

Thirty Ways to Prepare That Are Free, or Almost Free

By Carolyn Nicolaysen

The worldwide financial crisis is a great trial for this generation, and we don't see the end of it yet. Nevertheless, there are things we can do right now that are free, or nearly free, that will bring us closer to being self-reliant and prepared to meet our family's needs.

But first, I want to dispel a few rumors of the Urban Legend variety. One email is still circulating among well-intentioned people suggesting that a church leader told a congregation to prepare because a disaster was "imminent". Another report suggests that the Church has predicted that a pandemic would hit within two years. I don't speak for the LDS Church, but I have checked with both of the individuals named or implied by these reports, and the reports are clearly not true, or at the very least, they are taken grossly out of context and misreported.

Of course we should prepare, but unfortunately we don't know what events might befall any of us within the week, let alone within two years. Please folks, unless you hear it yourself through authentic channels from the Church, you have every obligation to question such reports. Most of all, please don't pass on these sensational reports to others.

Now, back to basics. Here are 30 Things to Prepare That Are Free or Almost Free:

1. Protect your photos, journals and scrapbooks by moving them to a safe place in your home, making them easier to grab in case you have to evacuate for a fire, flood, or other event.
2. Contact a friend or family member living at least 50 miles away and ask them if they would be willing to be your family's "Out of Area Contact". They are agreeing to let you come to their home if you need to evacuate, make phone calls on your behalf to your extended family, and store copies of important papers and photos for you.
3. Record the serial numbers of major appliances and electronics. These should be stored in a safe deposit box, and a copy kept in your 72 hour kit and with your out of area contact. Everyone is vulnerable to a burglary or house fire, and these will be invaluable when trying to file insurance claims or to claim your possessions as the police recover them. We recently had a family member discover an item on eBay that had been stolen from their vehicle.
4. Collect change from the sofa cushions, everyone's pockets, car, and the bottom of purses and place those coins in your 72 hour kit.
5. Teach your family about pandemics and discuss a plan for caring for immediate and extended family when a pandemic arrives. If you have not already done so, begin following the Friday series "Pandemic Prep" at <http://blog.TotallyReady.com> and encourage them to do the same. By following along, it will help calm their fears and empower them with simple, yet vital steps to readiness.
6. With your extended family, prepare a list of those who may need help to prepare for a pandemic or who may need a place to be cared for when a pandemic arrives. Create a plan for their care if they need a place to go. If they need help preparing and will be fine in their own home, help them with information and financial aid to accomplish their goals. You may consider giving these people food or other pandemic preparedness items to assist their preparation.
7. Call your child's school and ask for a copy of the school emergency plan. If they don't have one ask some specific questions. For some help in composing a list of questions, copy the Meridian article [Is Your School Prepared for Emergencies?](#) If your school has no plan to notify parents in case of an emergency or to provide for a student's needs during a lock down, or a plan to continue education during a pandemic - now is the time to get involved in the parent club or to get a group of friends together to go and ask some questions of your school administration and school board. This is very important. Every day in the United States there are schools locked down. I experienced a lock down several years ago at our high school. I was in the counseling office when the signal came and the doors were locked. I immediately thought of my son and realized he was in band. Thank goodness. There were restrooms in the band room. Several months ago a teacher was fired because he allowed his students to use the waste paper basket

as a potty during a lock down. He was told he should have called the office and someone would have come to escort the child to the restroom. What kind of lock down is that? In our case and in the majority of lock down cases, there is someone around with a weapon. Who would want their child escorted anywhere when someone with a gun was wandering around? If there is an earthquake or fire or tornado, what is the plan? If students and teachers are quarantined during a pandemic how will education continue? Missing three months of school is not an option. Be sure to set aside some time to discuss this plan with your children once you obtain it.

