better by reading, others by listening, and others by watching someone else do it first. If you fall into the last category, YouTube is a great place to watch someone do everything from skin a hog to set up a solar-powered battery bank.

Skills are perishable and, therefore, need to be practiced. Once you read a book or watch a video on how to do something, get out there and do it. When you buy new survival gear, take it out of the bag and use it. If it's a new magnesium fire starter, take it in the backyard and see if you can use it to build a fire. If it's a new bug-out tent, take it out back and set it up. Get familiar with the

process now, while it's not a life or death situation. Skill development primarily falls under Step One of the Seven Step Survival Plan; however, it's also an essential element to every other part of the plan, so we'll keep coming back to it.

Your mind is the primary tool in situational awareness. Practice using it for that. When you're at the gas station with your wallet out, keep a keen eye on who's around you and how close they are. Run the same analysis when you walk out of a store and into a parking lot or when you leave the bank. It's not about being paranoid, but about being aware of your surroundings.

Situational awareness of your immediate vicinity is only one level. We also have to be aware of what is going on geopolitically and financially. Zerohedge.com is a great alternative source for financial news. The Info Wars Nightly News provides a great evening newscast that can be streamed free via YouTube every night from your computer or Roku box. DrudgeReport.com and TheLibertyMill.com aggregate excellent news content from a variety of mainstream and alternative sources.

SOUL

Thinking about what comes when we finally leave this world may not seem like a topic that should be covered by a survival book, but to the authors, it is the single most important prep of all. Survival isn't really about survival. It's about delaying your eventual demise. If it were really about survival, it would be a futile subject. Because no matter your preparations, no matter your lifestyle, no matter your food storage plan or your collection of guns and gold, statistics show that ten out of ten people die. Despite your healthcare plan, despite your genetic makeup, exercise program and diet, we all have a six-foot hole waiting for us. That realization can be a little overwhelming and downright depressing, unless... Unless you have hope beyond the grave. We have that hope, and the authors believe that faith in Christ Jesus is the path to eternal life. He said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

A common misconception is that people are generally good. Many people believe because they haven't killed anybody that they'll go to heaven. But what if God's standard is higher than just not killing anybody? What if his standard is perfection? Would you be able to go to heaven? Have you ever lied, stolen, or disrespected your parents? In fact, the Bible says that nobody, not Mother Theresa, not Gandhi, nor the Pope is perfect. Romans 3:23 says "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Fortunately, for those of us who fell short, Jesus paid our ticket with his sacrifice on the cross. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." We hope you'll pray and ask God for forgiveness and tell him you accept that free gift if you've never done it before.

Some readers will be absolutely livid about being "preached to" in a survival book, but please understand that, as people who actually believe this, the authors feel that we would be derelict in our duty by not informing you. The choice is yours to do what you will with the information, but no prepper book is complete if it doesn't prepare you for the inevitable day that you expire. Jesus

said “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his own soul?” Prepper translation: “What good will it do you to survive the coming economic collapse, nuclear war, or even a zombie apocalypse if you don’t know you’ll go to heaven when you eventually die?”

Knowing God is not just pie in the sky. It has a very practical application for our time on this planet as well. Being connected to God will give you hope. Knowing the Creator of the universe is helping you through, will give you great peace in hard times. Getting connected to God is as easy as reading the Bible, listening to worship music, listening to the Bible being preached at church or on MP3, and praying. God will help you make difficult decisions when you ask him and study his Word. TWFT.com has free downloadable messages on every chapter of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, in MP3 format by the late Pastor Chuck Smith, founder of Calvary Chapel.

Inevitably, even people who recognize the need to be forgiven will put off thinking about this important subject. Putting off this subject has hazards beyond the obvious ones. Combat veterans will tell you that everyone will most certainly consider what comes next when someone is shooting at them. Not having that issue thought through can cause you to hesitate in the heat of a firefight. A split second hesitation in a gun battle can cost you your life and hasten the very day you’ve avoided thinking about. Yes, it’s very ironic, but it doesn’t have to be like that. Take some time to think about it now while you have the time. Whatever you decide is up to you, but get it settled so it doesn’t get in your way on game day.

The following story is an account of how being connected to God helped author David Kobler through an unimaginable period of stress and terror.

Being an infantry soldier, there were many times when training and deployed in Iraq that David Kobler could look back and say that everything was not rosy and peaceful. He’ll tell you his service was 99 percent boredom and 1 percent pure terror. People ask him if he was afraid during these periods of horror. While he can’t say he wasn’t scared, he had peace during those frightening events. The endless hours of training and working with his squad prepared him as best it could. Still, this didn’t guarantee he would survive. He saw soldiers that were the best of the best get killed or injured, while less prepared soldiers were never hurt.

Before going over the border into Iraq with his unit, the 101st Airborne Fort Campbell, he had many instances when the air sirens sounded. His unit would quickly suit up with chemical protective gear in fear of scud attacks from Iraq. On March 23, 2003, on the border of Iraq in a military staging area called Camp Pennsylvania, a soldier who was in the tent right next to David’s gathered some grenades and attacked three other tents across the camp. He threw four grenades and fired his rifle, killing two and injuring fourteen. At the same time, the sirens went off, and a US patriot team accidentally shot down a British fighter jet above the area that did not have the proper signal to clarify it as friendly. Small arms fire and grenades were going off in the camp while a large explosion overhead caused massive confusion.

The soldier who launched the attack slept less than twenty-five feet away from David. He could have just as easily attacked David’s tent that night or the dining tent that had hundreds of soldiers. The attack could have been much worse. The soldier was a combat engineer, and his vehicle was parked right outside the tents. Combat engineers have hundreds of pounds of C4 available at all

times. This soldier had the supplies and training to make a bomb-laden vehicle that could have done catastrophic damage to the camp and the 101st Airborne Division.

Even before crossing the Iraqi border, threats were present from numerous scud attacks. These events are not what a normal individual wants to go through; however, David can say that the fear of dying was not his main concern. Making a wrong decision and getting one of his guys wounded or killed was higher on his list of priorities. Through all of the stress, he had peace from knowing that he was where God wanted him to be. If God put David in that position, it was because he had a plan for him. David decided to put his trust in God. Being saved, David was assured that, if he died, he would be going to heaven. His fear of leaving his wife and kids without a husband and dad had to be put aside. He trusted that the Lord had a path for him to walk with his help. David carried a laminated card with the twenty-third Psalm on it, which he kept and read many times. These verses assured him that his shepherd would take care of him. David's son now carries that same card during his deployment with the US military.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 23

STEP TWO: BUDGET

All the perplexities, confusion, and distress in America arise not from defects in the Constitution or Confederation, not from a want of honor or virtue so much as from downright ignorance of the nature of coin, credit, and circulation.

John Adams

Author Mark Goodwin has a passion for helping people with budgeting and debt management. Creating and staying on a good budget will affect every other area of your life. Knowing that your debt is under control will reduce stress and actually help you sleep better. Money is a leading cause of divorce, so a good budget will help you have a better relationship with your spouse. It won't solve all the monetary conflicts that arise in a marriage, but it will nip a large portion of them in the bud. A good budget can help your other relationships as well. Friends and relatives tend to avoid phone calls from those who are always looking for a loan to tide them over until the next pay day.

While some people have a natural knack for numbers and finance, for others, this step may bore them to tears. If that sounds familiar, you may be tempted to skip this step or find another plan altogether. Please don't! Certainly there's no shortage of advice on prepping, but a budget is the foundation of any good preparedness plan. You could have the latest in night vision and tactical gear and have five years of food stored, but if you lose your home due to foreclosure or eviction, where will you put it? Between here and the zombie apocalypse is the possibility of the toughest economic hardship our country has ever known. Your job is at risk if there is another depression. The best way to prepare for that is by saving and living on less than you make. Living on less than you earn is an essential skill builder that will help you learn to be resourceful. Additionally, by living with a more moderate standard of living, you'll be adjusted to having fewer luxury items when the collapse comes. The shock on your lifestyle will be greatly mitigated.

A discussion I've heard from some preppers is that they plan to run up the credit cards to buy food and supplies when the collapse comes. Some people intend to leverage debt at the last minute. They have no intentions of paying off their home and expect the debt to be wiped out by the

collapse. No one knows the future, but historically, that hasn't been the way things have happened in this country. During the great depression, banks repossessed farms and homes from people even though there was no market whatsoever for the repossessed properties. In the subprime collapse in 2008, banks again foreclosed on properties after being bailed out by the American taxpayer. Don't get us wrong. We're not saying the evil banks took advantage of the poor borrowers who were forced into taking loans they could never afford to pay back. We place the blame on both parties, but the borrowers were punished for their poor decisions while the banks were rewarded for their bad behavior. This bit of analysis is less about the politics and morals of the subprime debacle and more about situational awareness. If the banks were bailed out while the taxpayer was screwed over during the last financial crisis, it might not be a rational plan to think the banks are just going to write off the debt and let the consumer walk away scot-free next time.

The next line of opposition to living on a budget might be a concern over the life expectancy of the dollar. If the greenback has one foot in the grave and the other foot on a banana peel, what's the use in saving it? Well, that argument does have more merit than maxing out the credit cards, but it is still flawed. For now, while the dollar is a leaky sieve as a store of value, it is about all we have for a medium of exchange. That may change some day, but for the time being, we have to work with what we've got. Once we get our spending and debt under control, we'll look at some ways to diversify and hedge ourselves against a currency collapse in the future steps.

Since one of the biggest threats to our way of life is an economic collapse or financial crisis, it makes sense that a top priority in planning for such an event would also be monetary in nature.

A 2012 Survey by CreditDonkey.com found that 40 percent of Americans had less than \$500 in savings. That is absolutely alarming. Nearly half of the country is one crisis away from financial disaster. Before you do anything else, if you haven't already, you need to save one month of living expenses to be held in cash, in your home, for an emergency fund.

This is where your budget begins. Where you record the following data doesn't matter as much as that you just do it. You can write your budget in a notebook, you can keep track of it on an Excel spreadsheet, or you can use a preset form that you find online. DaveRamsey.com has a wide array of budgeting forms under the Tools tab that allows you to fill in the blanks online or print out the form to make your budget.

The envelope system has been around for ages as a budgeting tool. It's a method of monitoring cash spending by having an envelope designated for each category of expense. All your grocery money goes into an envelope at the beginning of the month, your utilities money goes into another envelope, and your entertainment money goes into yet another. Once the money from that spending category is gone, no more spending occurs for that category until the envelope is refilled next month. It's a simple system to help you stay disciplined, but people rarely use cash. For those who have had trouble staying on a budget in the past, we'd recommend cashing your checks and starting to use the envelope system for everything. When you actually hand over cash, it has a different level of pain associated with it than handing someone a plastic card, which they hand right back to you. Additionally, credit cards have no consequences until the statement shows up weeks later. Using cash will also ensure you have some in the house in case of an emergency.

If you're opposed to the inconvenience of using cash, you can use a cyber-version of the envelope system and simply track the amount of money in each account on a spreadsheet. But, you'll have to account for every debit card swipe or credit card charge. It's much easier to lose track of these transactions than cash. If you're using cash, there's no way to forget to write it down. Once it's spent, it's gone and that's that.

If you're a numbers-oriented person, you may choose to use a hybrid envelope system that uses spreadsheet tracking for monthly expenses like electric bills and rent while using cash for daily expenses like gas and groceries. If you're not good with numbers, this might get confusing.

Your budget is going to begin with the amount of money you make every month. Even if you're paid weekly or bi-weekly, you want your budget to be done on a monthly basis because the majority of your bills come on a monthly basis. So add up all your sources of income for the month and enter that on the first line of your budget.

The next entry should be charity. Yes, your giving should be a priority. If you give away what's left over, you'll never give away a single dime because there will never be anything left over. How much you chose to give away is between you and God. If you've never been able to give to charity before because you've never been on a budget, you may have to start small. Once you see how rewarding it is to give faithfully to your church or help other human beings, you'll probably want to increase that amount.

The third line on your budget is going to be savings. I know this sounds radical to those of you who have never heard this kind of talk before, but just like giving, if you save what's left over at the end of the month, you'll never save anything. People who have managed to save significant amounts of wealth have usually done it by paying themselves first. If you don't make saving a priority, you'll never do it, no matter how much money you make. Ten percent is a good starting place for your savings plan. If things are too tight, you may have to start lower, but try to work toward a minimum savings rate of 10 percent. This is going to be what funds your initial one-month emergency fund. You don't touch this money unless you have a serious emergency. A Lady Gaga concert is not an emergency; well, maybe it is, but not the kind that permits you to dip into your emergency fund. An emergency is a flat tire, the air conditioner went out in the middle of July, or you were laid off from your job.

Hopefully, you don't carry credit card debt. If you do, get out the scissors, cut all of your cards up and allocate a portion of your income to paying them all off, and never carry a balance again. Credit card debt will be one of the lines on your budget if you have debt. Credit card interest is literally throwing money out the window. You get no value by enriching the bank with astronomical credit card interest rates. Once it's paid off, you can reallocate the funds for credit card debt to savings or retirement.

A well-known strategy for paying off credit card debt that is spread out over several different cards is called the snowball strategy. There are two different versions of that strategy. The most common method is to pay the minimum payment on all of your credit cards. Then, apply as much as you can each month toward paying off the card with the highest interest rate. Once that card is paid off, cut it up and apply that same tactic to the card with the next highest interest rate. Do this

until all of your cards are paid off, and you can start saving all of that money that was going to interest payments toward a home, emergency fund, or retirement account.

The less common version of the snowball strategy is Dave Ramsey's. He recommends paying off the card with the smallest balance first, regardless of the interest rate. He'll be the first to admit that this method is actually more expensive, but his philosophy is that paying off a card is a mental win, and it will give you the motivation you need to keep going. For people deep in credit card debt, it is a mental issue, so he makes a good point.

Credit cards are potentially dangerous items in the wrong hands, but they do offer benefits to the person who can handle the temptation. Some things, like renting a car or booking a hotel room, are very difficult to do without some form of plastic. Credit cards also offer a minimal level of consumer protection that cash doesn't.

If, and only if, you are a disciplined spender, and you pay off the balance at the end of the month and never, ever, ever pay interest, you can benefit from rewards points and cash back on savings that you won't get when paying with cash. Some cards offer large cash-back rewards for certain categories of spending.

Bass Pro Shop has an Outdoor Rewards card that pays 1 percent on all purchases and 2 percent on in-store purchases. The rewards are payable by in-store credit. There are a lot of things a prepper can buy at Bass Pro. You can use your rewards for portable water filters, tents, backpacks, ammo, or gun accessories.

