



SURVIVAL SQUADS

The Survival Squads Field Guide

Best practices, tips & tricks for surviving severe emergencies — plus the complete supply checklist

This guide is free for everyone, member or not. It is written for ordinary households, not preppers with bunkers. The single biggest predictor of how a family comes through a disaster is not how much gear they own — it is whether they had a plan, practiced it once, and knew which neighbors to call. Read the first two pages today, print the checklist, and put a copy in your go-bag.

Inside: six governing principles · a one-page family plan · ten scenario playbooks · comms, sanitation and food strategy · the complete essential and suggested supply checklist.

Six principles that do most of the work

Plan for the first 72 hours, then the first 3 weeks

Outside help is usually organized within 72 hours, but in a widespread event it can take two to three weeks to reach every street. Build a 72-hour go-bag you can carry, and a 2-week shelter-in-place stock you can live on at home. Anything beyond that is a bonus, not a starting point.

Skills beat gear, and people beat both

A neighbor who is a nurse is worth more than a \$400 trauma kit nobody can use. Map who around you can do medical, mechanical, electrical, childcare, cooking, radio and heavy-lifting work — that map is your real inventory.

Two is one, one is none

Every critical function — light, water treatment, heat, communication, ignition — needs a backup that fails in a different way. If your backup for a dead phone is a second phone, you do not have a backup.

Redundancy is cheaper when it is shared

Eight households do not each need a generator. One generator, one chainsaw, one pressure canner and one ham radio spread across a squad — with everyone knowing who holds what — is cheaper and more capable than eight duplicate closets.

Write it down, offline

Phone contacts, addresses, medication doses, insurance numbers and meeting points all live behind a screen that may be dead. Keep one printed page per person, laminated or in a zip bag.

Practice once a year

Run a two-hour drill: kill the household breaker, cook a meal on your backup stove, send one message on your backup comms, and drive your evacuation route. You will find three broken assumptions every single time.

The one-page family emergency plan

- Primary meeting point within walking distance of home (end of the block, a specific tree, a mailbox).
- Secondary meeting point outside the neighborhood, in case the area is closed off.
- Out-of-area contact — one person in another state everyone calls or texts to check in, because local lines jam first.
- Two evacuation routes out of your region that do not use the same highway, each driven at least once.
- Who picks up which child, from which school, with a written authorization on file.
- Where the water shutoff, gas shutoff and main breaker are, plus the wrench needed, stored beside them.

- Pet plan: carriers, food, vaccination records, and two pet-friendly lodging options an hour away.
- Document pack: IDs, deeds, insurance, prescriptions, and photos of every room for claims — copies in a waterproof pouch and on an encrypted USB drive.

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Scenario playbooks

Power outage / grid down

DO

- Keep freezers closed — a full freezer holds safe temperature about 48 hours, a half-full one about 24.
- Run generators outdoors only, at least 20 feet from any window or door, and never in a garage even with the door open.
- Use battery or LED lighting rather than candles; open-flame fires spike during outages.
- Turn off or unplug major appliances so the restart surge does not damage them.
- Charge phones from a car or power bank, and switch phones to low-power mode immediately.

AVOID

- × Heating a home with a stove, oven, charcoal or camp stove — this is the leading cause of carbon monoxide deaths after storms.
- × Assuming the outage is short. Prepare as if it is 72 hours from hour one.

Water contamination or loss of service

DO

- Fill bathtubs, pots and every container the moment an outage or storm warning is issued.
- Boil water at a rolling boil for one minute (three minutes above 6,500 ft) to make it biologically safe.
- If you cannot boil: eight drops of unscented household bleach per gallon, mixed, then wait 30 minutes.
- Remember the 40+ gallons already in your water heater and the clean tank of each toilet.
- Filter cloudy water through cloth first, then treat — chemical treatment fails on turbid water.

