

What If They Tell You to Evacuate?

The country just witnessed a very real disaster with Katrina. The ramifications of this storm will be felt for years, and is likely to have a very direct impact on the nations economy. The largest evacuation ever made has now occurred with Rita, and this event has caused me to rethink recommendations made in my original article. While most people live away from Hurricane Alley, there may still be situations where you are asked to evacuate your home. You, as the homeowner and resident, will have to make the call about whether to actually evacuate as instructed or not. But in the event you do evacuate, there are some things that you can have setup beforehand to help insure your property remains safe from looters and that you leave with adequate preparation.

THE BUGOUT

Survivalists call leaving the homestead bugging out. There are a lot of reasons to consider doing this, not the least of which is total chaos breaking out around you, as we witnessed after Katrina, within New Orleans. But if you do choose to evacuate for whatever reason, what can you do to protect your home when you are simply not there? What determines whether you should actually evacuate?

First, the goal in evacuating is to increase your chances of personal survival. Forget property this is about you as a person, and your family. I weathered Camille and several other hurricanes as a kid. Being from the Gulf Coast, these storms are not strangers to any of us. But whether to evacuate or not, for my family, is based on potential storm severity and my location.

Whatever the reason for evacuating, if you need to leave all you own, then at least make sure your home is as safe as it can be made, and that it is more difficult to get into than your neighbors. Be prepared to stay away for weeks, and handle your personal needs. Have a place to evacuate to, well away from where you are. Have a planned primary and alternate route to implement for traveling there.

FIRST PASS

How do you eliminate the possible causes of disaster within your own home? This is not rocket science, but most people forget these things out of haste and lack of planning.

1) Clean Out Refrigerator you will be turning off the electricity to avoid the possibility of electrical fires while you are absent. This means your food will spoil if left in the fridge, so break out the ice chests and pack what you can to eat on the road. If you have steaks or other frozen meats, then cook them and take them with you. They will ruin if you do not, so why waste your money? Once the fridge is cleared out, tape the door(s) shut with duct tape, but leave something in the door so that it remains open a crack. This will help prevent mildew from growing inside it while you are gone.

- 2) Clean Out Upright Freezers if you have an upright freezer, you may as well take what you want to for your trip or otherwise get rid of it. When the power goes, so will everything in the freezer.
- 3) Chest-Type Freezers if you have a chest-type freezer, you can leave your food for a week or maybe more by packing dry ice on top of the food and then sealing the freezer with duct tape. The dry ice will keep it frozen, and whatever pressure builds up will release through the gasket and tape. The more you have in the freezer, the better, as this larger mass will tend to stay frozen longer. Try and place your meats in the bottom, as this will be the coldest area. Pack as much dry ice as you can on top of your frozen food. Using duct tape, seal the lid as tightly as you can. If you have spare blankets, wrap them around the freezer as additional insulation to retain the cold. Only do this if you are reasonably certain you will be back within a few days or a week. Otherwise just empty the freezer.
- 4) Pets have a travel carrier for cats and dogs. You may really love your pet, but they need their own space when traveling, and you will have enough to worry about without the dog peeing all over the car. If you have fish, you can try placing their tank outside they may live or not, but inside they will not stand a chance. Be sure and have pet food stashed somewhere and dont forget it.
- 5) Food if you have a couple of ice chests loaded with what you removed from your fridge, and a few bags of staples, then you are probably good to go for food. Dont forget a can opener. I always have 20 or so MREs in each vehicle just in case of emergency. It never hurts to have them, and they last for years.
- 6) First Aid have your kit ready to go in your vehicle at all times. If you are leaving, renew and take any prescriptions as required. Have a bottle of water purification pills in your aid kit as well.
- 7) Water take something to make pure water. Clorox, survival filtration straws, etc.
- 8) Heat Source take something to cook with (propane stove, kerosene, at least waterproof matches) and on (a grilling grate, piece of steel, something to cook ON). A few pots help quite a bit too!!
- 9) Clothing take what is appropriate for your climate, but include rain gear and some bug repellent. Always bring blankets.
- 10) Shelter we keep a popup tent in each vehicle as well as first aid kits if you do this, you will always be able to shelter yourself. They are small, flat, store easy and are dirt cheap.
- 11) Light you can always use your car lights, but candles or a kerosene lamp can sure make things simpler.