Bank of America pays 3 percent cash back on gas, 2 percent on groceries, and 1 percent on everything else, up to \$1,500 per quarter. This is cash back that can be applied to your bill regularly. When you have earned enough to get the credit, you can use the money toward purchasing things for your preparedness plan.

The best strategy for these two cards would be to use the Bank of America card only for gas and groceries for the first \$500 per month. This keeps you under the \$1,500 per quarter max, so no points will be wasted. Even if you use less than \$500 per month on gas and groceries, get in the habit of using the Outdoor card for everything else.

If you carry a balance for even one month, you're paying interest and have completely nullified any points or cashback rewards. Also keep in mind that every dime you spend on a credit card provides a convenient paper trail for Big Brother to keep tabs on where you go and what you do with your money.

The next lines should be prioritized in order of importance. For most of us, food will be the most important, so the next line should be your grocery budget for the month. The Goodwin family uses the envelope system. They put a set amount of money in an envelope for groceries for the month. Once that envelope goes dry, they don't buy anymore groceries. This will force you to plan your meals and trips to the grocery. If you ever run out of food before you run out of month, it'll be the last time you let that happen. The following month, you'll stock up on inexpensive food items like dried beans and twenty-pound bags of rice to make sure you can get from month to

month on what you have. It may mean eating a little leaner for a couple of months to develop a bit of a cushion. Chicken legs and thighs might have to replace steak and lobster until you can learn to manage your money or get the pantry stocked up.

Don't underestimate the use of coupons. PrepperRecon.com has an entire page, the Coupon Corner, dedicated to coupons. By stacking coupons on top of store sales like buy one, get one sales, you can get some grocery items almost free. When these opportunities come along, stock up on them. We'll talk more about using coupons to build your food stockpile in Step Four.

Somewhere near the top of your priorities list will be housing. This line on the budget, and envelope if you choose to use the envelope system, will cover your rent or mortgage. This expense is what it is for now and doesn't have much wiggle room. If you're feeling a little pinched financially, you may have to examine more affordable housing solutions down the road. Just make sure you don't jeopardize your family's safety by moving to the wrong side of the tracks. That's what is often referred to as penny wise and pound foolish.

Next are utilities. This expense category may fluctuate with the seasons. During the months when the weather is pleasant, you'll have lower heating and cooling bills. Set your budget for the highest expense months and take this opportunity to use the overage in the more pleasant months to pay down debt or boost your savings. If you can pay the air-conditioning bill in July, you can still put aside the same amount of money in October. Be conscious of turning off lights and not leaving water running. Every dollar counts. Look at your monthly phone and cable charges, and make sure the plans are the most cost-effective ones available. If you're paying a bunch of money for movie channels you never watch, cancel the premium service. The Goodwin family cut their cable completely last year. They bought a good antenna for local channels and purchased a Roku box, which allows them to stream content from the Internet to the television. Roku and other services like it carry a one-time charge, usually less than a hundred dollars and have no other fees. Cell phone companies like Metro PCS and Virgin Mobile piggyback off of the networks of more expensive providers and offer the same service for lower costs.

Transportation is a priority. If you can't get to work, none of the other bills will get paid. Besides gas, you need to plan for recurring expenses like tires and oil changes. It's also wise to put a little money in that line item to cover repairs, which are inevitable. Since fuel prices fluctuate wildly, ballpark your monthly gas expenses on the high side, and leave the overage in the envelope for when the alternator goes out. Paying cash for a used car rather than making monthly payments for a new car will also save big bucks. Buying a junker might be more expensive in the long run when you factor in repairs, but a well-maintained, low-mileage used car will offer dependability and value. Factor in an estimated replacement cost for when the car you're driving finally bites the dust. When that day comes, you'll already have the cash on hand.

Insurance is going to be a big one, especially if your free Obamacare ended up tripling your premiums like it did for many families. If you're now stuck with a high-deductible plan because of prohibitive costs triggered by the Affordable Care Act, your best bet is to not get sick. Eat right, get plenty of sleep, and exercise to limit heart disease and maintain a healthy immune system. When deciding how much money to allocate to this budget line, factor in enough to eventually save up the full amount of your insurance deductible.

Personal items are going to have their own budget line and envelope. This is going to cover everything from shaving cream to shoes. It might make sense for husbands and wives to have their own separate envelopes. Remember, when the envelope runs out of money, no more spending on that category until next month.

Entertainment and gifts are going to be pretty low on the totem pole as far as priorities. Hopefully you're getting near the bottom of your budget and there are still a few dollars left over. Try to plan all year for family vacations and Christmas, so you don't have to break out the credit cards and go into debt. Also limit eating out to special occasions, and eat at home as much as possible. When you eat out several times a week, it doesn't feel as special as when you reserve it for a monthly treat, birthdays, and anniversaries.

One cup of coffee at Starbucks can buy enough coffee to brew your own at home for a couple of weeks. If you're too much of a coffee snob to make your own, go without for a couple of days. You'll learn a whole new appreciation for Folgers and Maxwell House. And pack your own lunch. You'll not only save money, but you'll probably eat better too.

If this is your first budget, it will probably have to go through some growing pains before it reaches the stage at which it will be functional. Keep that in mind and make changes as often as you need to, until you can make it work. A budget is going to be as unique as you are. Feel free to add categories or subcategories to items like savings. Savings can be a general fund that you use to build your emergency fund or it can be to save up for a home, bug-out retreat or retirement investments. Until you get your emergency fund fully funded, you should focus on that. Once you have a functional budget and one month of expenses saved up, you'll be ready to start on Step Three, but that's not where we stop for the emergency fund. We want to eventually get it up to six months of expenses. It will be up to you to decide if you can find a safe place to keep that much cash in the house, but if you're creative, you probably can. It doesn't have to be all in the same place. A gun safe is a great place to keep cash and a terrific investment, especially if you have children and guns in the house.

When deciding how much cash you want to keep around the house, there are a few things to consider. One is the fragility of our electrical grid. During the week that this chapter was being written, a piece of metal fell off a structure in an electrical substation and took out the power in DC. There were no storm force winds, no lightning, and no terrorist plots, just poor maintenance. Hurricanes and tornadoes can cripple electric service in large municipalities for several weeks. During her DHS exit speech, former head of the Department of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano said it's a matter of when, not if, our infrastructure will be targeted by terrorists. When the lights go out, so do credit card processing machines and ATMs. After hurricanes, it's common to see large grocery stores completely shut down until power is restored. Smaller mom-and-pop convenience stores, however, often open their doors using flashlights and sell what they can for cash. Depending on the owners, they may or may not have change to provide, so it's a good idea to keep a couple hundred dollars in fives and ones in your emergency fund.

Another thing to consider when deciding on how much cash to keep around the house is bank holidays. No, I'm not talking about Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, or New Year's Day.

Those are planned and you know they're coming. I'm talking about periods of severe financial upheaval similar to those that have occurred in countries like Argentina in 2001 or, more recently, in Cyprus during 2012. When governments or banking regulators fear runs on the banks, they close the doors until a solution can be reached. These banking institution closures can last for weeks, and they always come with no warning whatsoever. People often assume that these events are reserved for less developed countries and something like that could never happen in America. Those people are not well-informed and are wrong. We've already seen an event like that in America. During the thirties, several banks went belly-up due to bank runs. While the FDIC was established to prevent such a thing reoccurring, the amount in the FDIC insurance fund amounts to pennies on the dollar of the deposits insured. As with all government organizations, exact numbers are hard to locate for current information, but in 2008, the FDIC released a memorandum stating the insurance fund had only fifty-four billion dollars insuring deposits of over four trillion dollars. That suggests that they would be able to cover less than 2 percent of the deposits if there were a major banking crisis. Good luck trying to get them to pay you unless your last name happens to be Rockefeller or Rothschild.

Along the same lines as the banking holiday concern is what we'll identify as the branch liquidity concern. Most small bank branches have a very limited amount of cash on hand. Some keep as little as \$15,000 in the vaults Monday through Thursday and maybe double that on Fridays. If you walk into a bank asking to close out your account and request \$20,000 in cash, they probably don't have it. Even if you go to the main branch in your area, the bank likely has daily withdrawal limits that prevent you from taking out that much without pre-arranging it with the bank manager. Besides all of this, since 9/11, the banks have been keeping tabs on large cash withdrawals and reporting them to DHS. The forms they fill out if you happen to meet certain criteria are called SARs or Suspicious Activity Reports. Millions and millions of these reports have flooded into Washington for laundromats, pawn shops, restaurants, coin dealers, and other small businesses who conduct business in cash. Recently, the DOJ's Assistant Attorney General Leslie Caldwell urged banks to call local authorities on anyone withdrawing \$5,000 or more. While there's no law against it, pulling out less money than would be required to buy a car that doesn't require a tow truck for delivery, can get you interrogated by the authorities. If you can imagine an instance where you'd want to have a little cash on hand, you should start putting it together, little by little, while you still can.

You may do your budget and find that you have more money going out than you have coming in. That's a problem, and it only has two solutions. You either have to spend less or make more.

Your budget is going to allow you to see where every dollar is going. Analyze your spending and see what you can do without, what you can spend less on, and what goods or services you can find at a better price.

Every dollar you save is equivalent to much more than a dollar earned. When you factor in Federal, Social Security, Medicare, state income, and state sales tax, you'll probably find that nearly half of your income is going directly to taxes. That means to spend one dollar, you had to make two dollars. So every dollar you don't spend equals two dollars that you don't have to earn.

If your expenses don't have any fat to trim, you'll probably have to start looking for another income stream. It doesn't necessarily have to be a second job. Think about needs or services that you can fill. Perhaps you could start a part-time lawn service. If you have a good back and a truck, put an ad on Craigslist to move furniture. Whether your gift is accounting or pet sitting, there are people out there who will pay you to do the things they can't or don't have time to do. The great thing about starting your own business is that you get to be the boss, and no one can fire you.

Budgeting is a vital foundation for a good preparedness plan. Keep at it and you will perfect your skills to be prepared for whatever comes your way financially. You can do it! It may be tough in the beginning, but later you'll be happy you did.

STEP THREE: BUG-OUT BAG

He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.

Luke 22:36

Finally! We're going to get into some real prepping stuff. Thanks for being patient with us, but trust me, Steps One and Two are so important and are the foundation of your plan. Can you imagine building a house without first laying a foundation and putting in the electrical wiring and plumbing? Likewise, you have to get yourself and your budget squared away so the rest of your plan will be solid.

A bug-out bag is a ready-to-grab backpack or duffle bag that has the essentials you need to stay alive for seventy-two hours. For this reason, it is also commonly referred to as a seventy-two-hour kit. You may also hear it called a go-bag or go-kit. Whatever the name, its purpose is the same: to keep you alive for three days. Notice that its purpose isn't to keep you comfortable for three days. New preppers will often rebuild their bug-out bags every couple of months. That's not a bad idea. The drive to constantly modify and improve your bug-out bag makes a lot of sense. When seeking to improve your bag, though, you have to be ever vigilant against mission creep. The temptation to put enough tools and supplies to restart society entices us all, but if you give into it, you'll end up with a bag you can't even pick up, much less hike with. If you focus on the mission, staying alive for seventy-two hours, you can put together a good kit that will have all the essentials and very little fluff. Fluff adds weight, which will slow you down. Ounces add up to pounds, and pounds add up to pain, so keep it light.

One of the things we'll keep coming back to throughout the Seven Step Survival Plan is the importance of finding items that have multiple uses. This is an extremely important concept to remember when building your bug-out bag. If you can find items that have multiple uses, you will get the maximum amount of utility while adding the minimum amount of weight.

First, let's talk about selecting a good bag. After all, this is the primary component of your bug-out bag. Some people use a duffle bag because it's easy to grab and throw in the car if they have to leave home in a hurry. Anything is better than nothing, but we highly recommend a backpack, which will allow you to put it on your back and keep your hands free. If you're having to leave your home in a hurry, or if times are bad, you may need the use of your hands and arms for self-defense, clearing debris from your path, or a myriad of other unanticipated tasks. Now comes selecting a color. There are two basic schools of thought on what colors you should choose. The first is the grey-man approach. This suggests that you should avoid camouflage patterns and stick to muted colors that will blend into your environment, such as khaki, grey, black, or brown. The second school of thought is that you should go with camouflage colors, which will cause you to have a more military look. The idea is that if you look like a hard target, predators will avoid you. Being a hard target is a good idea, but we recommend avoiding contact and detection as much as possible, so the grey-man approach is the direction we prefer.

The grey-man concept should follow your entire bug-out plan. If you're bugging out from an urban environment, plan to wear inconspicuous clothing. This is going to be specific to your part of the country. Cowboy hats are commonplace in the southwest, but you might as well have flashing lights on your head if you're wearing one while bugging out of Detroit. The cowboy hat is an extreme example, but you get the picture. Jeans and work boots or hiking boots probably won't stand out as being odd in most parts of America, so that's not a bad choice. Tan or khaki cargo pants are also fairly benign and can offer a lot of utility with the extra pockets. If you live in a rural area, camo patterns may be very common attire for your location and might be the best choice for your specific grey-man approach.

Once you decide on a color scheme for your bug-out plan and your bag, you need to decide on a style of bag. Military surplus bags will offer a good value for a very well-constructed bag. The only setback with military bags is that they are only available in military colors. The ALICE backpack or All-purpose Lightweight Individual Carrying Equipment backpack was recently retired from military service and replaced with MOLLE or Modular Lightweight Load-carrying Equipment backpacks. Shortly after they were retired, ALICE packs flooded the market and were available at very low costs. The price has gone up on them, but they are still widely available. Many outdoor and tactical gear suppliers sell MOLLE style backpacks. While they may look like the real thing, these are not necessarily military grade, so the quality will vary greatly. If you are on a tight budget, you might want to start out with a small book-bag style backpack, with the idea of upgrading when funds become more available. For folks who decide to take this route, the smaller backpack can be converted to a get-home bag to be kept in your car. We'll discuss this later in the chapter.

Christmas and birthdays are great times to ask for gear. People are going to get you something anyway, so you might as well ask for useful gear. If you'd rather not discuss prepping with your family or friends just yet, you can ask for an Amazon gift card. Amazon has a wide variety of packs and survival gear, plus you have the added value of being able to read customer reviews about the products.

What goes in the bug-out bag is going to be different for each person, but there are going to be some commonalities for everyone. The three most important needs that should be met by your

bug-out bag are shelter, water, and food. We'll address these three, then move on to the next level of contents, which are also necessary, just not quite as high on the priority list.

