



# How to Survive a Breakdown of the Social Order

Sometimes even governments can be stressed beyond their breaking-points. A good example is the chaos that ensued in New Orleans in the absence of action from the local government or a timely effective federal response in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In such troubled times, people are forced to fend for themselves and their families, by any means necessary. The following tips will help you and your loved ones survive a breakdown of the social order until such time that help can arrive, or, if help does not come, prepare you towards the long-term goal of rebuilding society in the aftermath.

## Steps

- 1 Remain calm at all times.** There may be lots of frightened, desperate people wandering in the aftermath of a breakdown of the social order: this is the greatest danger of all. Do not give in to panic -- it impairs rational thinking and adds to the overall chaos.
- 2 Make sure that the social order really has broken down, rather than some local disturbance, such as a riot, uprising, or strike.**
  - If you have access to media, check local radio and television news stations, or dial to an emergency station. The government, if communications systems are still functional, should be broadcasting emergency information alerting its citizens of the danger.
  - Remember: a social breakdown is not caused by a specific disaster, but arises out of the actions of individual people
- 3 Take measure of your overall surroundings.**
  - Ask yourself: What resources do I have access to? What do I need? Where do I go to get what I need? What don't I need? A clear list of essentials is vital to making a solid survival plan.
- 4 Consider storing 2 weeks to 3 months supply of items that will make your life easier during a period of social breakdown.** If you are stockpiling supplies, you may not want to make it publicly known. You don't want everyone converting your house into the new local grocery store.

- Warm clothing is essential if you live in a climate where it gets cold. Electricity and natural gas may become unavailable for weeks. Have good coats, warm blankets sleeping bags, winter boots, gloves, hats, etc.
- Water: If you can stay warm your next essential will be drinking water. The water pressure may fail for any number of reasons. Of course, your hot water heater is one source of drinking water but it may be filled with sediment. Consider storing water in food grade containers in case of an emergency. 5 gallon (18.9 L) containers can be moved if needed. 55 gallon (208.2 L) barrels are great but impossible to move in an emergency. Store 1 gallon (3.8 L) of water per person per day. A family of 4 will need at least 120 gallons (454.2 L) to survive 30 days.
- Sanitation: You're warm and have plenty to drink. The next essential is keeping clean or sickness will quickly become devastating. If there is no water pressure, the toilet can be flushed by dumping a gallon of water into the bowl after use. Try to use old dish washing or bathing water. Don't waste your drinking water. If there is no water or functioning sewer establish a latrine or a waste bucket far from sleeping eating and living areas. Use a bit of that drinking water to wash hands. It is worth it to stay healthy.
- Defense: Often, in social breakdown, there are people who may be very dangerous and violent due to the lack of law enforcement. One must defend what resources they have from theft. During the 1992 Los Angeles riots, Korean business owners were able to defend their businesses with firearms from being looted and burned by rioters. Owning a weapon and sufficient ammunition may be critical for survival. Also, one must know how to maintain and use the weapon in case a situation might arise. Just make sure that the weapon is legal and if applicable, registered.

## **5 Consolidate your immediate support networks:** friends, close coworkers, family, and neighbors.

- No man is an island; it is crucial to remain connected to a community if one is to survive a breakdown of government. Make sure that your loved ones are safe by keeping them close by.

## **6 Venture out to procure your needed supplies.**

- Be aware: in the immediate aftermath of a disastrous breakdown of the social order, if you are in an urban area, there will likely be many, many people looking for the same thing. Looting will be rampant and widespread, and in the chaos, you may not be able to reach your ideal supply centers.
- Have contingencies in mind: cast your net wide, but locally. Do not venture too far from your base of operations in search of needed supplies, and if other people are willing to fight you for it, back away. The key is to be adaptable and to survive.

## **7 Having secured your supplies, it will be time to consolidate things back at home.** This will call for you to become an effective leader: oftentimes even a well-prepared group can break down due to internal tensions.