8. Find out which radio and TV stations are part of the emergency broadcast system for your local area. Be sure to find out which stations will handle emergency broadcasts for school emergencies. Place this list in your binder where you can find it quickly when the need arises.
9. Create phone trees for friends, neighbors and family. Assign everyone two or three people to call in case of an emergency. You will probably want a separate tree for family unless you all live in the same area. During the San Diego fires a few years ago, an entire block of families survived even though their homes did not, because they had a phone tree and called each other to warn of the danger and advise their neighbors to get out. Be sure your Out of Area Contact has phone numbers for every member of your family and extended family.
10. Create a Help List of friends and family who may be able to help with some of your preparedness needs. This is a great dinner activity. Children have great ideas and they also know what their friends' families may have. Brainstorm about those who garden, those who can teach you to sew, can, or repair a lawnmower. Is there a contractor who knows where to find scraps of lumber to build a food storage shelf or to use as firewood? Empty nesters may have canning jars they no longer use. Think creatively! When you have completed that list of resources, begin a list of things you can offer in trade to someone else. Take inventory pictures for an elderly couple, teach someone to can or to solve a computer problem.
11. Contact at least 2 of the people on your Help List. Let them know of your goal to prepare and become self-reliant and ask them if they would be willing to share with your family. Offer to trade...if you have neighbors who have fruit trees and you know they don't have the time or skills to can their fruit, ask them for fruit and offer to can a case for them. Elderly neighbors would love to have you pick the fruit they can no longer pick and will be more than willing to share the harvest.
12. Compile a list of handicapped or elderly neighbors who may need help evacuating during an emergency. Create a list of phone numbers and contact information for their family members. If you are being told to evacuate, their family may not be able to get in to help them.
13. Gather your first aid supplies from around the house and in your vehicles. Inventory what you already have on hand and make a list of items you need to purchase to complete those kits. Use items from the house to complete your car kit and place the kit back in the car.
14. Choose a secret message place. In the event you must evacuate before the family can gather, it is important to have a prearranged place where you will leave a note with the information as to when you left and where you have gone. Naturally this is an invitation to looters, so make this a secure place and not under a mat or in a door frame. Let your Out of Area Contact as well as your immediate family know where this secret message place can be found.
15. Compile a list of family heirlooms to grab if there is time when evacuating. Post this list in a cupboard or closet for quick access during an emergency.
16. Begin gathering as many of those items as possible into the same location, making them easy to grab during an emergency.
17. Check your home owners insurance and make sure you are adequately covered. Be sure to add any large purchases such as a boat or heirlooms if they are not already listed.
18. Print several copies of the Ground to Air Rescue Signals form. (<http://blog.totallyready.com/GroundToAirSignals.pdf>) Place these in your car kits and 72 hour kits. They can literally save your life if you are stranded in the wilderness.
19. Make an ice pack or two. Get a large, freezer-size, resealable, plastic bag. Pour in 3 cups of water and 1-cup of rubbing alcohol. Lay flat in the freezer for at least 2 hours before using. They will not freeze solid but can be easily molded to the area which needs the relief of an ice pack. They are much less expensive than commercial ice packs and work great. During a pandemic they would be invaluable to help reduce a fever. After a natural disaster they will help ease aches and pains after a long day of clean up. They have a thousand uses.

20. Make a list of items you need for your emergency supplies but have not been able to afford to purchase. This will be the list you give to family when they ask what you want for your birthday or Christmas.
21. Create a list of preparedness items you can give as gifts to family and even your children. During one of our family reunions our daughter and her family slept in the backyard. They had to borrow a few items and now understand what they still need to add to their supplies. They borrowed some sleeping bags from friends and the little girls now would love to get princess sleeping bags as a gift. This list may include: sleeping bags, white sheets and towels, Dutch oven, fire extinguisher, family uniform, food storage, fire ladder, 72 hour kits, water storage, and even a good set of maps.
22. Find a pet sitter. Make arrangements with a friend or family member to care for your pets should you need to evacuate. For a flood, or home fire this person may live close by. When preparing for a hurricane, tornado or other catastrophic disaster, the sitter should be outside your immediate area, at least 10 miles away (if the Out of Area Contact is unable to take in your pets due to allergies, rental contracts, etc.).
23. Learn to use the manual release on the garage door. In case of a power outage you want to be able to get the car out of the garage if you need to evacuate.
24. Get on line and print off a copy of your credit reports. Be sure to check all three credit reporting agencies - TransUnion, Equifax, and Experian. If you find anything that is incorrect, change it now. A good credit rating can save you thousands of dollars when you want to purchase or refinance a home or car. Don't be caught off guard. Fix any mistakes now!
25. Gather, count and clean all sleeping bags. If you don't have one per family member, this might make a good gift.
26. Prune those trees and bushes. Begin getting your yard ready for the harvest months ahead. Fruit trees that have not been properly pruned will not produce as well as those which have.
27. Copy your tax returns for at least the last 2 years and add them to your adult 72 hour kits and store a copy at your Out of Area Contact. If you don't want to share this info with your contact, place them in a sealed envelope before mailing these off.
28. Hold a family fire drill. Discuss: stop, drop and crawl. Remind family members to feel a door before opening it and if it is hot do not open the door. Find another way out of the room. Be sure you discuss two ways out of every room. Determine a meeting place outside of your home and then hold a surprise drill.
29. Inventory your food storage. This should be done every six months. Create a spreadsheet or other method to keep up to date.
30. Check your stored water. Water is such an important element in your preparedness plan. Don't be lulled into the belief that a water emergency can't happen to you. If you live in Southern California, for example, you are in danger of losing your water if there is an earthquake. Most of your water supply crosses one of the many fault lines. However, you may also lose your water if there is an earthquake in the Bay Area. Experts believe the levees in the San Joaquin Delta may not hold up during a large earthquake. If this is the case, salt water from the San Francisco Bay will flood the delta and pollute the fresh water. Much of that water supplies Southern California with drinking water. No matter where you live, everyone needs to be concerned about drinking water.

Every small step makes a big difference. And nothing provides peace of mind like being prepared. Have fun with it, and go do something today!