AVOID

- × Treating chemical or fuel contamination with boiling — boiling concentrates chemicals rather than removing them.
- × Drinking pool or spa water; use it for sanitation and flushing only.

Wildfire

DO

- Maintain five feet of non-combustible ground around the house and clear gutters of needles and leaves.
- Leave early. Most wildfire deaths happen to people who evacuate late, in vehicles, on blocked roads.
- Pack N95 respirators, not surgical masks — smoke particulate is the long-tail health risk.
- Close all windows, remove sheer curtains, shut interior doors, and leave exterior lights on for firefighter visibility.
- Run a portable HEPA filter or a box-fan filter in one sealed clean-air room.

AVOID

- × Waiting for a mandatory order if you have anyone with mobility limits, livestock or a single road out.
- × Returning before utilities are cleared — hot spots, downed lines and ash pits injure returnees.

Hurricane / flood

DO

- Know your evacuation zone and your elevation; flooding, not wind, causes most deaths.
- Move vehicles, documents and electronics to high ground 48 hours out, not 6.
- Turn around, do not drown — six inches of moving water knocks an adult down, twelve floats most cars.
- Photograph every room before the storm for insurance claims afterward.
- Treat all floodwater as sewage: gloves, boots, and hand hygiene after any contact.

AVOID

- × Sheltering in an attic without a way onto the roof.
- × Restoring power to a flooded panel before an electrician inspects it.

Tornado / severe wind

DO

- Get to the lowest floor, most interior room, with as many walls between you and the outside as possible.
- Cover your head and neck; wear shoes — most injuries after a tornado are foot and head lacerations from debris.
- Keep helmets for children within reach of the shelter spot.
- Have a NOAA weather radio with battery backup; sirens are outdoor warnings and are not meant to wake you.

AVOID

- × Sheltering in a mobile home or under a highway overpass — both are more dangerous than a low ditch.
- × Opening windows to 'equalize pressure' — it is a myth and wastes seconds.

Extreme heat

DO

- Identify one room you can keep cool and consolidate the household there.
- Hydrate on a schedule, not on thirst; add electrolytes when sweating for hours.
- Check on elderly neighbors twice daily — heat deaths cluster among people living alone.
- Know the difference: heat exhaustion is pale, clammy and sweaty; heat stroke is hot, confused and often dry — heat stroke is a 911 emergency.

AVOID

- × Relying on fans alone above roughly 95°F; moving hot air accelerates dehydration.
- × Leaving any person or pet in a parked vehicle, even briefly.

Extreme cold / ice storm

DO

- Insulate one room and live in it: close off the rest, hang blankets over doorways, cover windows at night.
- Dress in three layers — wicking base, insulating mid, wind/water shell — and always cover the head.
- Let faucets drip and open cabinet doors under sinks to prevent burst pipes.
- Keep the vehicle above half a tank, with blankets, water and traction material in the trunk.

AVOID

- × Alcohol as a warming strategy; it accelerates heat loss.
- × Running a vehicle in a garage or with a snow-blocked exhaust pipe.

Earthquake

DO

- Drop, cover and hold on. Stay where you are — most injuries happen when people move during shaking.
- Strap water heaters, bookcases and heavy wall art; secure them before, because you cannot after.
- Expect aftershocks and evacuate damaged buildings between them, not during.
- Shut off gas only if you smell or hear a leak; unnecessary shutoffs require a utility visit to restore.

AVOID

- × Doorways — modern ones are no stronger than the rest of the frame.
- × Elevators, and running outside past falling façades and glass.

Medical emergency without EMS

DO

- Stop the bleed first: direct pressure, packing, then a tourniquet high and tight on a limb if pressure fails.
- Keep a 30-day buffer of every prescription and a written list of doses, allergies and conditions per person.
- Take a Stop the Bleed and a wilderness or basic first-aid class — perishable skills need refreshing every two years.
- Know which squad member has medical training and how to reach them without a cell network.

