

Mike's Bugout Bag FAQ. v2.2 (Copyright Mike S. Medintz, 1998)

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All comments, constructive criticism, compliments, and suggestions should be sent to me at medintz@idir.net and/or posted to the misc.survivalism newsgroup (I check both daily). Unconstructive criticism and rude remarks should be sent somewhere else-I'll welcome civil disagreement but none other.

"Survivalism" as it's called in the mass media is more an art than a science-there are dang few right or wrong answers. The unofficial motto of our newsgroup is "Your Mileage May Vary," and rightly so. These represent the best answers that I can find for my situation, generalized as much as possible without losing all general value. Your situation is probably a fair bit different, and you should use your local conditions and local needs to drive your planning. This document is neither a recipe, nor a road map. It's merely a prod to tell you a few of the problems that you should be pondering.

1) What is a bugout bag?

A bugout bag is a bag that a person keeps pre-packed for emergencies. Should that person be forced to evacuate their home and be unable to call upon their usual services due to emergency, the bugout bag is essentially what they live out of.

2) How do I decide if I need one?

Is there ANYTHING that you need to worry about that could cause either a lack of essential services or a need to evacuate?

Let me put it another way: Do you live in a utopia with absolutely no severe weather, no floods, no hailstones, no crime, no riots, no tornadoes, no hurricanes, no meteor strikes, no terrorism, and is the very picture of Heaven on Earth? I doubt it. Therefore, you need a bugout bag.

2.5) How do I decide whether or not I need to bug out?

That's a toughie. It depends upon the incident.

In cases of hurricanes, it's generally a good idea if you're directly in the hurricane's path. Modern houses simply cannot be expected to withstand the strong winds that hurricanes bring. Ditto wildfires. They don't bring high winds, but they will burn your house down around you if they get there.

On the other hand, tornadoes are probably a good excuse to hole up in the basement. The damage from tornadoes is extremely localized, and the lead time is too short.

In the case of earthquakes, there's no lead time at all to be able to escape and an attempt will more often than not result in being stuck in traffic-one of the worst situations to be in.

In the case of a HazMat spill, you almost certainly should get the hell

out. Hazardous Materials got their name for a reason, and it's extremely difficult to make a house airtight to the degree necessary.

Civil disturbance is one of the trickiest questions. If the riot is severe, and appears to be spreading towards your neighborhood, then your best bet is to run. On the other hand, if the rioting is not spreading your way, then to run might result in being stuck in traffic, or in the fighting.

Ultimately, the decision of whether to bug out or sit tight will have to be made based upon your own individual situation. Obviously, you will want to select the option that maximizes your chances of survival. Therefore, you'll want to consider the following:

a) What is my threat? Is my home adequately hardened against this threat?

b) If I leave, do I have a specific destination in mind? Will I become a refugee? Is the threat at home so serious that I am willing to risk being a refugee or entering a shelter?

c) Can I get there from here? Do I have a route pre-planned and alternate routes figured out? Are there any choke points on my route such as bridges or freeways that might be out of service because of weather or rioting or chemical spills?

d) Am I in less danger at home than at my bugout destination?

3) What do I put in this bag?

Let that be determined by what may cause you to have to bug out.

The U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency makes certain recommendations. They recommend that each person keep food, water, clothing appropriate to the season, medicines, and sanitary needs for a bare minimum of three days. As a simple fact, relief agencies can not be relied upon to begin supplying any real level of relief services for a minimum of 72 hours and are overtaxed and overextended even when running at their maximum efficiency. The less that you need to rely on a service that may or may not be available, the safer you can justifiably feel. For this reason, I personally would recommend a bare minimum of a week's supplies, assuming that food, gasoline, batteries, clean water, and clean clothing can not be found, and that police, fire, and ambulance service will be severely overextended and therefore not entirely reliable..

3.1) Food:

Figure a bare minimum of 2000 calories of food with 60 grams of protein per day, biased heavily towards starches but with extra fats in the winter. Cooking supplies (stoves, firewood, gas) will be limited- this whole thing will be like a one-man birthday party. You get no presents that you didn't bring for yourself.