SHELTER

Next to oxygen, shelter is at the top of the list for human needs. The survival rule of threes says you can survive for three minutes without air, three hours without shelter in harsh conditions, three days without water, three weeks without food and three months without hope.

It's tough to say what time of year you'll have to bug out, so you should pack your bag with the worst possible weather in your area in mind. If you live in a northern climate, shelter is going to be different for you than for someone who lives further south. Shelter can be something as simple as a tarp or emergency tent, but you need to know that you can use it to construct an effective shelter. Bush craft experts can construct a good shelter out of forest debris. It's a great skill to learn and practice; although, until you've mastered it, a tent is going to be the best solution for most people. A tent can add a lot of weight to your bag, which can slow you down, so you may want to consider a small bivy tent. Very compact models are available on Amazon for less than seventy dollars, which can sleep two people, very snugly, and weigh less than three pounds. All tents are waterproof until it rains. We recommend that, as soon as you get your tent, you take it out of the box, set it up, and give it a good coat of either Scotchgard Water Shield or Kiwi Camp Dry. Not only will you have a truly waterproof tent, you'll get some practice setting it up. It's much less stressful to learn how to set up a new tent on a sunny Saturday afternoon, than in the middle of a cold, rainy night when you've just had to abandon your home. Rain is an underestimated threat. Even if it isn't super cold outside, rain will soak your clothing and pull the heat away from your body. Wet clothes in cool weather will cause hypothermia much faster than dry, cold air. Staying dry and staying warm are very important when surviving outdoors.

An even better shelter solution than a tent is a hotel. Keep a list of telephone numbers to hotels along all of your possible avenues of exit. You might have the chance to make a reservation before you even leave the house. Then again, you might not, so have a tent just in case. If you live in a large metropolitan area that has to be evacuated because of a hurricane, chemical spill, or terrorist attack, the hotels are going to fill up very quickly, and you need to be prepared with your own emergency shelter. Having a bag packed and being ready to leave in a moment's notice are going to increase your odds of getting out of the city and to a hotel before others, but there are no guarantees.

If you live in a cold climate, you'll also have to consider blankets or a sleeping bag. The most lightweight, compact sleeping bag option for cold weather is a mummy bag. These bags use a compact design to help conserve body heat and can be rated to keep you warm in climates as low as twenty below zero Fahrenheit. Expect to pay more for lower temperature ratings, but be sure to get a bag sufficient for your environment.

Mylar survival blankets are very cheap, sometimes as little as one dollar, weigh next to nothing, and take up very little room. They are certainly better than nothing, yet I wouldn't bet my life on them, and that's exactly what you're doing if that's all you have in your bag for a cover. An obvious drawback to a Mylar blanket is going to be the noise that it makes each time you make the slightest

move. You'll already be in a stressful environment, and sleep may not come easy as it is. Think twice before trying to sleep under something that makes so much racket. A better option that is slightly more expensive, around fifteen dollars, and takes up a little more room is a heavy-duty space blanket. These will have a shiny side, which will face you when you lie down, and a colored side, which faces up. They are much more effective and don't make nearly as much noise as a Mylar blanket.

WATER

We mentioned in the survival rule of threes that you can last about three days without water. There's quite a bit of fluctuation on that number, depending on the circumstances. If it's really hot outside and you're having to move fast and far, I wouldn't count on making it for three days. If you do, they'll be the worst three days of your life. For that reason, water is the second priority on our list. Under normal circumstances, you need roughly half a gallon a day to stay alive. So, for three days, you need at least a gallon and a half. If you don't know already, you'll soon learn that water is heavy: eight pounds per gallon. Adding twelve pounds of weight to your bag is going to be brutal. One popular option amongst preppers is to have some water in their bag and a high quality filter, so they can refill their containers along the way. If you choose this option, we recommend having at least a half-gallon per person if you are in an area with abundant fresh water supplies. If you live in a desert or other area with few water sources, you're going to have to bite the bullet and keep at least a gallon of water with your bag. Keep in mind, your planned water resupply locations could be held by hostiles, or you could arrive to find they are overrun by sick people, so have contingency plans whenever possible.

You can find good water filters at outdoor stores and online. Katadyn makes a variety of great portable water filters, which allow you to pump water directly from a lake or stream into your water container. The Katadyn Hiker Pro, available for around seventy dollars, will filter out pathogens like cryptosporidium and can process up to 300 gallons of water depending on the water quality. MSR also makes compact pump-style filters that sell for roughly the same price as similar Katadyn models.

The Katadyn Pocket is quite a bit more expensive, around \$300, but it can filter up to 13,000 gallons. With the thought of just surviving for three days, 300 gallons should do you just fine. We'll talk about some other filter systems that make more sense for your home or retreat property later on in the book. Compact filters are a good fit for the bug-out bag, but no need to overspend. In our opinion, that money will be better utilized on other gear.

To make the most out of your portable filter, use the clearest possible water. If your water source is very cloudy or filled with silt, pre-filter it through a handkerchief, towel, coffee filter, or clean tee shirt into a separate container, then use your portable filter. If you don't have another container, dig a gypsy well. It's simply a small hole a few feet away from the edge of the pond, stream, or lake. Water will slowly seep through the bank and into the hole you've dug. It will be much clearer if the original source was cloudy or full of silt. You can use a gypsy well in a tight pinch when you have no filter at all. While not perfect, it will filter out some of the potential pathogens, making the water safer to drink than when taken directly from the lake, pond, or stream.

Another concept we'll talk about throughout the Seven Step Survival Plan is redundancy. For survival basics as vital as water, you should practice redundancy. We don't necessarily recommend buying another expensive portable filter. There are some low-cost options for water-purification redundancy. One inexpensive method that takes up very little room is Potable Aqua iodine tablets. They come in a very small bottle with directions for use right on the side. If you use these, your water isn't going to taste great, although Potable Aqua does offer a two-stage solution, which helps to counteract the bad taste. Chlorine based purification drops are available as well. A very cheap fix is to use household bleach with an eye dropper. Use eight drops to purify a gallon of clear water and sixteen drops for a gallon of cloudy water. It's not going to taste fantastic, but it will keep you alive.

Life Straw makes an affordable alternative to pricey filters. It is simply a small tube that allows you to use it like a straw and drink directly from the water source. The only problem with the Life Straw is that it doesn't provide a method of purifying water for drinking at a later time. While not the best choice for a primary filter, it doesn't take up much room, so it can be a good fit for a backup purification device.

FOOD

In the survival rule of threes, we said you can live for three weeks without food, but you won't have the energy you need to perform all of the various other survival tasks that will be required of you in a disaster scenario. The average person needs a minimum of 2,000 calories a day, and that's just for sitting around on the couch. If you're bugging out, you'll likely be burning a lot more calories, so plan to keep at least 2,500 calories per day, per person in your bag. For normal bulk-food storage, there are much more economical choices than MREs, but Meals-Ready-to-Eat do provide a very convenient form of storable food for a bug-out bag. They are widely available at camping stores and online. Other ways to meet this need on a tight budget are granola bars, dried fruit, canned soup, canned meat, and canned fruit. Canned pasta, like Spaghetti O's or canned ravioli, are chock full of fat and calories. Under normal circumstances, that's not a positive attribute, but when you're trying to get the most potential energy in the smallest place, it's a great alternative. Make sure you have can openers if you're using canned goods for your bug-out bag's emergency food. We recommend having at least two openers. One could be a very small and very cheap military-style can opener. The other might be on your pocket knife or multitool. If you're not used to using these types of openers, try them out at home before you end up in the woods with cans as your only source of food and no idea how to get them open. In a pinch, you can rub the top of a can on an area of concrete for a long enough time to actually wear it down so you can pop the top right off.

TOOLS

The amount of tools you pack in your bug-out bag is up to you. The more tools you add, the heavier it's going to get. A few prepper favorites are saws, hatchets, lightweight folding camp shovels for digging latrines, knives, multi-tools, and machetes.

We absolutely recommend getting a good multi-tool. You can pick up a cheap one for around ten bucks, but you get what you pay for. If you're on a tight budget and having to buy a bunch of

stuff, you might have to start out with a cheap one and upgrade at a later date. If the ten-dollar multi-tool hasn't fallen apart by the time you upgrade, you can always use it for your get-home bag to keep in your car. Leatherman is the brand name that is synonymous with high quality multi-tools. Gerber also makes a selection of very reliable multi-tools at a better value. The multi-tool epitomizes the concept of an item having multiple uses. Look for a multi-tool that has at a minimum, pliers, wire cutters, a knife, Philips and flat head screwdrivers, a can opener, and a serrated-knife blade. The Leatherman Wave has all of these essentials for around eighty dollars. The Gerber Diesel also covers the basics for about half the price.

A knife is another must-have for your bug-out bag. Yes, you probably have at least two knife blades on your multi-tool, but the knife is such an important tool that you have to employ redundancy in case you lose one or break one. We recommend having a fixed-blade knife. Shop for one with a full tang, which means that the same piece of metal the blade is made from extends all the way through to the bottom of the handle. The full tang will add strength when using it to pry or chop. The longer it is, the heavier it will be, but the payoff is that length will add leverage when prying and provide a larger cutting surface when chopping. You can find good fixed-blade survival knives with a saw back for light cutting.

Because it is such an important survival tool, it wouldn't hurt to have one more knife, either for your bag or for carrying day-to-day. A lot of guys carry a pocket knife as part of their everyday carry. For under forty dollars, The Gerber Kiowa is a very nice folding utility knife. It features a pocket clip; a Tanto blade, which is good for piercing; and a serrated section on the back of the locking blade. For a few dollars more, Columbia River Knife and Tool offers the M16-14ZLEK, which has the same features as the Kiowa but also includes a seatbelt cutter and glass breaker. Smith & Wesson has put its name on a series of knives that do not reflect the quality of the company's firearms. The screws fall out and they fall apart with the lightest of wear. We recommend staying away from Smith & Wesson knives and other cheap knives altogether.

A folding camp shovel takes up a lot of room in a bug-out bag, but if you decide to skip it, you still need some method of being able to dig a latrine. A sturdy plastic garden shovel from the Dollar store might save money and space. Hygiene is very important in a survival situation. Disease is a big killer after wars and natural disasters, largely due to human waste contamination. When digging your latrine, make it at least 200 feet from water and your camp site. The hole should be a minimum of eight inches deep, and cover it when you're finished.

A machete can be useful for chopping through thick brush or cutting small pieces of dry wood for a fire. It provides a primitive form of self-defense as well. It can be a useful addition to your bag, but we will say it's optional.

Other tools that are up to you are saws and hatchets. These items can really add the weight on. A wire camping saw is an affordable alternative that takes up very little space and weighs next to nothing.

A first aid kit is a must-have item for your bug-out bag. At a bare minimum, you should have pain relievers, bandages, antibiotic gel, gauze, hand sanitizer to clean wounds, alcohol prep pads, and burn gel. PrepperRecon.com has fully stocked [IFAKs](#) or Individual First Aid Kits, which have

all of the above mentioned items, plus a ton of advanced trauma supplies. The kits contain an Israeli Battle Dressing, a TK4 tourniquet, synthetic sutures, hemostats, a Quickclot sponge, EMT Shears, a nasopharyngeal airway, regular and extra-large Tough Strip Band-Aids, 3M Steri-Strips skin closures, Betadine swabs, nitrile gloves, Advil, and triple antibiotic ointment.

The Israeli Battle Dressing is a self-contained sterile gauze compression bandage that has a special cleat that allows you to tighten the bandage. The compression cleat puts pressure on the wound to slow the bleeding. The TK4 tourniquet is a compact band used to cut the circulation off arterial bleeding. If you puncture an artery, you have very little time to cut the circulation before death. Arterial bleeding can be identified by the pulsing spurts of blood, which are bright red in color. The tourniquet must be applied between the injury and the heart.

For venous or non-arterial bleeding, which can be identified by a steady flow of blood rather than spurts, the Quick Clot sponge can be applied to stop bleeding in seconds.

The kits contain everything for suturing, including three pre-threaded sutures, Betadine swabs to clean the area to be sutured, hemostats, and gloves. For lacerations that are not deep enough to warrant a suture or for situations where there isn't enough time to suture, Steri-Strips are included in the kits.

The IFAKs come with EMT shears, which can cut through heavy material like denim and Kevlar, to allow access to the wound. A chest seal is included for chest wounds, as well as an NPA for a blocked airway. These kits come in compact MOLLE-compatible pouches, which allow them to attach to the exterior of a MOLLE bug-out bag or belt for quick access. They come in a variety of colors such as tan, black, OD green, and ACU. The kits are perfect for your bug-out bag or car emergency kit. You can purchase them from prepperrecon.com/ifak-store/ for eighty-nine dollars, which includes shipping to anywhere in America.

Clothing is another item you will have to decide on for yourself. We recommend at least keeping a couple pairs of clean socks in your bag, along with an extra tee shirt and a change of underwear. A sweater or hoodie is also a good idea. Once you start adding extra pants or shoes, the bag is going to fill up quickly. Remember that this is survival and not a vacation.

A flashlight is another crucial item. It's so important that we recommend having two quality flashlights. Keep them small because big ones will add weight and take up space. If you're on a budget and have to start cheap, do what you have to do. Something is better than nothing, but you get what you pay for. That's not to say that all flashlights with a premium price are of comparable quality. Nebo charges a pretty penny for their lights, which are highly unreliable. A very high quality flashlight manufacturer is Surefire. They make great tactical flashlights as well as weapon mounted lights. Their entry-level models start at just under sixty dollars. Surefire lights are extremely bright and typically require non-standard batteries like CR123As. A more economical choice that is still dependable is the Mini Maglite, available for around ten dollars. A Mini Maglite may not produce the same brightness; however, it does use standard AA batteries.

We talked about situational awareness in Step One. To know what's going on around you, you'll need, at a minimum, an AM/FM radio. If you get one that operates on AA batteries, you can use

the same extra batteries for your radio or your flashlight if you purchase a Mini Maglite. You should be able to find a small reliable radio with weather band for around twenty dollars. Emergency broadcasts are repeated on weather bands, so it's a good feature to have. An AM/FM radio that also receives shortwave can be had for a few dollars more.

Wouxun and Baofeng both make economical handheld transceivers that can transmit and receive shortwave radio signals. You'll need to get your license to send messages unless it's an emergency, but anyone can listen in to get information being passed around by the ham operators.