AVOID

- × Moving a suspected spinal injury unless the scene itself is lethal.
- × Improvising antibiotics; infection control is hygiene, irrigation and clean dressings first.

Civil disruption / evacuation

DO

- Leave before the roads fill; being early is the entire strategy.
- Keep vehicles above half a tank as a standing rule during any watch or warning season.
- Carry small bills in cash — card networks fail with the grid.
- Agree on a check-in cadence and a code word that means 'come get me' or 'do not come'.

AVOID

- × Broadcasting your inventory or your absence on social media.
- × Splitting the group without a written rally point and time window.

Communications when the network is down

- Text, do not call. SMS gets through congested networks when voice calls fail.
- Set an out-of-area contact as the hub, so local congestion does not break the chain.
- Give every squad a primary and backup radio plan: FRS/GMRS channel and privacy code for short range, ham 2m simplex frequency for longer, plus a listening schedule (for example, top of every even hour).
- Keep a NOAA weather radio with hand-crank or solar charging.
- Print the contact tree: who calls whom, in what order, with numbers written out.
- Establish a physical message drop — a mailbox, a marked post — for the case where nothing electronic works.

Sanitation, the thing nobody plans for

- Two 5-gallon buckets with a snap-on toilet seat, heavy contractor bags and sawdust, kitty litter or peat moss for cover material.
- Plan roughly 1 gallon of water per person per day for hygiene and flushing on top of drinking water.
- Soap and hand-washing beat sanitizer for anything involving food or waste.
- Bag and seal waste, store away from living space and water sources, and never bury near a well or creek.
- Menstrual supplies, diapers and incontinence supplies for the full planning window — these disappear from shelves fastest.

Food strategy

- Store what you already eat, then eat what you store — rotate first in, first out, and nothing goes to waste.
- Prioritize calorie density and zero-cook options for the first 72 hours: nut butter, tuna pouches, tortillas, dried fruit, bars.
- Aim for about 2,000 calories per adult per day as a floor, more for cold, labor or nursing.
- Keep comfort food, coffee, spices and hard candy — morale is a survival resource, especially with children.
- Have two cooking methods that need no grid: a propane or butane stove and a rocket or wood stove, both used outdoors.
- Store a manual can opener with the food, not in the kitchen drawer.

The supply checklist

Essential items cover the two-week window. Suggested items extend you toward 30 days or make life meaningfully easier. Print the companion checklist sheet to tick these off.

Water

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ 1 gallon per person per day, 2-week minimum at home
- ☐ 72-hour portable water in the go-bag (3 liters per person)
- ☐ Water filter rated for bacteria and protozoa (0.2 micron or better)
- ☐ Purification tablets or unscented household bleach with dropper
- ☐ Collapsible 5-gallon jugs plus a bathtub bladder
- ☐ Metal pot for boiling

SUGGESTED

- ☐ Gravity filter for group use
- ☐ Rain catchment barrel and first-flush diverter
- ☐ Water test strips
- ☐ Hose rated as potable for transfer

Food

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ 14 days of shelf-stable food per person, rotated
- ☐ 3 days of no-cook food in the go-bag
- ☐ Manual can opener
- ☐ Off-grid stove with fuel for 14 days
- ☐ Salt, sugar, oil, spices, coffee or tea
- ☐ Infant formula, pet food and special-diet items as applicable

SUGGESTED

- ☐ Freeze-dried long-term buckets for the 30-day tier
- ☐ Cast iron and a Dutch oven
- ☐ Sprouting seeds or a garden plan for fresh nutrients
- ☐ Vacuum sealer and food-grade buckets with gamma lids

Medical

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ Full first-aid kit with trauma shears and a CPR barrier
- ☐ Tourniquet and hemostatic gauze, plus training to use them
- ☐ 30-day supply of all prescriptions
- ☐ Pain relievers, antihistamine, anti-diarrheal, rehydration salts
- ☐ Thermometer, tweezers, splint, elastic wrap
- ☐ Printed medical page per person: conditions, doses, allergies, doctors

