



Urban Survival: Learn the Five Risk Factors in Deciding to Shelter-in-Place

By Paul C. Scheib

“Should I stay or should I go?” That is the most important question to ask yourself before developing a survival plan. It will determine the type of action you will take and the type and quantity of provisions you will set aside.

Unless you are hit directly by a natural or man made disaster, you will most likely be better off sheltering in place, rather than leaving your home. There are several reasons for this.

1. After proper preparation against the potential threats outlined in this course, you will have access to more provisions at home than you could take with you.
2. Experience in your community gives you the basis for whom to trust and where to get resources. You will not have this knowledge if you flee to a “sanctuary” city.
3. Leaving risks your being caught in the open with very little protection. If a threat looms, large numbers of people trapped on highways or in cities will panic. Panicked people do irrational things. And predators will be drawn to the crowds to commit crimes like sexual assault and robbery. This is a very dangerous mix and should be avoided at all cost.

This article will help you to decide on the course of action you feel you should take during a disaster. **Don't miss this point: you should decide on your appropriate course of action now, so that you can simply execute the plan if the threat arises.** It is not enough to understand your options and remain undecided. When you are under the stress of a crisis, you will waste precious time gathering the information necessary to make a decision. You may only have a 60 to 90 minute window to evacuate before being caught by the stampeding masses. In addition, deciding now lets everyone in the family know what you are going to do so that they can respond appropriately and quickly.

You should carefully consider the risk factors in this article against the potential threats of:

1. Industrial Accident

2. Natural Disaster
3. Civil Unrest
4. Terrorist Attack
5. Financial Collapse
6. Military Attack by Foreign Power (EMP)

Then decide under which threat conditions you will leave and which you will shelter in place. Then, write out that plan and put it in a survival binder so you can refer to it when you are under stress and can't remember the details.

Five Risk Factors

There are risk factors to take into account when deciding to leave. To make this decision you need a map and some time to drive around. First, locate paper maps of your area. You can buy them online or at local convenience stores. Depending on the size of the metropolitan area you live in, you may need several adjoining maps to lay out all the relevant information. Buy one of each map for every car in the family. Once you have them, gather the following information:

1. **Location Risks** - Survey the topography of the land that surrounds your home. Start with a 10 mile radius. Mark on your map the closest water sources. Are there lakes, rivers, streams or wells to draw water from? It is preferable to find a clear water source. We will cover purification and storage later. Other than air, water is the most basic need you have and if a disaster cuts power to the pump stations that keep the pressure on, you will, sooner or later, need to have a new water source. If there is no place to get water, you will need to decide if you are willing store large quantities and how or if it is better to leave for a better local source.

You will also want to note the choke points that can be used to prevent outsiders from entering your neighborhood or keep you from escaping. You'll want to determine if sheltering in place could keep you from leaving if things became too dangerous. Remember, you want at least two possible escape routes in a crisis.

The choke points could be the entrances to your subdivision or several roads that merge down into one to bypass obstructions like lakes, hills, or even large buildings. If you decide to shelter in place and work with other people, these spots will make good defensive positions and control check points. You will also want to mark on your map any bridges, toll booths, and interstate exchanges that bottle neck during heavy traffic. These areas should be avoided if you decide to leave for a safer location.

2. **Dangerous Populations** – Next, highlight any mental health hospitals, drug rehab centers, prisons, or other facilities that have large populations of potentially dangerous people. Large-scale natural or man-made disasters would possibly facilitate the escape of some if not all of these people. Mental health and drug rehab

patients off of their medicine, even for a short time, can become psychotic. They may not fully understand their own actions and be aggressive with you. Escaped criminals will have no resources and will take them from whomever they can find. This is a low-probability threat, but one of which you should be aware.