HYGIENE

Put together a small hygiene kit with travel size toothpaste, toothbrush, soap, and shampoo. Being dirty for three days won't kill you, but you'll sleep better and feel better if you can clean up a little. Baby wipes are good for taking a little cat bath if you can't take a bath or shower. Don't forget to pack some toilet paper. You can smash it down to save space; it will still work the same.

MEDICATION

Take into consideration the health of everyone in your family. Try to set aside three days' worth of medication if you can. Keep some diarrhea medicine just in case. You may be eating different foods than you're used to, and you might be drinking from questionable water sources. Hopefully your filters will prevent any waterborne sickness, but better safe than sorry. Benadryl is a good addition to your bug-out medicine chest. Besides hay fever, it can be used to treat allergic reactions to plants and insect stings. Get a small can of bug repellent and mini-sized sunscreen. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Some preppers have been known to purchase fish antibiotics online in anticipation of not being able to get amoxicillin or cipro after a collapse. The types and dosages are similar to antibiotics produced for human consumption. If you decide to purchase amoxicillin or cipro, make sure you do your research as to how to store it, which antibiotic to use for which symptoms, and how much to take.

FIRE

We recommend trying to stick with foods that don't require cooking or preparation; however, fire has other purposes besides cooking. Even though your canned soup or canned pasta can be eaten cold, it will taste much better hot. If you lose your water filter and run out of iodine tablets, you can use a fire to boil water and make it drinkable, as long as you have a metal water container. A fire gives the people you are traveling with something to congregate around. It can lift your spirits and dispel darkness if you're alone. Fire will provide warmth in the cold of winter, and it acts as a deterrent, which will keep the various critters at bay.

Fire has a couple of drawbacks that are worth mentioning. If you're not careful to clear a good perimeter around your fire, you can start a forest fire. If you're trying to evade contact with hostiles,

it will broadcast your location visually through light and smoke as well as by the smell of the smoke.

Since fire does have multiple uses, we recommend having at least a couple of tools for starting a fire. A good old-fashioned lighter will work just fine. Waterproof matches can be made by dipping the tip of strike-anywhere kitchen matches in a bit of molten candle wax. Magnesium fire starters are fun to use and very popular among preppers, but make sure you get used to using one before relying on it as your primary method of starting a fire.

One of the biggest challenges in making a fire is getting one started after a rain. If all of your available wood and kindling is wet, you'll have to be creative. Strip the wet bark off the outside of twigs and sticks with your knife until you reach a dry surface. If you live down south, dried palmetto fronds make great kindling. If they are wet, give them a good shake, and most of the moisture will come off. Camping stores sell products specifically designed for starting a fire when everything is damp. One such product is called Wet Fire. You can make your own if you're on a budget. Simply take an old candle and place it in a cleaned out soup can or vegetable can. Place the can in a pan of boiling water to create a double boiler. Once the wax has melted, use pliers or forceps to dip cotton balls, one at a time, in the molten wax until they are soaked through. Place the cotton balls to cool on an old magazine or some other surface you don't mind getting wax all over. Once they are cool, place them in an Altoids tin or similar sized box. When you're ready to use one of the cotton balls, pull it apart to expose the fine wax coated fiber, then light with a match or lighter. The cotton will act as a wick and use the wax as fuel, giving you a flame that will burn long enough to get your damp tinder dried out and burning.

For making a fire to boil water or cook with when it's windy or when you don't want to broadcast your position, you can dig a Dakota fire hole. Use your foldable shovel or garden shovel and dig a pit roughly one-foot-wide by one foot deep. Dig another hole about a foot away at a diagonal that will form a tunnel that intersects with the first hole. The second hole will allow oxygen to fuel the fire in the first hole. Besides giving off little smoke or flame, the Dakota fire hole also uses very little fuel, so it makes a good alternative when flammable resources are tight.

DOCUMENTS

In addition to all of the camping and survival stuff you need for your bag, you need some ordinary items as well. Scan all of your important documents to a password-protected flash drive. We recommend getting a flash drive with lots of storage. That way, you can store wedding pictures and even a few videos on there as well. If you ever have a fire in your home or are leaving to never return, you'll have all of your important information on a protected drive in your bug-out bag. Here is a quick checklist of the documents you should scan to your flash drive.

PERSONAL DOCUMENTS

- Driver's License
- Passport
- Birth Certificates
- Adoption Papers

Citizenship/Naturalization Papers
Military Discharge Papers
Last Will and Testament
Trust Documents
Burial Instructions (pre-paid services, plots, etc.)
Safe Deposit Boxes and/or Safes (with keys and/or combinations)
Powers of Attorney

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS

Bank/Credit Union Accounts (Checking, Savings)
Retirement Accounts
Brokerage Accounts
Pension System Statements
Deferred Compensation Papers
Credit Card Accounts
U.S. Savings Bonds
Money Market Accounts
Certificates of Deposit (CDs)
Stock Certificates/Bonds

FINANCIAL PAPERS

Real Estate Deeds
Mortgage Documents
Property Tax Records
Inventory of Assets (include appraisal)
Vehicle Titles
Income Tax Returns for Several Years
Rental/Lease Agreements
Partnership Agreements
Outstanding Loans (either owed to you or by you)
Pending Legal Actions/Lawsuits

MEDICAL AND INSURANCE INFORMATION

Health Care Provider and Personal ID Number
Organ Donor Information
Living Will/Health Care Proxy
Long-Term Care Policy Information
Life Insurance Policy Documents
Veterans Administration Insurance Policy
Mortgage Insurance Policy
Property and Casualty Policies

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

A deck of playing cards can help pass the time. There's a good chance that you'll be stuck in one location for an extended period of time, and it's good to have something to do besides worrying. A small New Testament Bible can be a tremendous source of hope, especially if it includes the Psalms.

Duct tape is a cheap fix all. You can do gear repairs, patch holes in your tent, or even restrain hostiles with duct tape. To make it more compact, cut the center cardboard out and smash it flat. A couple of rubber bands will keep it flat, and you'll have rubber bands in your bag.

Military paracord holds up to 550 lbs. and can have several uses. Inside each strand of paracord are seven inner strands. These can be used to make trip wires around your camp or snares for small game or even to construct a shelter out of limbs and forest debris.

A few large garbage bags can be used for foraging, water collection, waste removal, a poncho, a rain protector for your gear, or several other uses.

You can make a small fishing kit with a spool of fishing line. The spool will typically have four hollow compartments in the center. You can place hooks in one, a small bobber in the second one, weights in the third one, and a few small lures in the other. Cover everything with masking tape and you have a self-contained fishing kit.

If you get all of this, you will be off to a good start. Remember, a bug-out bag is also a bug-in bag. Everything you store in it can also be used in the event that you're unable to leave. If you're stuck in your home, you'll know you have three days of food, medical supplies, a means of filtering water, and a radio. Plus, it's all in one, easy-to-find place.

Your bug-out bag is to be kept in your home, but what if you get stranded on the road? We recommend keeping a get-home bag in the trunk of your car. Some of the items you need in your get-home bag are going to depend on your environment.

If you live up north, getting stranded on the road in the middle of a snow storm is a threat. For that, you'll want to make sure you have a way to stay warm until you're found. For some people, that might mean keeping a mummy sleeping bag in the car. Others might be alright with a heavy-duty survival blanket. Getting out in a blizzard when you have no idea how far you have to walk to find shelter is a bad idea. If you know the exit is only a mile or two up the road and the temperature is such that you're sure you can make it, walking to shelter might be better than staying in the car.

Everyone should keep a few basics in the car. Water is probably the most important thing to keep in your get-home bag. You can drink it if you're stranded, and you can fill your radiator with it if you overheat or spring a slow leak. Duct tape might be the second most important item. Sometimes a quick look under the hood will reveal that a hose has come loose, and duct tape might keep you going until you get to a garage. Be careful; engine parts can be very hot. You should keep a good flashlight. You have a fifty-fifty shot that whatever happens will be at night. Keep a

good pair of running or walking shoes in the car. You may be wearing dress shoes or flip flops when you run into trouble. If you break down or an event occurs that requires you to walk home, you'll want comfortable shoes.

Emergency ponchos are super cheap and don't take up much space. You'll be glad you have one if you have to change a tire in the rain.

Fix-A-Flat is so much easier than changing a tire, and it's much faster. Additionally, you don't know what neighborhood you'll be in when you get a flat. Sometimes getting out in a jiffy is a high priority. As long as it isn't a gash in the side wall of the tire, Fix-A-Flat will usually seal the puncture until you can get to a garage.

You don't need a three-day supply of food in your get-home bag, but we recommend keeping some snack bars or nuts. Keep in mind that cars get pretty hot in the summer, so whatever you keep should be able to handle the heat. Survival food bars are very compact and contain 2,000 calories. Consider one of these for your get-home bag.

We recommend that you always have at least one hundred dollars in emergency cash in your wallet or purse. Still, it wouldn't be a bad idea to keep another forty or fifty dollars in cash in your get-home bag.

Finally, keep a good medical kit in your car. The Individual First Aid Kits or IFAKs from PrepperRecon.com are perfect for a car medical kit. Automobile accidents are notorious for causing traumatic injuries. And, if you have a good medical kit in your car, you'll have some basic first aid supplies near you wherever you go.

STEP FOUR: BEANS

In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has.

Proverbs 21:20

Beans are both symbolic of our overall food storage and an essential component of long-term survival food storage. Beans are considered to be a super food. They contain fiber and protein that can sustain you for a long time. Dried beans are cheap and can last for eight years or more if properly stored. They make a great base for our long-term food storage goals. In addition to beans, white rice is also cheap and can last for twenty years if stored properly at a cool temperature. Brown rice is much better for you. Unfortunately, the same thing that makes it good for you, gives it a much shorter shelf life. The bran or the outer shell of the brown rice has oils and fats that can become rancid. It's not recommended to store brown rice for more than a year. If it is kept in a climate-controlled environment, you might be able to keep it a bit longer. We recommend not buying more brown rice than you'll eat in a year. And, as with all foods, date your containers and rotate the stock so you are always eating the foods that are closest to expiration first.

Our long-term, food-storage goal is to eventually store up enough food and necessities to last you six months. This is a general goal and won't work for everyone. If you live in a small apartment, you might not be able to store that much food; although, there are a few tricks to make the most out of the space you have. Other folks may want to extend their food storage stockpile to a year or more. If you have family coming to stay at your house when it hits the fan, you'll have to plan for them as well. But, before we get into all of that, let's start with building an emergency, one month, food stockpile.

To build our initial month supply, we are going to use five-gallon buckets. These buckets can be used to keep you alive in the event that supply chains break down due to a natural or man-made disaster, transportation issues, food shortages, fuel shortages, or civil unrest. Each bucket is going

to be lined with a trash bag, so they can be recycled buckets. The trash bag is an extra layer of protection but not the final liner, as they are often treated with pesticides, which you wouldn't want to be in direct contact with your food. Inside the trash bag is going to be a five-gallon Mylar liner and an oxygen absorber. These are widely available from online survival stores and Amazon. They are often sold in packages containing ten Mylar liners and ten oxygen absorbers for around twenty dollars. Mylar is impermeable to oxygen, moisture, and light so the liners will help your stores last even longer. Each Mylar liner will be filled with a twenty-pound bag of white rice, which you can catch on sale regularly for seven dollars. Next, we will add ten pounds of dried beans, which you can often find on sale for around one dollar each.

Restaurants often throw out five-gallon, food-grade buckets used for pickles or other bulk items. If you can scavenge these, the buckets can be recycled for your food storage plan. If you can find the buckets for free, the total cost for a bucket with twenty pounds of rice and ten pounds of beans is under twenty dollars, including the Mylar liner and oxygen absorber. Otherwise, you'll have to add the price of the bucket to your total cost.

After your beans and rice are in the bag, drop in a moisture absorber and press the sides of the Mylar together, keeping them even. Push all excess air out of the bag. Place a board, like a cutting board or piece of wood, that will handle some heat on one side of the bucket and iron only the top few inches of Mylar. The Mylar will seal together when the heat of the iron touches it, without any additional adhesive.

If you'd like to take your food storage protection one step further, reusable heavy-duty Gamma lids have a special attachment that allows you to screw an air-tight lid onto your bucket.

Twenty pounds of white rice contains 25,600 calories. Ten pounds of red beans contains 14,400 calories. That is a total of 40,000 calories. While it might be less than you need in a disaster scenario, you can stay alive on 2,000 calories a day. So, that's a twenty-day survival food store for one person or a ten-day supply for two people. Three of these buckets create a one-month emergency food supply for two people. Adjust accordingly for the number of members in your family.

If you live in a small apartment, storage is probably already an issue. An easy solution is to pull your bed frame and replace it with your food storage buckets. As long as it's not a water bed, two heavy-duty buckets in each corner of your bed should support the weight just fine. We recommend placing a plywood board on top of the buckets to evenly displace the weight of the box springs and reduce the odds of cracking the lids. If you decide on this solution, you'll have a total of eight buckets, two in each corner, under your bed. Two bed skirts can be positioned to cover the base of your bed so visitors don't see under your bed. The buckets are going to raise your bed higher than before. You'll get used to the additional height. The raised bed is going to create a large storage space. You can store your bug-out bag and other survival gear in the added space beneath your bed. Plastic tubs can be used to stow canned goods, bottled water, medical supplies, and other prepper essentials, which can be easily accessed from under the bed.

Think about how you are going to cook your beans and rice. White rice cooks in about twenty minutes. Beans require a long cook time. Soaking beans overnight reduces the cook time to one or

even two hours, depending on the type of bean. By adding a tablespoon of baking soda to a pound of beans when you soak them, will cut the cooking time in half. In an environment where cooking fuel may be scarce, having an energy saver like that is worth its weight in gold.

Propane camping stoves are great for short-term emergencies, but you'll eventually run out of fuel. If your plan is to cook over a fire pit in the backyard, think about the amount of resources available to you for firewood and think about who you'll be competing with for these resources. Another drawback to a backyard fire is that you're broadcasting your position to everyone in your area by the smoke and smell of the fire. Depending on what you're cooking, you may also be broadcasting the fact that you have food when others are starving.

Two easy remedies are a solar cooker or solar generator. A solar cooker is a simple wooden or cardboard box topped with a piece of clear glass, which traps the heat from the sun and cooks the food inside. The cooking section of the box is typically black inside. Four flaps, usually of wood or cardboard, cut in the shape of inverted, truncated triangles, extend up and out from the cooking area of the box. These wings are covered with a shiny material, such as aluminum foil, to reflect the heat down into the cooking area. Solar cookers are available to purchase, or it's easy enough to find plans on the Internet to build your own for as little as ten dollars. Prices for pre-built solar cookers vary widely, depending on their size and the materials used to build them.