Personally, I like ramen noodles, powerbars, summer sausage or beef jerky, trail mix, and vitamin supplements. Boring fare indeed, but you can live off of it for a while if need be. Some correspondents have suggested macaroni carried in ziplock bags, some have said salt pork and ship's biscuit, and therefore we conclude that Your Mileage May Vary. If you don't reasonably expect to have to travel a significant distance on foot, you can supplement that with canned foods that can be eaten cold or reheated as possible. Canned stew, canned spaghetti, canned pork and beans, all work well for this. (In all things, these should be foods that you're somewhat

accustomed to, lest you get sick from 'intestinal culture shock.')

Also, if you drink coffee, tea, or pop on a regular basis, you may be a caffeine addict without knowing it. Sudden deprivation may affect your judgement or your ability to think, sleep, or work, and keeping coffee or tea in your bag is advised. As a matter of fact, some wilderness Emergency Medical Technicians have been seen to carry caffeine pills (Vivarin or similar) for this very reason. In the same vein, smokers or recent ex-smokers like myself should keep nicotine gum or patches packed-staying quit under the stress of an emergency evacuation is not going to be the easiest thing in the world.

Any good book on backpacking should have a number of recipes involving lightweight food that requires no refrigeration. The "Sports" section of the local Barne's and Noble or the back of the Sierra Club magazine both have a number of books about this very subject. Also, Backpacker magazine has recipes for lightweight foods that don't need refrigeration, or so my spies inform me. And then there's the Boy Scouts of America Cooking merit badge pamphlet, with a few recipes of its own. (I'd suggest a bottle of tabasco sauce would improve ANY of them)

3.2) Water:

The average human needs a gallon per day for drinking alone. There ain't any two ways around it-without water you will die within three days, and it won't be a pleasant way to go. (It has been suggested by one m.s correspondent that it's possible to live on half of this if you don't move much, don't move at all except in the cool of the night, and ration sweat ruthlessly. Given how likely it is that you'll be able to sit still for three days, however, I stand by my claim of a gallon a day, more in summer and more in deserts)

There are multiple ways to store water. The less-imaginative (and still quite successful) person would keep water jugs of the type used in car camping. Some people will take a clean 2-liter pop bottle, fill it about 3/4 full from the tap, and add a small amount of bleach. Then, cap the bottle and freeze it. This ensures that the drinking water in question will be cold and potable (when thawed), and can be used to keep perishables from spoiling.

Some people reported using 15-gallon pony kegs (normally used for beer) to store drinking water. I've never tried this, but it does seem feasible.

Beyond drinking water, you'll also need water for basic hygiene. That starts at another gallon a day, and the sky's the limit.

Do you have a way to purify water? The easiest method that I know of is to treat the water with an iodine preparation such as Potable Aqua or PolarPure. I use PolarPure, as it's probably the cheapest way for an individual to disinfect water, but Potable Aqua is probably a bit easier. My emergency bag also contains a MSR Miniworks water filter with a spare filter element. See Patton Turner's Water Purification FAQ elsewhere on this web site for more info.

3.3) Medicines:

In short, if you don't know how to use it, don't bother keeping it.

If you use any medicine on a regular basis, make sure you have a supply on hand, be it nitro pills, Paxil, allergy medicine, birth-control pills, or whatever.

Anything else, don't keep it if you don't know how to use it. If you've never been trained or instructed in the use of a particular medicine by a competent medical professional, then remedy that deficiency before adding to your stash.

For what it's worth, an OTC pain reliever, an antacid, an antihistamine, and some sort of anti-diarrhea med have been known to come in pretty durn handy. If you expect to have to evacuate to a place above 8,000 feet or therabouts, you might want to talk to your doctor about drugs to treat altitude sickness.