This is a short summary of some simple things. How many had you thought of?

Lets get into planning a little where the hell are we going to evacuate TO?

If you havent already talked about this with a friend far away or one of your relatives, then you should do so. Staying in a hotel only works as long as you have money, and your money will go fast staying in a motel. If you do make a deal with relatives or friends, then be ready to reciprocate with them. A dry run is a great excuse to visit! But have a destination.

If you have nobody to plan an evac swap with, then you can always make for a state or national park out of the affected area. But ALWAYS have a distinct destination and a rationale for why it will increase your survival chances. If it doesnt increase your survival rate, then you have chosen a bad evac location.

LEAVING TOWN

Hurricane Rita caused the largest evacuation of people in recent memory, perhaps ever. Approximately 2,000,000 people from the coast headed north to escape the storm, choking the freeways, stripping resources from the evacuation routes, and leaving very little in their wake. I live 4 blocks from the major evacuation route, and this experience has drastically altered the simple instruction set I previously recommended.

If you live in a metropolitan area, and evacuation is recommended, you have already waited too late.

Texas has one of the countrys best and most well maintained highway systems. Oil and gas are plentiful here. We are the second largest grower of agricultural products in the nation. Yet in the wake of Rita, store shelves were stripped and gasoline was insufficient to complete the evacuation of only 30% of the metro population!!

First, let me relate a few anecdotes from the Rita evacuation. Most of these were witnessed by me or else by people I know very well who are not prone to exaggeration, and who did evac in the mass exodus. Most of it is considered common knowledge around the area, but thus is not likely to make it into the national media or consciousness.

Gasoline was becoming scarce in Houston by the end of Wednesday afternoon. This was 3 days before projected landfall of the storm. There was no gasoline in Galveston or anywhere between Galveston and Houston by Wednesday night. Thursday it was obvious that at 8-12 miles per hour, many people would run out of gas. People were pushing their cars and turning off their A/C to conserve fuel, even though the temperature was 100 degrees. This would mean about 110-115 degrees actually felt in congested traffic, with all the exhaust and heat from the car engines.

Dehydration became an issue with many families. They left their cars and walked to nearby stores, stripping the shelves of anything edible or wet. Every convenience store was bare except for the beer section it looked as if locusts had been through each one. Managers had to temporarily close several Wal-Marts and similar stores due to the mobs vying for food and liquids. Any road appearing to go north was flooded with evacuees, as they tried to get off the freeway and take alternate routes. This resulted in massive gridlock throughout the entire area.

Police, under instructions, blocked each of these alternate routes and forced everyone to stay on the designated evacuation routes. This slowed traffic measurably, as locals who knew how to get out without increasing already congested interstate traffic were forced into the evacuation herd.

Some entrepreneurs began to buy up burgers by the 40s and 50s from McDonalds and Burger King. They would carry these back to the freeway and sell them to stranded motorists for \$5 to \$12 each. Drinks were selling roadside for \$5 to \$15 each. Stalled cars were pushed out of the way by following cars whether they wished it or not. All trash (tampons, dirty diapers, etc.) was dumped roadside it is still there as I rewrite this article. People were urinating and defecating on the roadside they had nowhere else to go. Piles of human excrement are readily visible to anyone willing to walk beside the freeways. Sunday afternoon (24+ hours after landfall), there were anywhere from 5 to 20 cars stranded/abandoned roadside between each exit ramp and on ramp. You will not see this in news coverage.

Our police department was tied up trying to open up all lanes for northbound use the contra-flow idea which they implemented much too late. This allowed numerous fights to break out over food and water. Many shoplifters simply snatched or grabbed and ran back into the snarl of creeping traffic, as witnessed by our 4 local convenience store managers. They tried calling our police, but there was no way for them to magically fly over all the congestion and enforce the law. Again, this did not make the news coverage.