The next option is a solar generator. A solar generator collects energy from the sun and charges a deep-cycle battery. Once charged, an inverter can be attached to the battery, which can power a hot plate, microwave, or toaster oven. To build your own solar generator, you only need a few items: solar panels, which collect the energy from the sun; a charge controller, which uses the sun's energy collected by the panels to charge a battery; a deep-cycle battery, which stores the energy until you're ready to use it; and an inverter, which makes the energy in the battery available to be used by your appliances. Of course, you'll need a few lengths of the appropriate wire to connect everything.

You can follow this link for instructions on setting up your own solar generator. There's even a podcast where author Mark Goodwin talks about his experience with putting one together.

<http://prepperrecon.com/podcast-diy-solar-back-up-system-prepper-recon-on-the-midnight-patriot-show/>

For people who don't have time to learn everything needed to build their own, SolarGoKit.com sells complete solar generator kits, designed by a former space shuttle engineer, which are encased in high-quality Pelican cases. They even have flexible solar panels available, which weigh very little and can be rolled up and stored inside the small Pelican case, which contains the charge controller, inverter, and battery. A Solar Go Kit is a fantastic option for anyone living in a small dwelling like an apartment with very limited storage space. Additionally, they're designed to grab and go, so they can be part of your bug-out plan.

Whatever your plan for preparing your emergency food is, practice using it. If you find out your inverter is too small, or your cooking pot doesn't fit in your solar cooker, it's easy to fix now,

while stores are open and the Internet is up. If you discover a hole in your plan after the stuff hits the fan, you may not be able to patch it.

No one is going to enjoy living on rice and beans, but it will keep you alive. This is where couponing and looking for sales comes in. Build your stockpile of specific items when those items are buy one, get one free or when they are on super sale. Some items that store well besides rice and beans are canned soups, canned vegetables, pasta, pasta sauce, peanut butter, cereal, crackers, cookies, jelly, nuts, dried fruit, and canned meats like tuna, chicken, ham, and turkey.

Many grocers around the country allow you to stack coupons on top of sales, even buy one, get one sales. There are two basic types of coupons. Store coupons are for specific items or a dollar amount off your total. Manufacturer coupons are for items that the manufacturer is trying to promote. Most grocers will allow you to use one store coupon and one manufacturer coupon on each item. The best grocery stores allow you to put a store coupon and a manufacturer coupon on sales items as well. Some allow you to do this for buy one, get one or BOGO deals.

For example, let's say a box of cereal is four dollars. That particular box of cereal is on BOGO this week. You have two store coupons for that cereal, and each coupon is for \$1 off. You also have two manufacturer coupons for the cereal, also \$1 off for each. If your store allows it, and many do, you can put \$2 worth of coupons on the box of cereal you buy and two coupons on the box of cereal you're getting free from the BOGO promotion. That makes the two boxes free. Coupon Prepper, who maintains the [Coupon Corner](#) page at PrepperRecon.com, does deals like this all the time.

Couponing is essential to prepping on a budget. Couponing allows you to buy extra food to stockpile without spending much more than your normal weekly food budget. Some items may actually be money makers, meaning that the value of your coupons is greater than the sale price. The overage from the money makers can go toward paying down the balance of the remaining grocery bill. You can easily build your stockpile to six months' worth of food in a year.

Coupons are also very valuable for drugstore items like soap, shampoo, pain killers, deodorant, razors, and other personal necessities. You can stockpile toilet paper, napkins, and paper towels as well. When you find money maker items that you may not need, buy them for the negative balance toward the rest of your purchase and give them away to your church or friends who need them.

Once you understand the system and start doing it, it will become easier. One thing is for sure, you will never shop like you used to. You'll want to see those huge savings, week after week. There's nothing like coming home with a trunk full of groceries and knowing you saved seventy percent or more off the total.

Another wonderful thing about couponing is that your standard of living actually improves in the sense that you can now buy things that you were never able to afford before. It gives you the chance to try new things and decide if you like them or not. The more you coupon, the more you will see that savings are consistently available on many quality brand name items, as well as organic and natural products.

COUPON LINKS

The following recommended websites will help you understand the principal of couponing and stockpiling. Some of them even have videos to watch, so you can actually see how to use your coupons at the store and what kind of sales to look for. The websites match the store's weekly ads with the available coupons to use. Keep in mind that some parts of the country do not double coupons. You'll have to find out the coupon policy for the stores in your area.

IHeartTheMart.com – Coupon information for Walmart, major grocery stores, and drugstores.

Hip2Save.com – Geared toward amazing Internet deals that will save you tons of money.

TotallyTarget.com – All the deals at Target.

IHeartPublix.com – Great site for Publix deals if you happen to live near one. (GA, FL, AL, SC, TN)

AddictedToSaving.com – Excellent site for store deals at places like Publix, Winn Dixie, Albertsons, Target, Walmart, and many more.

SouthernSavers.com – Great site to learn tactics and get coupons.

TheKrazyCouponLady.com – Very good site for beginners. Has deals for most of the country; just click on the Stores tab in the upper left hand corner. All the drugstore deals are there as well.

IHeartKroger.com – Great site for Kroger deals if you have them in your area.

IHeartSavingMoney.com – Deals for Kroger, Food Lion, Ingles, Target and Walmart.

IHeartCVS.com - CVS drugstore deals can allow you to get free stuff every week by rolling their Extra Care Bucks (ECBs). You can get all of your toiletries and beauty and health items this way.

IHeartRiteAid.com – Rite Aid is a great drugstore at which to get lots of freebies. Their rewards program is similar to CVS's program.

FREE PRINTABLE COUPON SITES

Coupons.com
SmartSource.com
RedPlum.com
AllYou.com

This week pasta sauce and peanut butter might be on sale; buy a ton of it. Next week might be crackers and tuna; stock up. Soon, you'll have a large selection of items to supplement your rice and beans with. Don't forget to rotate your items so you don't have to be stuck with expired items.

A couple of bulk food items we recommend for storing are powdered milk and powdered eggs. Milk and eggs are difficult to store without power and may be impossible to purchase in the event of a long-term emergency. While their powdered versions don't taste as nice as the fresh variants, they will work perfectly for cooking. Milk is also available in Tetra Brick boxes that don't require refrigeration, and canned as evaporated milk, which will store for a very long time. To use condensed milk as regular milk, just add water until you achieve your desired taste and consistency.

WATER

Water is such an important part of survival that it should have probably come before the food storage plan, but this step is named "Beans," so it only made sense to cover food storage first.

Depending on what part of the country you live in, you may need to store as much water as you do food. Those who live in the desert or very arid regions with little annual rain fall need to make water storage their highest priority. Folks with lakes, rivers, and streams nearby can get away with a little less water storage if they have sufficient filtration methods. Nevertheless, we recommend having at least one week's worth of drinking water as an absolute minimum. An average adult needs at least a half-gallon per day just for drinking, but plan on a gallon per day. That leaves some for cooking and a little extra for brushing your teeth and nothing else. Don't forget about the pets. Store a minimum of seven gallons for each family member and each pet. If you live in a desert or arid region, we recommend twenty-eight gallons at a minimum.

Water storage doesn't have to be all in eight-ounce bottles of Evian. Cleaned out soda bottles, juice bottles or iced tea jugs will work just fine. Milk jugs will work for a short time, but the plastic of a milk jug is very thin and will leak. If you have to use one, store it in a place where it won't ruin anything when it eventually leaks, because it probably will.

If you know a disaster is coming that could affect your water supply, like a hurricane, you can store up some extra water at the last minute. Fill your tub, storage bins, pots, pans and pitchers. A commercial product for storing water in your tub, known as the Water Bob, is available from preparedness supply stores. Water Bricks allow you to stack your water storage units to conserve space, but they can be expensive. An economical method of storing large amounts of water is the 275-gallon square plastic tanks that are used for farming. These can often be found on Craigslist for as little as a hundred dollars. Just be sure you know they weren't used for toxic chemicals or pesticides. You can find food-grade plastic barrels as well. These make the perfect rain catch system. Simply back those up to a downspout from a gutter, and you're catching rain water. Cover the top as best you can because it will be a haven for mosquitos. A rain catch makes a good watering source for gardens between now and the apocalypse. Water from a rain catch will need to be filtered since it and the roof the water runs off of is open to nature and all the things that go on in nature.

You should already have a good portable water filter in your bug-out bag for filtering from lakes, streams, and rain catch systems. We recommend that you get something a little more comprehensive for the house. Large tank filters like the Big Berkey are gravity fed and filter

between one and a half to six gallons at a time. Pro Pure filters are also very popular and sell for a comparable price. Pitcher style filters, like Pur and Brita do not filter out pathogens like a Pro Pure or Big Berkey filter; however, if you treat your water with bleach to eliminate the pathogens, the pitcher style filters will filter out sediment and the taste of the bleach.

If you are caught off guard and don't store enough water, you can retrieve the water out of your hot water heater. Connect a hose to the outlet at the bottom and drain it into a container. You may need to disconnect the pipe at the top of the heater or open a hot water faucet valve to let air in so it can drain.

You can build a bio-sand filter if you're in a tight situation. Take a five-gallon bucket and drill or punch holes in the bottom. Fill it with several inches of gravel. Next, top off the gravel with several inches of charcoal. The top layer will be several inches of sand. Set this bucket on top of another five-gallon bucket, pour the water over it, and let it drain through to the bottom bucket. Run a couple of batches of water through it to rinse the system before you drink from it. While not a perfect solution, it's much better than drinking unfiltered water.

GARDENING

Regardless of how big of a long-term food stockpile you build, it will eventually run out. We recommend starting a garden, no matter how small of a space you're working with. Every ounce of food you can produce reduces your dependency on a fragile system. If you only have a windowsill, grow a few fresh herbs to add vitamins and flavor to your stored food. If you have an apartment balcony that gets good sunlight, you can grow a few more things: maybe a tomato plant and a pepper plant. If you have a backyard, take advantage of it and start a full garden.

The worst possible thing preppers can do is buy a Survival Seed Vault and then never plant one seed. Not that there's anything wrong with a Survival Seed Vault. They're actually sealed in such a way that the seed is preserved for a long time. However, don't buy one; buy two. Store one and take the other one outside and see which seeds you can get to grow in your soil and climate. The learning curve is much bigger than you think.

When purchasing seeds to learn about growing a survival garden, always buy heirloom seeds. Heirloom seeds are in their natural state and have not been cross-bred, as in the case of hybrid seeds or seeds that are genetically modified in any way. Seeds that have been cross-bred or genetically modified may produce a good crop, but the seeds from the following generations may be completely sterile or may produce plants that are not true to the original fruit or vegetable. Even if the GMO, or genetically modified organism seeds produce fruit in the second and third generation, they can fail in the fourth or fifth. The same is true of hybrids.

If you've been saving seeds from vegetables you've bought in the grocery, there's a good chance they are GMOs or hybrids. Don't count on those to produce a crop.

Some seeds, such as tomato seeds, will grow best if you start them in a smaller container like an egg carton filled with fine soil, and then plant them in the ground after they've gotten a good

start. Other seeds, like mustard green seeds, work best when planted directly in the ground where you plan to let them mature. Research each plant to find out the best method for planting before wasting time and effort.

A few vegetables that grow easily and produce food fairly quickly are green beans, mustard greens, and peas. Check with your local nursery or farmers market to find out what varieties of fruits and vegetables grow well in your area and are easy to maintain.

A big gardening challenge in much of the country is poor soil. A remedy for this problem is composting. Composting is simply helping nature to break down organic material and convert it back into nutritious soil that you can use to fill a raised bed garden or augment your existing garden bed with. You can build a compost bin out of just about anything, but it needs a few things to be successful. For one, it needs air. The bacteria, fungus, worms, and bugs known as decomposers are the living organisms that help in the breakdown process. Since they are living things, they need air. You can build a simple compost bin out of wood by constructing a box that leaves a couple of inches between each board. This allows air to flow into the box, but the spacing is tight enough to keep the material confined in the container. Plastic barrels or garbage cans can also be used if you drill out several holes all over the container to allow air to pass through. The easiest-to-build compost bin is four equal-sized wood pallets, zip tied together, with a fifth pallet placed on top as a lid.

You can fill your compost bin with all of your organic material, including leaves, cardboard, banana peels, coffee grounds, corn husks, newspaper, and junk mail. You can use yard clippings as long as you don't put chemicals on your lawn. If you use herbicides or pesticides in your lawn and add these clippings to your bin, you'll poison the very creatures you need for the composting process.

Raised bed gardens elevate a particular area to contain the valuable compost and make it workable for growing a garden. A raised bed garden is just an area that you select to build a one to two foot wall out of any material available. You can build a square or rectangular wall out of concrete blocks, and it will last a lifetime. If you use untreated wood, it will eventually rot. Some people build raised bed gardens out of railroad ties. You'll hear purist say that they worry that the oil and arsenic in the railroad ties will leach into the soil. Other people grow food using old tires for their raised bed gardens. They fill the inside of the tire with compost and plant the seedlings. You may hear of concerns with chemical leaching from the tires, but people who use this method will swear by it.

CANNING

Canning has been a method of food preservation since before the era of modern refrigeration. Properly canning meats and vegetables can provide an excellent long-term storage solution that isn't dependent on the power grid.

Typically, stores offer turkeys at very low costs during the week before Thanksgiving. Turkeys are often loss-leaders, which lose money for the store, but they expect to make it up by selling you

cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie and all the fixin's. This is a fantastic opportunity for you to take advantage of the deep discounts and hone your canning skills.

The first order of business will be to cook the turkey. Season it well with salt and pepper, and then add rosemary, sage, or your preferred selection of fresh or dried herbs. Add an onion and some celery scraps for even more flavor. Make some small slits in the turkey skin so you can place the seasonings under the skin. Place the remainder of the herbs and seasonings inside the bird. Turn the turkey on its breast so the juices will flow down into the breast meat. This won't make a beautiful brown turkey, but it will be juicy. Cover the pan with aluminum foil and cook it at 350 degrees. The foil produces a Dutch-oven effect and cooks the bird very fast. Plan on cooking it for just under ten minutes per pound. Keep a close eye on the turkey with a meat thermometer and remove the turkey from the oven when it reaches 165 degrees. Allow it to sit for one hour. Remove all of the bones, skin, onion pieces, and celery parts and place them in a large stock pot. Pour the broth that has cooked out of the turkey while in the oven into the pot with the bones. Fill it with water and simmer for two hours. Strain the solids from the pot, and you have a delicious stock to can with the turkey.