While not strictly a drug, insect repellent and bug nets have their place. Mostquitoes and ticks are a royal pain, and chiggers can make you almost with you'd stayed behind and died. Some people claim that garlic and/or lots of B vitamins work quite well...personally, I prefer a pure liquid DEET mixture. Again, YMMV. (Recent fluff pieces on CNN have mentioned that the mosquito genus Anopheles, which carries malaria, has been spotted in small areas of the southern US for the first time in decades. If you live in Florida or Texas that should affect your planning, as a disaster that makes you evacuate may also interrupt mosquito abatement)

Few first aid skills can be self-taught. It's heartily advised that you seek a high pre-professional level of skill in first aid (First Responder or EMT would be good) and supplement that with a book such as Auerbach's Medicine for the Outdoors AND consultation with your doctor regarding the material. Through your doctor, you can also get medicines that are potentially quite useful but not OTC.

3.4) Hygienic needs:

First and foremost, soap. When regular medical attention is less than fully reliable, the ability to prevent infection becomes even more important. Maybe you have a topical antibiotic like Neosporin (as most of us do) but that's not much help until you already get infected.

Along with the soap, a clean hand towel makes washing easier.

Pre-moistened towellettes like the ones they give out on airplanes, or alcohol prep pads, can make cleaning a little easier. Just remember to pack out your trash. (BTW, alcohol pads on broken or cut skin sting like hell-be forewarned)

Need one mention toilet paper? Non-poison-sumac leaves, cornhusks, et cetera aren't always so easy to find. Diapers if you have small children travelling with you.

Got any plans for sunburn or windburn? Some Chapstick and a bottle of SPF 15 sunblock is essential unless you plan to stay inside. Even then, sunblock is cheap. (And don't try to get out of it based upon it being winter-snow reflects a lot of sunlight right into your face. For that reason, a good pair of impact-resistant sunglasses is useful in summer and essential in winter.)

3.5) Light

Hard to see without it.

You'll need a good, solid, durable flashlight at the least. I personally keep a 2AA Mini-Maglite with at least one spare bulb and two changes of spare batteries dedicated to the bugout bag, and also have a 2D MagLite

with extra bulb and batteries next to the bed.

Beyond that, an area light can be rather useful. Something like a lantern and/or a bunch of Cyalume lightsticks are quite useful for actually trying to work under bad lighting conditions.

If you go with a lantern, using a lantern capable of burning the same fuel as your stove, space heater, whatever makes your supply situation a _lot_ simpler.

Let your needs drive your planning.

3.6) Navigation:

How well do you know the roads in your county? In the neighboring counties? Think you have it perfect?

I thought so.

There's no shame in that-six, seven counties make a _lot_ of roads to memorize. I couldn't do it for Douglas County, Kansas, and I know better than to even try for something as complex as Chicago.

Start with a decent compass (I like the Silva Ranger 15CL, but that's a little feature-rich and high-dollar for most people who just want a backup). A cheaper Silva or Suunto should be adequate for the non-compass-obsessed <vbg>. Carrying a second compass to avoid the problem of one getting a little out of whack is advised. Avoid the really cheap ones.

Add to that both road maps and topo maps for your county and the surrounding counties. Road maps are available from the American Automobile Association (membership with them is valuable in any case, and especially when you need either maps, towing, or a bond card) or a respectable bookstore, and topo maps can be had from the U.S. Geological Survey or state Geological Survey. In many areas, both types are available from the county surveyor's office. County Surveyors also know the magnetic declination of your county, and can help you get your compass properly adjusted.

Beyond that, GPS and other toys may be nice, but I don't much care for them. Too much money for a gadget that does what your brain and a map can do, and they'll make you overconfident besides. And let's not even get started on batteries.

The Boy Scouts of America publishes a merit badge pamphlet on Orienteering. While not being a perfect manual, this pamphlet is both inexpensive and will provide a more-or-less adequate education-especially when supplemented with the sort of expert instruction that can be had from an Outward Bound or Sierra Club outing.

3.7) Clothing and Shelter:

Pack at least one full change appropriate to the season, plus extra underwear and socks. (Note: 'Appropriate to the season' means _no_ cotton outerwear or longjohns in the winter-that's asking to freeze to death).

