

# Were You Prepared?

Is there anyone out there who still doesn't take emergency preparedness seriously?

Putting COVID aside for a moment, the recent winter storm is another great reason to have been prepared ahead of time. How many of you needed to go to the grocery store and couldn't get there? Or risked icy roads and consumed valuable gas looking for stores that were open. How many of you were without power for a significant amount of time? How many of you are still without power? How many were without phone service? How many of you had busted pipes or no hot water? Who didn't winterize their vehicle? Some of you lost Internet access even if you didn't lose power. If that's not a disaster, I don't know what is...

Like the flu, winter happens every year. Granted this one is the worst in my memory, but the preparations are the same, regardless of severity. Winterize your home. Cover outside faucets and pipes, check the insulation on your water heater, doors and windows, have a plan for power outages, and have everything ready before winter strikes in late November. (I remember when the first freeze didn't happen until late December. Where is Global Warming when you need it?)

COVID taught us what to do when stuck at home, but that doesn't do much good if there is no Internet or electricity. And almost like clockwork, if Punxsutawney Phil predicts 6 more weeks of winter, it almost guarantees at least one more winter storm before spring. Were you prepared?

Another winter hazard is dehydration. Most people don't drink enough water any time of the year, but it is critical that you have enough water to keep yourself healthy. Your heart, brain, digestive system, immune system and your ability to generate heat (or perspire) all depend on drinking enough water throughout the day, even during winter freezes. Seniors, especially are susceptible to dehydration. And don't think that beer or soda are adequate substitutes for pure water.

If you use natural gas or propane for heat, you should have carbon monoxide detectors throughout your home. Gas heaters need regular maintenance to ensure proper combustion. Gasoline generators should never be placed indoors. You can run an extension cord inside for light and heat but the cords and generator need regular maintenance also. Be careful to not overload the amperage capacity of your generator and have the capability to safely store your fuel. A generator can also power your modem if Internet service still works.

Power outages and busted pipes can drive people from their homes in winter. Do you have a plan for that? At a minimum, your Go Bag should have clothing, toiletries, money, prescriptions and ID's. Go bags, like anything else, require regular maintenance and inspection. Replacing batteries in radios and flashlights, updating meds, and changing out seasonal clothing should be a semi-annual routine.

Many of us had no phone service, but texting sometimes worked. Without electricity, how do you charge your phone? Get a small battery bank for each cell phone and keep it charged. Each unit is about \$20-\$30 and can charge a phone 2-3 times on a charge. Use your phone only when needed when the power is out. Cell phones can drain your battery searching for service so turn that feature off when cell service isn't available. The solar charger versions are more expensive but can be recharged by sunlight.

Unconventional heating or lighting options or power surges could lead to uncontrollable fires. Can you evacuate your home with all your family members and everything you need to survive temporarily in sub-freezing weather? Will you have your insurance documents, ID's, and money for a hotel or arrangements with family or friends for a place to stay, and begin the steps to recovery?

For Pete's sake, if you are going to use your car to stay warm or charge your phone or computer, open the garage door to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Even in the open, carbon monoxide can leak into your vehicle. And what are you going to do when you are out of gas or have a dead battery? And if you don't know how to drive on icy roads, then don't!

What if there is a medical emergency? Do you know basic first aid? Under icy conditions, first responders may be delayed by other calls or not be able to get to you at all. You must be able to treat yourself or a family member until first responders can get to you or you can get safely to a hospital. You need to store first aid supplies and know how to use them. There is a Stop-the-Bleed program that teaches you how to properly use a tourniquet. (<https://www.stopthebleed.org/>) The Fire Department can teach Stop-the-Bleed to a group. The County Citizen Emergency Response Team course teaches basic first aid basic triage, valuable knowledge even if you don't join the volunteer unit. (<https://www.co.kerr.tx.us/sheriff/cert/>) And of course, the local Red Cross is available to teach first aid classes.

Don't forget your pets. Multiple days of subfreezing temperatures may be too much for even the hardiest house pets. If your animal is used to being outside all the time, at least have some shelter for them. If you have to evacuate, will you take your pets with you? Do not risk your life to rescue a pet from a fire. The people who depend on you will not appreciate the sacrifice. Food, water and medicine storage considerations apply to animals and pets in your care, as well as your family.

The winter storm probably put a dent in the already declining COVID infection rate, but COVID will be with us for a while longer. The new and future variants may prolong the suffering. People have gotten sloppy about how they wear their masks and how often they wash their hands. And how many of you are wearing a mask with no eye protection? The cough or sneeze or touch that can transfer a droplet to your nose or mouth can also infect the tear duct at your eye. You should continue to wash your hands often. Every time you return home or are in close proximity to anyone who does not live with you, or every time you leave a store, you should be washing your hands or using hand sanitizer. Public areas should be sanitized regularly. Do not let your guard down, even if you get the vaccine. It will be weeks or months before everyone is vaccinated.

Emergency Preparedness is for everyone. Thousands of people are killed or injured by preventable situations every day, whether they are natural or man-made. Preparedness forces you to consider the probable, possible and likely events and prepare for them. Add accidents and medical emergencies to the list of potential hazards and you have the groundwork for Emergency Preparedness. Being aware of what could happen is half the battle. Hurricane season starts in June. Texas is famous for its hot, dry summers and the next flu season is waiting around the corner. And after that, another winter. Will you be ready?

Go to [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) for more information on Preparedness. The Hill Country Preppers have been conducting monthly meetings for almost nine years on a variety of preparedness topics. If any of the above information is new to you, then you need to come to more of our meetings. Call me at 830-739-5990 or send an email to [hcpreppers@gmail.com](mailto:hcpreppers@gmail.com) for more information.

Stephen Lehman  
Hill Country Preppers