To can the turkey, you need a pressure canner. All meats, as well as any low-acid foods must be canned with a pressure canner to prevent botulism. The Presto 23-Quart Pressure Canner is available for around seventy dollars. Sterilize your jars in a bath of hot water. Empty the water and add one teaspoon of salt to the bottom of the jars. Break up your pulled turkey meat and distribute throughout several sterilized jars. Fill the jars with the hot stock to about one inch from the rim. Clean the rim of the jar with vinegar to remove any grease, which will prevent the lids from sealing. Place a new, sterilized lid from a pan of simmering water on each jar and place a ring over the lid snugly, but not too tight. Place the jars in your pressure canner and cook at ten pounds of pressure for about seventy-five minutes or by the specifications of your canner.

Once the appropriate time has passed, turn off the burner and allow the pressure to reduce to zero. Remove the jars and set them in a place where they can stay for twenty-four hours. Tighten the rings as tightly as possible by hand and allow them to cool overnight. Now you have several jars of great-tasting turkey for long-term storage. You can eat it in turkey salad or turkey pot pie or just heat and eat it with mashed potatoes. The stock can be used to make soup, cook rice, or gravy.

You can use a similar process to can pork, which is great for BBQ; beef, which is great for stew; chicken; or venison.

Drying is another age-old method of food preservation. Fruits, vegetables, and beans can be dried for prolonged storage. Commercial food dehydrators are available, and solar ovens are fantastic for drying food.

To extend the shelf life of meat and store it without refrigeration, you can make jerky. Once again, a solar oven is perfect for making jerky. The Internet is full of great recipes for making jerky with a solar oven. If you perfect the skill now, you'll always be able to repeat the process after the stuff hits the fan.

STEP FIVE: BULLETS

The beauty of the Second Amendment is that it will not be needed until they try to take it.

Thomas Jefferson

Bullet is our B-letter word to describe the security aspect of our survival plan, as well as an essential component of that plan. You have a lot of things to think about when considering your security plan. Probably the most important is your state's firearm laws. For residents of states that allow concealed carry permits, this is the best first step. You'll get a great introductory firearm safety course, as well as learn about the laws in your state. After you receive your permit, you'll be allowed to carry a concealed firearm for personal protection. Reliable manufacturers of economic, small pistols that are concealable are Beretta, Ruger, Colt, and Glock. These small concealed carry pistols accommodate bullets from .25 and .32, to .380, 9 mm, and .45 ACP. Tons of opinions exist on what pistol to carry, maybe more than on any other prepper topic.

For a home defense pistol, Glock is very reliable and affordable. Think of them as the Honda of guns. You could get a little bit better gun, but you would pay a lot more money. Glocks are very popular, which makes getting parts and extra magazines simple. They come in subcompact, compact, and full sizes, and are chambered in 9 mm, .40 cal, and .45 cal.

In areas where handguns are not permitted, shotguns are effective deterrents. They make great additions to home defense for people who want to take it to the next level. Preppers favorites are the 12 gauge Mossberg 500 and the Remington 870. Both are reasonably priced and very reliable. Mossberg and Remington shotguns are very popular, which makes it easy to find parts and accessories for them. A wide range of aftermarket accessories are available for both of these guns including tactical stocks, pistol grips, folding stocks, heat shields, exchangeable barrels for hunting or home defense, side saddle shell holders, tactical rails, and lights.

The added bonus of a shotgun is its versatility. A short barrel can be attached for home defense. The shorter barrel will widen the spread of the blast, making it easier to hit the target. Of course,

this decrease in precision is both a blessing and a curse. While it increases the chances of hitting an intruder, it also increases the odds of hitting an unintended target. If you ever have to pull the trigger in a home-defense situation, make sure you know what is beyond the target. Drywall will not stop buck shot or most other shotgun, pistol, or rifle round. If your spouse or child are on the other side of the wall you're shooting at, you could potentially kill them.

A longer barrel can be added to a shotgun to keep a tighter pattern in the shot. Shotguns have an extensive variety of shot shells that are mission specific. You can purchase shotgun shells designed distinctly for self-defense, small game, birds, large game, or deer.

Many preppers feel the need to own a battle rifle. Some see this as a responsibility placed on them by the Second Amendment, which reads, "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." The apparent intention of the amendment is for the citizenry to provide the security for a free state. This is a task that would be difficult to perform with a .22 caliber rifle, so those who feel it is their responsibility, look for a battle rifle. The two most popular battle rifles are the AK-47 and the AR-15. Each has distinct advantages. One advantage of the AK-47 is that it was made to require very little maintenance and to operate in harsh conditions. It uses a slightly larger round of ammunition, the 7.62x39 mm. While the AR15 requires a bit more TLC, it delivers a bit more accuracy. Having a smaller bullet, the 5.56mm or .223 caliber, makes it easier to carry more rounds for the same amount of weight. If you do purchase an AR-15, remember that if you purchase one chambered in 5.56mm, you will be able to use 5.56x54 ammo as well as .223 caliber. If you purchase an AR-15 chambered in .223, you will only be able to use .223 ammo. In a grid-down situation, that extra bit of versatility could be a game changer.

The market now provides almost as many accessories for the AK-47 as it does the AR-15, but the vast selection among those accessories for the AR-15 has earned it the nickname, "Barbie Doll for Men." Tactical rail systems allow easy attachment of accessories like reflex sights, tactical lights, lasers, foregrips, bipods, scopes, and night vision equipment. A wide array of fixed stocks, adjustable stocks, folding stocks, traditional hand guards, MOE hand guards, and quad rail hand guards are available for the AR-15.

Some preppers stockpile bullets in case of a complete collapse, ammo ban, or other market event that could dry up supplies. Other preppers purchase ammo to be used as barter items since it would be in high demand after a cataclysmic event. The caveat for acquiring ammo as a barter item is to be conscious of who you trade with. If you supply a predator with ammo in exchange for fuel, food, or other provisions, he may come back and kill you with the very same ammo. On the other hand, if you are part of a tight-knit group or preparedness community, ammo may be the currency du jour for your group. This is a good reason to stick with conventional and popular sizes and calibers of bullets and guns. If you have extra .40 cal or 9mm bullets to trade, you are more likely to find a buyer for them than for some obscure bullet like a .32 rim-fire. The most popular pistol bullets are .25, .32, .380, 9mm, .40, .45, .357, .38, and .44. The most common rifle bullets are .22, .223, 7.62x39, 5.56 NATO, .270, .308, 30-06, and 7.62x54. Without a doubt, 12 gauge shotguns are the standard, but 20 gauge and 410 are also common.

We've had a couple of opportunities over the past few years to witness how fast the market for ammo can react to a perceived crisis. As soon as threats from the left start to surface, AR-15s, AK-47s, and high-capacity magazines completely sell out. Ammo supplies get very tight. Even when the threat is a ban on a particular class of weapon and there's no direct threat to ammunition for those guns, retailers completely sell out.

A common question is how much ammo you should stockpile. That answer is going to be different for everyone, but traditional thinking is a minimum of 1,000 rounds for your battle rifle and 500 rounds for each caliber of handgun that you own. These numbers represent a rock bottom limit and would not include ammo that you intend on using for barter nor practice. It seems like a lot and it can get expensive, but if stored properly, it should last you a lifetime. As you buy more ammo for practice, remember to rotate your stockpile to ensure you are storing the most recently purchased bullets. One thing is for certain, ammo isn't getting any cheaper. Because of the way the market can dry up when threatening news breaks, we recommend that you try to secure those bare minimum quantities now, while you still can.

Some people may live in very restrictive areas that don't allow any firearms. Unfortunately, a lot of those cities are also restrictive on pepper spray and even carrying knives. A baseball bat might be the best deterrent for the homes in those areas. You can also look into laws regarding bows and crossbows.

The Second Amendment to the Constitution says "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." If your rights are too infringed, you have to ask yourself if you're still in America. We recommend that you consider relocating to an area of the country that is more sympathetic to the law of the land. Besides the issue of self-defense, regions of the country with strict gun laws also tend to be the most tolerant to other violations of constitutional freedoms.

Gun violence in America is highest in cities with the most gun regulations. Criminals think twice before committing a crime in an area with a well-armed citizenry.

The great thing about a zombie apocalypse is that the zombies I've seen in movies don't seem to be able to operate a firearm. Unfortunately, in a real societal breakdown, the bad guys will probably shoot back. Body armor can greatly reduce the odds that an assault against you will be fatal. You can choose from different levels and types of body armor.

Level I body armor is typically a soft vest made of Kevlar or similar material designed to stop knife attacks and small pistol rounds such as .22, .25, and 380 Auto.

Level II A is designed to stop all lower level threats and lower grade 9mm and .40 rounds.

Level II is designed to stop all lower level threats, higher velocity 9mm and .40 rounds, and .357.

Level III A is effective against all handgun ammunition including .44 Magnum.

Level III utilizes hard plates made of ceramic or steel and is designed to stop rifle rounds such as 7.62x39, .223, and 7.62x51.

Level IV uses hard plates and is effective against at least one round of armor-piercing ammunition.

Level III and IV can be used with soft body armor to help absorb the impact of the round. The kinetic energy can still produce significant damage, even with the use of hard ballistic plates.

With ceramic-plate body armor, several rounds from a rifle can crack the plates and render them ineffective. High grade steel plates, such as those available at catiarmor.com, can withstand multiple hits from .223, 5.56, and 7.62x39 rounds. CATI Armor offers plates made of top-quality, quarter-inch AR-500 steel. Their top-of-the-line model features Rhino coatings, which reduce spall. Spall are the fragments of bullets that hit the face of the hard armor plates and can follow the profile of the plate and hit one under the chin or on the arms or legs. Anti-spall coating, like Rhino coatings, deflects the fragments back out at an angle and away from the individual being protected by the plates. CATI offers plates for every budget, but even their top-of-the-line anti-spall coated set, including front, two sides, and rear plates, ships free for under \$200.

Many lower level body armor vests, such as Level I and II, will include pouches on the front, sides, and back where steel or ceramic plates can be inserted. This combination will offer the highest level of protection against rifle threats. It will also be heavy and can get expensive. If you decide on a lower cost or lighter weight option, you can use a simple plate carrier vest. These can be purchased in most common camouflage colors, as well as flat colors like black, olive drab, and coyote. Plate carriers are available with MOLLE straps for attaching rifle and pistol magazine pouches, first aid kits, radio pouches, and pistol holsters.

Chest rigs with multiple rifle magazine pouches can be worn over the top of plate carriers with no pouches or MOLLE straps of their own.

Alarm systems are a great deterrent, but they can be expensive. However, even the priciest alarm system is cheaper than getting robbed. A major drawback to alarm systems is that they rely on telephone or Internet service to contact police or fire departments. If the service the system depends on is cut by an intruder or goes down, it's no longer a source of security. Most alarm systems have a battery backup system in case the power goes out. Battery backups will only keep the system running for a short time if not recharged.

Dogs are an extremely effective alarm system, and you don't have to worry about them not working if the power goes out. The smallest dog may not be much of a threat to an intruder, but a dog's keen hearing and sense of smell will allow it to know if someone or something is creeping around outside. When it detects an unwelcome presence, it will bark and alert you, so you'll be able to address the hazard.

One of the easiest things you can do to keep your home safe is to lock the doors. Thirty percent of break-ins are through unlocked doors. The same goes for your vehicles and outbuildings. A few seconds to lock the door will make it that much harder to get into.

Lights are a big deterrent for burglars. Keeping lights on outside will reveal suspicious activity to neighbors, passersby, and law enforcement patrolling the area. Having a well-lit area around your home allows you to see what's going on from inside through the window if you hear a suspicious noise in the night.

Hardening your home will add to its overall security. Hurricane windows are much harder to break into than regular glass windows. You can give the appearance of someone being home by leaving lights and a TV on when you're away from the house. A TV makes it sound and look like someone is home. It might run up the electric bill a bit, but it's cheaper than a monitoring service from an alarm company, and much cheaper than getting broken into.

A fence can serve as an efficient obstacle. Several different types of fences are available, but all of them serve as a barrier to let people know that they need to be invited before crossing. Barbed wire fence is easy for a person on foot to cross or crawl under, but if it were to be breached by a vehicle, the wire will likely get caught up in the wheel well and disable the oncoming car or truck.

If you're in a neighborhood, try to use a fence that will match the neighborhood. If everyone else has a white picket fence, a twelve-foot-tall, chain-link fence with razor wire on top is going to mark you as having something worth stealing. Of course the white picket fence may not be as effective, but it is an obstacle.

Safes are a fantastic investment and an absolute must for gun owners with small children. We hear too many news stories of children getting a hold of unsecured firearms and things going terribly wrong. To add insult to injury, the far-left media will grab these stories and wag them in our faces as proof that guns should be banned rather than encourage people to be more responsible gun owners.

Safes should be bolted to the floor, or you run the risk of having the entire safe stolen. A criminal can cart it out to his truck or van and worry about cutting it open once it he gets it to his hideout. Most gun safes have a twenty-minute fire rating, which adds an extra layer of protection for jewelry, bullion, weapons, and important documents. When buying a safe, we recommend buying one with manual tumblers rather than electronic or digital components, which could be damaged by an EMP. It would be terrible to be so well-prepared and well-armed but have an EMP prevent you from being able to access your weapons, precious metals, and ammo.

The most secure valuables are the ones no one will ever find. Burying a cache on your property will keep your items safe and accessible in the event that banks are closed and safe-deposit boxes are inaccessible. Be sure your items are very well protected from moisture before burying them, particularly things that are easily damaged like firearms. Some preppers have been known to vacuum seal firearms before caching them in PVC tubes or dry boxes. Keep in mind that items like jewelry, guns, gold, and silver can be ferreted out with a metal detector. One method of reducing the chances of your items being found with a metal detector is to bury several decoys. Cans full of nuts and bolts buried nearby will keep treasure hunters digging holes with very little payoff. Burying a cache under a slab of concrete with rebar running through it will give off a signature to a metal detector and keep raiders guessing.

An underrated threat to homes, both now and after the apocalypse, is fire. Fire can be natural or man-made. During droughts or lightning storms, the threat of fire is increased. Fire can be used as a weapon to burn or smoke you and your family out of your home. In a grid-down scenario, the only fire department you may be able to call is the one you have organized with your family or mutual assistance group.