- Keep a level head and try to be fair and impartial in dealing with difficult or stressful situations between people.
- You will all be under a great deal of stress: try to encourage stress-relieving activities, such as plenty of exercise, board games and puzzles, reading, and investing time in learning useful practical skills.
- Delegate resources efficiently and according to need. Although some will obviously want special treatment, remember to keep in mind that your resources are limited. If necessary, use triage.
- Give everyone a useful task. Idle hands are the devil's plaything.
- Resolve arguments before they can occur. If you sense tension or anxiety growing between two people, try to get the issue out into the open before it can turn into a potentially deadly confrontation.
- If conflicts are unavoidable, try first negotiating a compromise: speak to each person involved on a personal basis -- don't try to be a dictator. Calm spirits by speaking in a firm, but soothing tone. If the situation continues to degenerate, get friendly, neutral parties to restrain the combatants.

## **8 Having created your small community, secured a supply of resources, and taken charge of its leadership, you will be well prepared to wait out the social breakdown until the rule of law is restored.**

## **9 If it is truly catastrophic, resulting in national destruction and a regression of civilization, you will need to take further steps to ensure that your community becomes the nucleus for the rebirth of society.**

## Rebuilding Society

- The worst case scenario is one in which the whole of society breaks down, irreparably, and retrogresses into a new Dark Age. In this case, the little band that you've drawn together will not be enough to make it alone: it will still be drawing upon what supplies it can scavenge from the area around, and those will dwindle in the following weeks.
- You will need to forge your community into an effective micro-society, self-sufficient in all respects, in order to begin rebuilding civilization from the ashes.
- For this, urban survival will not nearly be sufficient. Most urban areas do not have enough fertile land to support gardens and agriculture that can feed even a modest community. You will need to branch out from your safe shelter to the countryside.
- Take steps to ensure that you maintain the knowledge of the past society, or, at the very least, preserve the seeds for a future Renaissance. Invest time in educating the future generations. Preserve useful books, such as those on medicine, engineering, agriculture, mathematics, philosophy, literature, and the sciences.
- Resist the urge to conquer competing nearby tribes. Collaboration is a must, else, it may doom yourself and future generations to hundreds of years of endemic tribal warfare. Exhaust all other diplomatic options before deciding upon the use of force.
- Keep in mind the long-term future goals. Assess your current situation and try to envision the current level of economic activity extended fifty or a hundred years hence. Remember: rebuilding society's former glory is your goal - hence, invest in cottage industries and infrastructure that can later expand.
- Choose an effective, efficient form of government for your given culture and its needs. Do not press heedlessly to a single ideological dogma. Be flexible.

## Tips

- Remain in communication with community leaders and local authorities
- Wear comfortable clothes
- Have some cash on hand as ATM machines may empty quickly.
- "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" may be a tired slogan, but it is essentially practical in this situation.
- Don't try to be a hero; do not risk your life needlessly.
- Have access to a stockpile of supplies, such as first-aid, batteries, and food
- Remember to have a sufficient amount of weapons and ammunition (hunting bows, hunting rifles, pistols, and pepper spray for personal defense against wild animals or violent persons) to support yourself and others. Though you may never use them it is better to have them and not need them than to not have them at all.
- Get hand tools in case the power is gone, rendering electric tools useless (For example, hand saws, hand drill, hand planes, and hammers).
- Devote your leisure time to learning useful skills, such as carpentry, archery, mechanics, mathematics, plumbing, engineering, medical, or agriculture
- Remain hydrated; get plenty of fresh, clean water

## Warnings

- The human body can survive at least a week without food, but less than three days without water. A good, clean water supply is crucial.
- Stay away from armed people or people who seem to be behaving erratically: the most dangerous animal on earth is the human being.
- Disease will be extremely dangerous in the social breakdown, with restricted access to medical supplies and medical professionals: be extremely cautious, as even a slipped disk, broken limb, or pulled muscle or tendon can be life threatening. Learn first aid and consult medical manuals if possible.
- If you engage in illegal activities like looting, you may be held accountable by law enforcement if order returns

## Sources and Citations

- <https://www.ready.gov/are-you-ready-guide>
- <http://www.ready.gov/>

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