Then add a coat. Then a hat. Then gloves. Then footwear (I like a pair of Wolverine steel-toed boots with lug soles, and adding a pair of wool-lined mukluks in the winter and track shoes or sandals in the summer).

At the bare minimum, you'll need a tarp of some kind to keep the wind and

rain off-and that's in the summer. In the winter, you'll need to add a decent sleeping bag, shell, and mattress. Luxury is unimportant, but being able to remain warm even with wet equipment is critical.

It would be wise to refer to a good reference on backpacking for ideas on what to wear.

3.8) Tools

A knife is essential-sturdy, sharp knives are among the most useful tools made. The big "rambo" knives are almost useless, though. A sturdy folder (Buck or Schrade or Gerber or the like) and _maybe_ a midsize sheath knife or kukri/parang is all you need.

Pliers, shovels/E-tools can be helpful, but can also be extra weight. A good compromise are the so-called "Leatherman" tools-I personally like the Gerber version over the Leatherman. It's ten bucks more, but the handles don't pinch the skin off your fingers when you use the pliers)

Duct tape can fix anything-they don't call it the "handyman's best friend" for nothing.

As for other tools, well, let your needs drive your plans.

If you bring canned food, bring a can opener. You can get cheap folding P-38 can openers at Walmart three for a buck. Not having one to open your beans is frustrating sometimes.

Some sort of cordage is almost a requirement. I personally like parachute cord, but some correspondents have reported that nylon seine twine is almost as strong, a little more widely available, and takes up a fair bit less space.

3.9) Weapons

KNOW YOUR LOCAL LAWS! Bugging out only to end up in jail facing a weapons charge is a _bad_ way to handle an emergency.

Let your needs drive your planning. Do you plan to fight an infantry engagement? If the answer to this is 'yes' then a full rifle or shotgun is indicated, along with a psychiatric evaluation. Fighting a war while running from a chemical spill would at the least be really bad timing.

At any rate, too many guns and too much ammunition will weigh you down, and has a nasty habit of seeming indiscreet.

Whatever weapons you do carry, make damned sure that they will function even with a lack of regular maintenance, that you can maintain them with a minimum of equipment, and that you can shoot effectively. You owe that much to the people around you-an armed untrained man is nothing more than a danger to himself and others. (People who want advice should probably think very hard, and then post to misc.survivalism. You'll get advice. You'll probably get a lot more advice than you wanted. I can give advice by email, but I am neither an expert on firearms, nor firearms laws, nor your local conditions and your own needs, and I'm not generally inclined to discuss my own plans.)

3.10) Signalling and Radios

First, I'd refer you to the Communications FAQ elsewhere on this website and posted to the misc.survivalism newsgroup.

A radio capable of receiving all-news formatted AM stations should be the first radio that you add. After that, a licensed ham should add a 144MHz FM handheld with extra batteries, and an unlicensed individual should get a license. (Anyone wanting to bitch about my politics for adding the bit about licenses should redirect their comments to dev/null where they'll get just as much attention)

3.11) Misc. Stuff

Keys-when you lock the house you'll probably want to be able to unlock it afterwards. Also, do you have spare car keys? Spare mailbox key? Safe-deposit-box key?

Extra photo ID just for the bugout is a help-an old military ID or expired driver's license...non-US citizens should have their passports and visas with them at ALL times. Also, copies of your insurance policies can be a big help should the house need repair or you need medical care. If you live in one of the third-world backwaters like Illinois that requires a specific ID to transport a firearm, then you want a copy of that if your bag includes a gun.

A pre-paid phone card goes a long way too...you might just need to call Mom and tell her that you won't be in for dinner that weekend because you're running for your life.

Passport can be helpful, and if you're outside of your country of citizenship then you do not want to be separated from your passport or WHO Yellow Book _EVER_.

3.12) Packing it all up

You need a bag that will hold all this stuff, with some degree of protection from the elements. Personally, I prefer just using a large bookbag...keep it simple. (Plus, in college towns like this one a backpack doesn't look all that out of place). As a rule of thumb, if the bag is perfectly packed when you first pack it, then once you open it up in the field you'll never get it repacked. Therefore, a bag should probably be about half again as big as you actually need.