Several different levels of preparedness for fighting fires exist, however we'll cover the basics for now. Since fire is one of the most probable threats you will face both now and after it hits the fan, it makes sense to dedicate as much time and resources to fire prevention as possible.

One of the easiest things you can do is to keep flammable items away from your living quarters. Many preppers stockpile fuel in case of power outages or supply crunches. That's a good idea, but be safe about where you store it. Always store your gasoline in containers designed for fuel storage. Keep them away from heat sources and ignition sources, as fumes can build up in an enclosed area. Space heaters and pilot lights on hot water tanks and furnaces are potential ignition sources for gasoline fumes. Clean up spills with sawdust, newspaper, or rags to avoid the buildup of fumes.

Another easy step to take in protecting your home against fire is to have smoke detectors and extra batteries. Every prepper should have at least one fire extinguisher. We recommend setting a goal to have one fire extinguisher for every room in your home. Many fires start in the kitchen, so if you only have one, keep it near the stove, and make sure it is rated for grease fires. Extinguishers rated A are rated for anything that will produce ash, such as wood and paper. Extinguishers rated B are for flammable liquids such as oil and gas. C rated extinguishers are for electrical fires. An easy way to remember is C is for "Current." If you try to stick with ABC extinguishers, you'll be covered for all of those threats.

To use the fire extinguisher, remember the acronym PASS. P is for Pull the pin. The second step is A, which stands for Aim. Next is Squeeze the handle to release the contents. Finally, Sweep the hose from side to side to cover the entire area of the fire.

As a reminder, your number one survival tool is you. You have to exercise common sense and situational awareness at all times. The best alarm system in the world won't help if you don't arm it. The highest quality firearms in the country are only effective if you train and learn to operate them.

Most criminals are inherently lazy. They'll look for the easiest home to victimize. By doing little things to make your home a hard target, you'll give them an incentive to find somewhere else to cause trouble.

This chapter only covers the basics for security as we designed this book to get you to a minimum stage of readiness in all the primary areas of prepping. Once you get the basics covered, you may want to dedicate more time and resources into developing your security plan. If so, please check out our first book, [*Retreat Security and Small Unit Tactics*](#). In that book, we provide much more in-depth instruction on organizing a security team for your retreat or neighborhood. We cover

individual troop movement, small unit movement, hand signals, and night vision, as well as some basic knowledge used by the US military in securing a base.

Before you move on to the next step, we recommend that you continue to build your emergency fund to a total of three months' worth of expenses. If your monthly budget is \$2,000, you should save up a total of \$6,000 before moving on to the next step. For some of you, this is going to take some time. That's okay; do what you can when you can. Keep putting one foot in front of the other, and you'll eventually reach your destination. For others, you may be able to complete this level of your emergency fund relatively quickly. The important thing is to stay focused on the task at hand.

You will have covered the basics of preparedness by the time you finish Step Five, and you need to shore up your cash reserves before proceeding. Feel free to keep reading so you can be planning and deciding your next step. It's wise to be constantly molding your preparedness plan.

STEP SIX: BULLION

Paper money eventually returns to its intrinsic value—zero.

Voltaire

Gold is a popular safe haven asset against inflation and collapse, as it has been a store of wealth since the beginning of time. The Bible declares its value in Genesis 2:11 by mentioning its availability and quality in the land of Havilah. In Genesis 13:2, Abraham is said to be wealthy because of his holdings of gold, silver, and cattle. To this day, central banks around the world hoard bullion. According to a 2014 USA Today article, the three largest holders of bullion are the U.S. with 8,133 tons, Germany with 3,387 tons, and Italy with 2,451 tons. The International Monetary Fund, or IMF, is another major holder of gold bullion with 2,814 tons, according to the IMF website. Even though world currencies are not backed by bullion, countries see the value of holding it in reserve.

Not to get off on a rabbit trail, but some analysts, particularly those associated with GATA, the Gold Anti-Trust Action Committee, think the method used in calculating the numbers of U.S. gold holdings is less than transparent at best, and flat out deceptive at worst. If the amount of gold being held by the U.S. Treasury is being manipulated or lied about to instill a false sense of security in markets and the American public, the case for owning it will be even stronger than what we are presenting.

If you were to look at a chart of the gold price since 1971, you would be tempted to think of gold as a terrific investment. That may be true, but it's not the purpose of Step Six. Our purpose in purchasing bullion is similar to buying insurance. When you buy car insurance, you do so in hopes that it will be there to protect you if you have a car wreck, not as an asset that you are hoping will outperform the markets.

The reason that gold has steadily climbed since 1971 is because the dollar was taken off of the gold standard that year. The gold standard provided a type of discipline for the U.S. central bank in creating new units of currency. For every dollar bill printed, one-dollar worth of gold had to be

available to back it. Since the gold price was fixed at thirty-five dollars per ounce, this system provided for a very stable currency. The gold-backed dollar system was agreed upon by all the major central bank players on the planet after World War II, at the Bretton Woods Conference. This agreement made the dollar the reserve currency of the world.

In the late sixties, when it was discovered by the French that America was abusing their status as the issuer of the world reserve currency, they began converting their dollars back into gold. This triggered a massive run on U.S. gold reserves and caused President Nixon to close the gold window and effectively default on the Bretton Woods agreement.

Since this currency default by the U.S., gold has skyrocketed 3,400 percent to roughly \$1,200 per ounce at the time of this writing. Most people who track the historic gold price will tell you that gold has not really changed in value, but rather the dollar, which is in a death spiral. When valued against gold, the dollar has lost 97 percent of its value. If you look at other commodities such as coffee, beef, corn, steel, and even home prices, the dollar has suffered a major devaluation in purchasing power against those items since 1971 as well.

The technical reason for this massive hit to the dollar's value has been the complete lack of discipline by the Federal Reserve, America's central bank. Without the tight reins of a gold standard to keep them in check, the Fed has had carte blanche to print money to finance a profligate government. The U.S. government takes these piles of free money and wastes them on welfare programs, which ensure votes for one party, and massive military contracts, which ensure campaign finances for the other. All the while, the American public is the one being stolen from. While Americans wake up every day and see the same dollar amount in their bank accounts, those dollars are losing purchasing power with each new unit of currency brought into existence by the Fed. The central bank's power to steal wealth from your pocket without ever touching your wallet is done by the same principle as is employed by a counterfeiter.

To get a better understanding of this theft, let's assume a very simple economy, which has only \$10 and ten pizzas. In this simplified economy, each \$1 can buy one pizza. If you have \$5, you have the purchasing power to buy five pizzas. You had to work, invest, or give up some value to acquire those \$5. Now, the Fed comes along and prints ten more dollars. Suddenly the money supply has doubled, but our economy still has the same amount of pizzas. Now we have \$20 and ten pizzas. Each pizza now costs \$2. Your \$5 will now only buy two and a half pizzas. While you still have the same dollar amount, the Fed just effectively stole two and a half pizzas from you. This has been happening over and over since 1971, but the American public hasn't woken up to the scam because of the complex nature of our economy.

People who hold gold, silver, or other hard assets know they are holding a store of value that cannot be created with a printing press, or entry on a computer by the Federal Reserve, or thieving counterfeiters. Gold and silver have to be located in the earth's crust, mined out, purified, and minted into a coin or bar.

People who speculate in gold and silver to make large profits can get caught on the wrong side of the trade and risk losing money. Preppers who buy gold and silver as an insurance policy for either long-term wealth preservation or as a hedge against a complete currency collapse look at the

amount of ounces they have been able to obtain rather than what the market price for gold and silver are on a particular day. For folks who like to bet the markets, gold and silver are as good of a vehicle as any, but that's not what we are promoting here in this book.

As a means of preserving wealth, gold and silver have performed very well since 1971. Unless the U.S. government announces that they will be adopting a balanced budget amendment and only spending what they collect in revenues, the forty-four-year-old trend of gold, priced in U.S. dollars, is not likely to reverse course. In order for the dollar to make significant long-term gains against gold, we would have to see a balanced budget amendment in addition to a viable plan to pay off the \$18 trillion dollars in U.S. debt and cover the \$205 trillion in unfunded liabilities. Statistically speaking, perpetual motion and time travel are more achievable than those lofty goals, especially considering our current cast of decision makers and economic conditions.

We've talked a lot about gold, but not much about silver at this point. Silver has also played a role as a monetary metal throughout time. We mentioned at the beginning of the chapter that Genesis 13:2 talks about Abraham's wealth being measured in silver, as well as gold and cattle. Silver continued to be used for money through 1964 in America. Dimes, quarters, dollars, and half-dollars were minted by the U.S. Mint out of ninety-percent silver until that year. From 1965 through 1970, silver half-dollars contained 40 percent silver.

Because of silver's lower price, preppers who are considering precious metals for a barter economy prefer silver because of the increased amount of units they can buy. Ninety-percent silver quarters and dimes provide even smaller denominations for trade. The most common unit for silver is one-ounce coins and bars. "Coins" typically refer to coins minted by a sovereign country's official mint, like Canada's, America's, Mexico's, or China's. A silver round is the same shape, but is typically minted by a private mint such as Sunshine Mint, Golden State Mint, Silver Towne, Ohio Precious Metals, or APMEX. These same private mints also produce bars. The advantage of private mints over sovereign mints is the lower premium or price over spot per ounce. The spot price is the market price for large bars of silver traded on international markets like the COMEX. The premium is what you pay for a coin or bar above the spot price. At the time of this writing, the spot price for silver was around \$16.00, but the lowest price you might find a privately minted silver round for was roughly \$17.00. This extra dollar represents the premium. The more desirable or recognizable the coin or bar, the higher the premium.

By far, the most recognizable unit of silver is the one-ounce American Silver Eagle minted by the U.S. Mint. These coins are 99.9 percent pure and are easy to resell because of their popularity. The American Silver Eagle's premium was around \$3.00 at the time of this writing. The second most recognizable coin is the 99.99 percent pure Silver Canadian Maple Leaf, whose premium was roughly \$2.50 at the time of this writing. Sunshine Mint's 99.9 percent pure one-ounce silver rounds were available at only \$.75 over spot at the time of this writing, making them the best value on an over spot basis. If you decide to go with the value of a private mint, make sure you stay with the most reputable mints so you don't end up with a product that no one recognizes.

Premiums on gold coins and bars will be similar in the mark up percentage. One-ounce Gold American Buffalos and Gold Eagles were around \$55 over the spot price of gold at the time of this writing. Gold Canadian Maple Leafs were roughly \$35 over spot for a total of \$1,235 each.

Fractional gold coins can make buying gold more affordable. As you buy smaller units of gold, the percentage of the premium goes up. For example, a half-ounce Gold Maple Leaf was \$650 or \$50 over spot, representing an 8 percent markup, whereas the one-ounce Maple only had a 3 percent markup. Likewise, at the time of writing, a quarter-ounce Maple was \$340, representing a 13 percent markup.

Numismatic coins, or collectable coins, often have much higher premiums, making them less attractive as bullion. Once in a while, you'll catch old, pre-1933 gold coins from the U.S. and around the world for less than the price of modern bullion coins. When you can catch these sales, it's a great opportunity to buy a piece of history. But, we don't recommend paying huge premiums for old coins.

Purity in silver is pretty standard. Silver coins minted before 1965 are 90 percent pure. Modern sovereign and private mints produce 99.9 percent pure coins. The Royal Canadian Mint is a bit of an overachiever and purifies their products to 99.99 percent.

Gold is a little different. Pre-1933 U.S. minted coins and vintage world coins that were used as currency during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are 90 percent gold. This helped to make the coins more resilient for day-to-day use. Modern bullion coins are either twenty-two karat or twenty-four karat. Twenty-four karat coins like the U.S. minted Gold Buffalo and Canadian Maple Leaf will scratch and dent easily due to the purity of the gold and inherent softness of the metal. The Gold American Eagle is twenty-two karat gold, which is roughly 92 percent pure. The purity does not affect the value, as the coins still contain one troy ounce of pure gold, just like the 99.99 percent pure Buffalo or Maple. The alloy metals, which are added to make a harder coin, are in addition to the thirty-one grams contained in a troy ounce, the standard unit of measurement for precious metals.

Alloy metals used in modern bullion coins are typically copper and silver. South African Krugerrands use only copper, which produces a darker coin, while the American Gold Eagle uses a blend of silver and copper, which helps the coin retain a tone that looks more like pure gold.

Deciding who to buy from is important. Lots of reputable dealers offer products online that ship directly to your door. Many of these dealers will ship for free. Charlatans also plague the online precious metals industry. Some of those who run the biggest ads on television have the most devious practices. You will probably get the actual product you ordered and paid for, but the classic scam is to get you to call about one product and then get you to purchase something totally different. Online dealers who make you call a sales representative are almost always going to try a bait-and-switch scam on you. The most honest and fair companies will publish the price of the coin or bar, as well as let you calculate the shipping costs before checking out. The best way to choose an online dealer is to compare prices among several. Try checking prices at JM Bullion, Apmex, and Silver.com. We've bought from all of these companies and have never had an issue.

When buying from an online dealer, you'll have to mail in a paper check. The processing time for a company to clear a check after they receive it in the mail is typically ten days. Once the check clears, reputable companies will ship your order. The entire process can take up to three weeks from the time you drop the check in the mail until you receive your order.

If you can't stand waiting that long, you can go to a local coin shop. Make sure you compare the prices online before buying at a local shop. A coin shop has a lot of extra overhead to pay in addition to the cost of the coin, so expect to pay quite a bit more.

How much bullion to buy is going to be different for everyone. Some advisors recommend keeping as much as 10 percent of your net worth in precious metals. Others will tell you to allocate 10–20 percent of your liquid assets to gold and silver. Whatever you decide, we recommend that you start small, get familiar with the process, and then consider adding to your position.

You'll also need to decide how you want to allocate your precious metals purchases between gold and silver. Since silver has a lower cost and you can purchase more units for trade or barter, you may consider buying only silver for the first one hundred ounces, then moving toward a fifty-fifty allocation each of gold and silver.

The amounts and allocation are up to you, but we recommend keeping the units small. Buying large ten, twenty, or one-kilo bars of silver defeats the purpose of having the individual units to sell incrementally or for barter. Stick to one-ounce coins, rounds, and bars. If you can catch pre-1965, 90 percent silver coins on sale, by all means, feel free to buy those quarters, dimes, and half-dollars, but don't pay a higher premium than what you'd pay for the one-ounce silver coins and bars.