SUGGESTED

- ☐ Suture or wound-closure kit if trained
- ☐ Blood-pressure cuff and pulse oximeter
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses and hearing-aid batteries
- ☐ N95 respirators, one per person per day of smoke

Light, power & heat

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ Headlamp per person plus spare batteries
- ☐ Two lanterns and a hand-crank or solar light
- ☐ Power bank sized to at least four phone charges
- ☐ Weather radio (NOAA) with crank or solar
- ☐ Warm sleeping bag or wool blankets rated for local winter lows
- ☐ Fire: lighter, stormproof matches, ferro rod, tinder

SUGGESTED

- ☐ Solar panel with a small battery station
- ☐ Generator with fuel stabilizer and a transfer plan
- ☐ Indoor-rated propane heater with a CO detector
- ☐ Battery CO and smoke detectors on every level

Shelter & warmth

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ Tarp, paracord and duct tape
- ☐ Emergency bivvy or space blanket per person
- ☐ Work gloves and sturdy boots per person
- ☐ Rain shell and layered clothing set per person
- ☐ Plastic sheeting and staples for a sealed room

SUGGESTED

- ☐ Four-season tent for the squad
- ☐ Wool base layers and extra socks
- ☐ Canvas repair kit and spare tarps

Sanitation & hygiene

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ Bucket toilet with seat, bags and cover material
- ☐ Toilet paper for the planning window
- ☐ Soap, hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes
- ☐ Trash bags, heavy duty
- ☐ Feminine hygiene, diapers, wipes as applicable

SUGGESTED

- ☐ Portable camp shower
- ☐ Bleach for surface disinfection
- ☐ Nitrile gloves and N95 masks for cleanup

Tools & repair

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ Multi-tool and a fixed-blade knife
- ☐ Adjustable wrench sized for the gas shutoff, kept at the meter
- ☐ Hammer, pry bar, hand saw
- ☐ Duct tape, zip ties, wire, tarp clips
- ☐ Fire extinguisher (ABC) on each floor

SUGGESTED

- ☐ Chainsaw with chaps, fuel and a spare chain
- ☐ Cordless drill with charged spares
- ☐ Shovel, axe, bolt cutters
- ☐ Tire plug kit and 12V compressor

Communications

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ FRS/GMRS radios with charged spares and a written channel plan
- ☐ Printed contact tree and out-of-area contact
- ☐ Paper maps of the region with routes marked
- ☐ Whistle per person

SUGGESTED

- ☐ Ham radio license and a 2m/70cm handheld
- ☐ Satellite messenger for the squad
- ☐ Signal mirror and chem lights

Documents & cash

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ Waterproof pouch: IDs, insurance, deeds, birth certificates, medical records
- ☐ Encrypted USB with scans and room-by-room home photos
- ☐ \$200–\$500 in small bills per household
- ☐ Written list of account and policy numbers

SUGGESTED

- ☐ Notarized child-pickup authorizations
- ☐ Copies stored with the out-of-area contact
- ☐ Pet vaccination records and microchip numbers

Squad-level shared assets

ESSENTIAL

- ☐ Roster of who holds what gear and which skills
- ☐ Shared meeting points, primary and secondary
- ☐ Offline packet printed and carried by every household
- ☐ Agreed radio schedule and check-in cadence

SUGGESTED

- ☐ Shared generator, chainsaw, pressure canner, cargo trailer
- ☐ Pooled bulk food and fuel storage with a rotation owner
- ☐ Annual squad drill on the calendar
- ☐ One trained medic, one trained radio operator, one trained cook per squad

Preparedness is not a purchase, it is a habit. Pick one line from this checklist each week, and one drill each year. In twelve months you will be the household your street depends on — and if you build a squad around you, your whole block will be.

Size your own numbers with the free calculator at SurvivalSquads.co/calculator — water, calories, food weight and consumables for every person in your squad.

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