3. **Industrial Threats** - Next mark on your map the location of any chemical, natural gas, or other heavy industrial plants near your home. In the case of an industrial accident or terrorist attack that triggers the release of toxic chemicals, you will need to make a quick decision whether to leave or to stay. For example, if you live within 5 miles of a chemical plant that has a release and the wind is blowing toward your home at 5 miles per hour, you have a maximum of one hour to clear the area before the danger reaches you. Remember, wind changes speed and direction all the time, which can accelerate or diminish the threat to you. You should also know that the farther you live from the plant the more the wind will dissipate the air borne threat.
4. **The Nuclear Power Problem** - We learned from the Japanese Fukushima Dai-ichi meltdown that the government had to evacuate a 50 mile radius from the accident scene. It took some time for them to get organized and recommend the evacuation. Many people remained in that fallout area for weeks after the accident. The health effects from that event will not be clear for years. The lesson is that if you live within 50 miles of a nuclear power plant, you should mark it and on your map and plan evacuation routes that are outside of that perimeter so, that in the case of an accident, you will be able to leave quickly.
5. **Economic Factors** - The final factor in developing your evacuation plan is the economics of the area. The experience of the Watts Riots in LA in 1965, The 1968 riots in 100 U.S. Cities, The South Central Los Angeles Riots 1992, and the London riots of this year show that income level plays a role.

The first three riots began in low income areas where racial and police tensions existed. Each was sparked by a violent event (police beatings and the assassination of MLK). Dozens died, thousands were arrested and tens of millions of dollars of property was damaged in each event. Loss of life often occurred when people were trapped in burning buildings. The lesson to take from these events is that if you are living in a low-income or even in a transitional neighborhood, you should give careful consideration to leaving quickly in the event of hostilities breaking out. It is our belief that small groups of well-armed defenders are likely to be overwhelmed by the sheer number violent partisans.

In contrast, the London Riots of 2011 were fueled by the outrage over bailouts to corporate interests by the British Government. Unlike the American Riots, the London event was perpetrated by middle and upper class youths aligned with various Communist or Anarchist groups. They attacked well-to-do neighborhoods and upscale shopping districts, causing members of the general public to use violence as a cover to steal merchandise of varying types. The damage was in the tens of million of

pounds, but the loss of life was very limited. We believe this type of event is possible in almost any American city. However, because this violence is driven by ideology rather than racial or religious animosity, the number of initial participants will likely be relatively small. Therefore it is probable that groups of armed citizens (The British populace was disarmed in 1996) would act as a powerful deterrent to violence before it could escalate into a general population of looters. This scenario should not trigger an automatic flight but rather a measured response based on the facts as they unfold.

Now that you have this critical information, you can decide under which conditions you should leave. If you have determined that there are conditions in which you must leave, have an evacuation plan that includes routes, possible destinations, and the supplies ready to do so within a moment's notice. We will discuss your “**go bag**” in an up coming article. Remember, you may only have a sixty minute window to get ahead of the crowds that will block your escape.

Practice Exercise 1 - To fully make use of this lesson's information, you must go through the steps that are outlined. You will need some supplies to keep yourself organized so that if you or your family needs to refer to your Survival Plan, it will be at your fingertips.

Items to buy:

1. 2 inch, three ring binder: You will be surprised at how much information you will collect.
2. Dividers: I prefer multi-color 5 tab dividers, so that I can color code my sections for quicker retrieval.
3. Pocket holder for three ring binders: You may want to keep note cards on resources or business cards of people that can help you in the pockets.
4. Maps of your area
5. Highlighter and blue ink pens for marking maps
6. Note pad for making survival to do list.

If you are type-it-out person, that is fine, but make sure you print out and keep your lists and plan in your binder. There is no guarantee that you will be able to access the information on your computer in a crisis.

Now, do the map exercise detailed in this article. If you know someone that could benefit from this article, *please pass it on.*

Please visit us at <http://www.thegeorgia9-12project.org> for more installments of our **Survival Series** and for other useful information. Consider joining a chapter near you. It's free.

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