For gold, buy the largest unit that you can afford with each purchase. If your precious-metals budget allows you to buy an ounce every three months, buy the whole ounce rather than paying a much higher premium for 4 quarter-ounce coins. Of course, if your budget only allows for a quarter ounce of gold every six months, go ahead and buy it rather than waiting two years to save up for an entire ounce. Some analysts, like Nick Barisheff, expect dramatic price moves to the upside for gold in the next few years.

Step Six isn't just about silver and gold; it's also about wealth preservation and barter items that you can use if the economy collapses to a state in which dollars are no longer accepted as a unit of exchange.

The recent crisis in Venezuela has shown us that one of the most coveted barter items in a time of turmoil is toilet paper. When the shelves are cleared of toilet paper, you know that your standard of living has just taken a nose dive. The good thing about stocking up toilet paper as a barter item is that it is relatively cheap to purchase. The obvious downside is the amount of space required to store it. If you can be creative and think of a good place to store it, we highly recommend stocking up on toilet paper, both for barter and for personal use.

In Step Four, we talked a lot about coupons. We briefly discussed using reward points at drugstores to get free items every week. Rite Aid, Walgreens, and CVS all have hefty reward programs which allow you to purchase items, and often get the full amount back in reward points.

For example, let's say a razor is on sale at CVS for \$4 and you get back \$4 in CVS Extra Care Bucks, which is their reward point currency. It's not exactly free, because you gave them \$4 in

cash and the Extra Care Bucks or ECBs have to be spent at CVS. Additionally, the \$4 in ECBs has to be spent by a certain date or it expires. You can use those ECBs to purchase the deal for the following week, which will again give you \$4 back in ECBs.

Coupon Prepper, who maintains the Coupon Corner page at PrepperRecon.com has been rolling the same \$20 at CVS for two years now and has bought thousands of dollars' worth of personal items for the home as well as barter items with that same \$20, with very little additional capital invested. It's a one-time investment that will reap rewards for years into the future if you manage it right.

Soap, medical supplies, shampoo, razors, haircare products, toothpaste, deodorant, and dental floss are just a few of the items that you can collect for free by rolling rewards points at drugstores. Once you've stocked up enough for your family, keep going, because all of these things will be very good barter items.

Land has been a stable form of wealth preservation throughout the ages as well. Land can be used for hunting, gardening, and camping to provide value to the owner between now and the apocalypse. Land can pay dividends by harvesting a portion of the timber from the property every few years. If you thin out the large trees once in a while, you'll receive an income stream and provide more space for the small trees to mature and new seedlings to grow.

Since the next step is Base, we'll get into more detail about land as a form of wealth preservation and selecting a good retreat property.

Feel free to read ahead, but before you start to consider purchasing a retreat property, make sure you have built your emergency fund to a total of six months' worth of expenses, and you have a six-month supply of long-term-storage food.

STEP SEVEN: BASE

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

Psalm 91:1-4

We were tempted to call this step Bug-Out Land, which is a common term for a retreat property, but that may not be the solution for everyone. It is to be expected that reaching "BASE," our final step may take several years from the time you start with Step One. Our goal is not to rush through all the steps but to build a foundation of preparedness that can be built upon little by little. With each progressive step, you are reaching new levels of preparedness. Running ahead out of fear and anxiety can create a financial disaster that will set you back years. Keep doing what you can, when you can, and you'll find you are in a better position than you were the day before.

Some people may already live in a lightly populated town or rural environment. For them, the goal of Step Seven will be to make the most out of a great situation. For other people, the possibility of moving to the boonies may not ever be a reality because of physical limitations, finances, or ties to work and family. For those folks, we'll look at options to put them in a better position to ride out a storm. We will also talk about what to look for in a retreat property for folks who have the ability to relocate and for those who have the financial means to purchase a retreat property to go to in the case of an emergency.

Let's start with the people who don't anticipate being able to purchase a bug-out property, because for those of you who are saving up for a retreat, this advice will help you be in a better position while you wait.

Some folks have good jobs and just can't leave the area they live in for some future event that may not occur for years. After all, we've all heard stories of folks who went all-in for Y2K and

missed out on years of working at a productive job. If that sounds like you or you're going to have to wait a while before you head for the hills, think about how much more of a commute you would be willing to make to be in a more sustainable environment. Many cities are packed like sardines in the downtown areas, but just fifteen minutes from suburbs are properties that offer enough land for a small garden and maybe even a few chickens. You might have to give up another half hour a day in your commute, but you'll probably get more house and more yard for your money, which will offset the time and money spent on the longer commute.

For those of you who are in a position to purchase a retreat property now or are saving up for one in the future, you have a lot to think about. Let's start with people who are staying near the city because of work and will be buying a place to bug out to in case of a disaster. For you, you'll want your location to be far enough from a large metropolitan area that you don't have to worry about the spillover from social unrest, yet close enough to be able to go there on the weekends to hang out, start projects, and try to be part of the community. A hundred and fifty miles is going to be close to the limit for most folks.

For people who are relocating altogether, distance is going to be less important than the type of people who are there. You want to look for areas with folks who are like-minded and self-sufficient. People who live outside of the major population centers tend to be more conservative and prefer to have less government telling them how to live their lives. When outsiders try to bring their culture and way of doing things into smaller communities, they can often find themselves alienated from the community, which might be a worse position than the one they left. If you relocate to a more lightly populated area, it's important to look for people who will share your views of personal freedom, government, and religion.

Two areas of the country that are becoming popular with liberty-minded preppers are the American Redoubt, which consists of the Inland Northwest and the Cumberland Plateau, which is the region of Tennessee and Kentucky just west of the Appalachian Mountains.

Meetup.com is a good way to connect with people who have similar interests. You'll find prepper groups, gardening groups, outdoor adventure groups who are into fishing and hiking, and all sorts of folks in your area. If you can attend a Prepper Expo in your area, you'll get the opportunity to meet like-minded people as well. Try striking up a conversation with people you sit next to in the classes at a Prepper Expo. See if they'd be interested in exchanging numbers or doing something outdoors. If you meet three or four people like that, it will be well worth your time and price of admission.

Whether you're moving full-time or buying a retreat location to visit on the weekends, do what you can to get involved with the community. When the school football team or police benevolence association is asking for donations, throw something in the hat. Drop off donuts at the volunteer fire department and look for other opportunities to make connections. When you're moving into a small town where everyone knows each other, it'll be up to you to break the ice if you don't want to be viewed as an outsider.

While we're on the subject of people and culture, we'll talk a little bit about the importance of community and then get into the physical attributes of a retreat property. People are the most

important part of a successful survival plan. Trying to survive on your own is going to be very difficult, if not impossible. The number of chores required to survive are too much for a typical family to handle. In a grid-down situation, you'll need twenty-four-hour security. If you have only two people working security at a time, 3 eight-hour shifts would require six people. You'll need people for cleaning, cooking, gardening, repairs, communications, and taking care of livestock. Looking for existing communities of like-minded preppers through message boards and other means will be much easier than trying to start one from scratch.

For now, try getting the conversation started with the people who live around you. Ease your way into the discussion by asking if they are ready for hurricane or tornado season if you live in an area of the country affected by those disasters. If you live out west, earthquake preparedness is a good conversation starter. For folks up north, bracing for winter is becoming an increasingly important subject. Once you get your neighbors to understand the importance of preparing for natural disasters, you might recommend getting a block watch started for security. In doing these things, you're helping yourself by helping others to prepare.

Even if your neighbors are in tune with the economic disaster being created by Washington and the Fed, it's sometimes difficult to get them to start thinking about preparing for an economic collapse because of the radical change of priorities that type of planning requires. Even though people like Newt Gingrich and Janet Napolitano have warned of the imminent danger of cyber-attacks or EMP attacks that could cripple our utility infrastructure, people go into a state of denial because the idea is too challenging to their normalcy bias, which tells them everything will be okay.

You have to ease people into the idea that calamities and collapses always happen. Think about how gradual your awakening was. You've probably been chewing on all of these ideas for months, if not years, before you finally decided to read this book.

Normalcy bias is the idea that, because something hasn't happened to me before, it can never happen to me. Because normalcy bias is so prevalent in our culture and difficult to break through, we recommend moving to an area where people are already living a life that has a reduced dependency on modern systems of support. A good ol' boy that grows his own food, hunts his own game, and raises his own chickens for eggs and meat is in a much better position for weathering an economic collapse, EMP attack, or other crisis, even if he's never heard of a prepper. Additionally, he is not in close proximity to those who are completely dependent on those support systems. Those who rely on the grocery store for every meal will become quite violent when they get hungry.

Beyond people, you want to be aware of other characteristics of the areas you consider. Economics can play a big part. If the town is in trouble financially, their money problems will become your money problems. City-Data.com provides tons of statistics about most small cities and towns in the country. You can find out the crime rate, the average income, the population, and even the percentages of folks who voted for what party in the last election. A town that voted four-to-one Republican in the last vote may not necessarily indicate everyone is a liberty-loving patriot, but you can be relatively sure that those that voted four-to-one Democrat are going to have some notions of entitlement and expect government to provide the solution in the next crisis. People who

expect government to fix everything, or even think it can, are not the ones you want to be around when the wheels fall off.

Money isn't everything, but if you're moving to an area that is extremely impoverished, it's not in a good position for another economic downturn. If you spend enough time looking around on City-Data.com, you'll see a major correlation between average income and the crime rate.

Take your health into consideration. If you need to be near a hospital because of health issues, don't get too far away from those facilities. Being so far out in the woods that going to town is an all-day trip isn't for everybody, especially if you're used to making several trips a week to the grocery.

You'll want to look for a few specific physical attributes in a good bug-out location. Of course, fresh water is going to be very important. Streams and creeks are excellent sources of water. It's a major plus if you can find a property with a good, reliable water source. If you get a retreat with a well, consider installing a solar-powered or manual backup pump.

Timber is a positive element for a number of reasons. Trees can help to mask your location from the road. They offer a reliable source of heating and cooking fuel. A forest provides a habitat for small game. Harvesting a few trees for lumber or firewood can provide a revenue stream to offset your taxes and other expenses associated with the retreat.

Check out the soil quality and keep in mind how level the terrain is. If the land is too hilly or if the soil is too bad, it won't be much good for a garden or large livestock. People often overestimate the amount of acreage they need to produce a garden to sustain them. If you plan it properly, you can produce enough food for a family of four on a one-acre plot.

While you need sufficient pasture area for cattle, you can raise chickens, rabbits, and even goats on a smaller property. Chickens will eat just about anything. The only drawback is that they are tempting prey for raccoons, foxes, and coyotes. You'll have to make sure you have a secure home for your chickens. Chickens are good for the soil in your yard or garden. They'll eat the bugs, leave droppings to fertilize, and till the soil as they scratch and peck. Cordon off different areas of the yard and move them around so they don't overwork any one particular part. Excess droppings can be added to your compost bin to make an even richer garden soil. Eggs are an easy-to-store source of protein and possible sustainable barter item if you produce more than you eat.

Rabbits reproduce very quickly and can provide an abundance of protein in a small section of your property. They eat grass and hay, as well as peelings and cores left over from your fruits and vegetables. Rabbit manure is another great addition to your compost bin for a heartier garden. Rabbits and chickens are conveniently sized so that one large animal will provide one meal for a family, so you don't have to think about preserving the leftovers in a grid-down situation.

Goats can thrive in hilly, rough terrain that isn't suitable for cattle. They will provide milk for drinking, cooking, or cheese making. While perfecting the art of cheese making may be a lifelong pursuit, the basic process is easy enough for anyone to learn. Once you've made cheese, it can be stored longer and more easily than milk, without refrigeration.

Cattle can provide a lot of meat and milk if you have sufficient pasture for grazing. A disadvantage of cattle is their size. Since they are easy to spot from a distance, they may attract unwanted attention in a post-collapse world. You'll also need a means of processing and preserving the large quantity of meat.

If you're purchasing a retreat location in addition to your home, look for a place that will provide a family getaway to enjoy. The family will be much more on board with the program if they have fun being there. Who doesn't love a beautiful cabin in the woods?

Especially since the 2008 housing bubble, it is typically easier to purchase a property with an existing structure than to build a structure. With the actions of the Fed and the money that has been flooded into the system by central bank intervention, that could soon change. Once all of those dollars start looking for hard assets, we could see another housing bubble in the future, so do your own research when deciding to buy raw land or something that already has a home.

If you don't expect to be able to buy a retreat with a home already on it, you might be able to find a few acres for as little as \$5,000. You could also find a small, used camping trailer in good condition for another \$5,000 from sites like Craigslist.

The best way to start looking into what's available is to visit Realtor.com. From there, you can enter a city or town you'd like to be near, select the size of the property you're looking for, the age and size of the home, and your price range. You can even save the searches and have Realtor.com send you email alerts whenever a new listing comes up that might interest you. Be sure to go to the More Filters tab at the top of the page and select "Include Areas Within 20 Miles" to give you the largest amount of results.

When you start looking for your retreat property, keep in mind that, while there are some good rules of thumb on what to look for, there is no perfect retreat that will meet everyone's needs. Just as your bug-out bag is going to be unique, so is your base. Also remember that, because you can't do everything, it doesn't mean you can't do anything. Do what you can to be a little more prepared today than you were yesterday.

AFTERWORD

Thank you for reading *The Seven Step Survival Plan*. If you enjoyed the book, please take a moment to leave a five-star review on Amazon.com.

Both authors are committed to educating others about being ready for whatever the future may hold.

David Kobler has made tons of videos that cover the entire spectrum of prepping in his [SouthernPrepper1](#) YouTube channel. All of this information is available for free. David speaks at preparedness expos, online, and in person across the country. David Kobler is also available for private consulting. You can get his rates for phone or in-person consultations by e-mailing him at SouthernPrepper1@yahoo.com.

Mark Goodwin produces two podcasts a week on [PrepperRecon.com](#). The podcasts feature interviews with economic and preparedness experts from around the world. If you are a fan of post-apocalyptic fiction, be sure to read Mark Goodwin's [Economic Collapse Chronicles](#) or his second series, [The Days of Noah](#).

In Mark's latest series, [Behold, Darkness and Sorrow](#), ambitious college student, Daniel Walker, has his world turned upside down when he begins having prophetic dreams about the judgment coming upon America. Through one of his dreams, Daniel learns about an imminent threat of an EMP attack which will wipe out America's electric grid sending the country into a technological dark age. Living in a nation where all life-sustaining systems of support are completely dependent on electricity and computers, the odds for survival are dismal. If he wants to live through the most catastrophic period in American history, Daniel will have to race against time to get prepared, before the lights go out.