Note about brands of equipment:

I'm not a big fan of US Military-issue equipment. It's made by the lowest bidder in a contracting system that seems driven more by politics than by producing quality equipment, and as a result almost all of the Mil-Spec gear that I've used has turned out to be shoddily-made crap. Well, not all of it. My canteens have held up well, as has my ripstop poncho. OTOH, I've ruined more ALICE packs through normal use than I care to think about.

The REI house brand is usually serviceable-my current pack was made by REI and has seen almost three years of moderately hard use with very little apparent wear.

As far as compasses go, the higher-end Silvas, Suuntos, and Bruntons are almost identical in quality as far as I can tell. They all run in the \$40-\$50 range.

High-grade sleeping bags abound-I currently have an Slumberjack Everest Elite that has served well for almost ten years, but is now facing retirement-sleeping bags lose their insulating power with time. Still perfectly adequate for 3-season use, but not for winter if I have any

choice in the matter. (Editor's note-the bag has since been supplanted by a Sierra Designs synthetic-fill model rated down to +5 degrees F ...excellent bag for winter use if a little bulky)

For knives-if you want a folder, you want a lock-blade for safety reasons. Buck and Gerber knives tend to be _very_ well made, warrantied from here to eternity, and hold their edges reasonably well.

As far as sheath knives go-I like the Buck Special with 6" blade. Everything else that's at all well made is is way beyond my budget. (Well, except for the US Marine-issue KaBar, which is heavy and a little awkward in my opinion. Others will disagree.)

I won't recommend one firearm over another in this document. Shooting skill takes precedence over the choice of firearm itself any day.

My own kit:

Backpack of the day, (Either a Lowe Alpine day pack or a medium REI Traverse Newstar, depending on the season):

One pair of cheap imitation Carhartts work pants
wool shirt
two changes of underwear
two pairs of wool socks with capilene liner socks
two t-shirts
change of longjohns (late fall through early spring)
small towel
All packed in large ziplock bags

gloves (lightweight wool liners and medium-weight leather shells)
wool watch cap
shatter-resistant sunglasses
wool scarf
Spyderco folding knife
Buck Special sheath knife
Gerber Multi-Tool
50' duct tape
50' parachute cord
one bottle, aspirin
one bottle, Pepcid
one tube, generic triple antibiotic ointment
ten 3"x3" gauze pads
30 assorted bandaids
one roll, adhesive tape
two pairs, surgical gloves
8-oz bottle, Doctor Bronners miracle patent medicine soap or whatever.
one bottle, SPF 15 waterproof sunblock
one bottle, 100% DEET bug dope
3 days worth of Nicoret (TEOTW would be a bad time for a relapse :)
Mini-Mag light, extra bulb, two sets of extra AA batteries
six Cyalume light sticks, assorted colors
AM radio, with more batteries of its own.
Yaesu 2M/440 HT, with yet more batteries
compass

Food bag containing: Hot cereal mix, tea bags, jerky, powerbars, ramen noodles, Tabasco sauce, small sealed bottle of vitamin pills, and the like (Roughly 10,000 calories total)

MSR Whisperlite 600 with about a quart of white gas

two 1Q Nalgene lexan water bottles, two 1Q army surplus canteens, and a half-gallon water bag.

One MSR MiniWorks filter-make sure that the filter element is in good shape.

Mil-surplus ripstop poncho with liner
sleeping bag and ridgerest pad(Oct 15-april 15)

Armaments as dictated by local laws and situation

(When I go camping normally, the above is what I take although I leave the radio at home and bring better food)

old school ID
medical insurance card
spare apartment and truck keys
\$25 prepaid phone card
\$50 paper
~\$5 in change
topo maps of Douglas and part of Jefferson Counties, KS. (stored in car)
Road maps of KS, MO, and NE (stored in car)
E911 map of my county (stored in car)
small spiral notebook
mechanical pencil

YMMV