Once traffic began to move (with the contra-flow lanes now open), many caravans of latinos used blocking to get ahead in the tight traffic. One car in the caravan would hit the feeder or access road and block the left lane of traffic by faking a stalled car. The rest of the caravan would exit the freeway and use the blocked lane to speed ahead to another on ramp. Once there, another car would fake a stall in the right lane of the freeway, and then the caravan would all jump back on the freeway, and the first stalled car would magically be repaired. This allowed many of them to leapfrog out ahead of those without CB radios and a plan. As before, this story will not make the news, yet I do admire them for thinking this maneuver out. However, it slowed things dramatically for everyone else even with the contra-flow lanes open.

The shelters designated by the authorities were woefully inadequate for the number of people leaving. Many were going to stay with friends or relatives in other metro areas. This also caused a run on gasoline and supplies in each of the designated destination cities. In short, while Texas did it better than Louisiana, it remained a fiasco in every way outside of the actual moving of physical bodies from harms way.

Why? Because all of our supply lines are based on daily delivery food, drink, gasoline everything. Our freeways are designed for local traffic needs, not regional, and certainly not for massive evacuation. If Rita had made landfall as a Cat 5 head-on into Galveston, there would have been many people homeless and probably significant loss of life. Remember, 4 million people did NOT evac because there was no gas and the roads were all clogged. Sure, the mayor came out and told everybody to sit tight, but it was the only option for him there was no fuel left and no way to evacuate the remaining Houston population!! Again, this will never be brought up in the media, but it is a fact that each person reading this article needs to take into account. If you are in New York or Boston or a similar huge metro area, then think about what happened in Houston 30% of the population used all the available gasoline in a single 36 hour evac.

So, with this knowledge now a part of my experience let me revise my recommendations.

- 1) If you live in a large metropolitan area, and you wait for the government to tell you to evacuate, you have waited too late. Please reread my anecdotes and think about what I am saying.
- 2) If you are in a large metro area, you should make sure you have 20 or so gallons of gas IN ADDITION to full tanks well before any evacuation is begun. This means having several gas cans available. Even better, have an extra fuel tank added to your vehicle.
- 3) You should have 10 gallons of water on hand as a precaution for being stuck in slow moving traffic, more for larger families.
- 4) You should have some MREs or other handy foods to eat while sitting in traffic, enough for 48 hours without being hungry.
- 5) Have some 12V fans available to conserve your fuel and prevent overheating due to running the A/C without moving the car.
- 6) Bring something to block the sun from your car windows in slow traffic.

7) If it is winter, then prep for extreme cold weather rather than heat.

The next item is how to get out of town geographically. The Galveston and Metro Houston South evac was accomplished in a couple of days, but the actual movement of traffic was at 8-20 MpH. Horses trot much faster than this, and the average bicycle rider makes more progress. I live 50 miles from the closest evac shelter, yet it took an average of 10 hours to make those 50 miles by car that is 5 miles an hour!! So how can we speed this up and get to safety?

If this is an orderly evacuation and there is no personal loss associated with waiting in the traffic, then I would recommend simply having the above preparations, along with your Bugout kit, and following the directions to the nearest shelter or to your pre-selected evac site.

But what if waiting in traffic increases the likelihood you will NOT survive? A terrorist has threatened a nuclear bomb or else there is a Cat 5 hurricane bearing down on you and the wind is already kicking up? What if violence suddenly breaks out nearby in the congested traffic lanes due to tempers flaring and local resources being scarce?

This is where you need to have a Plan B, as in Beat Feet now. But what options do you have? In my opinion, based on the Rita evacuation, you have lots of options when traffic is moving at 5 MpH! So what could one do to get out of Dodge more quickly?

Firstly, never forget that if traffic is moving at less than 10 miles an hour, you can walk out just as fast. If traffic has all but stopped, then walking may be better, depending on where you are going and how far you have to reach your destination. If people had the time to go and buy hamburgers, then scalp them to others in Houston traffic, how fast were things really moving? Pack light, take water and hoof it, provided that walking will get you where you need to be more quickly.

Another valid option is bicycling. You can easily average 20 MpH unless you are dragging too much gear. So if you just bring your Bugout kit, you should be able to make better time on a bike. You can also go right around roadblocks setup for cars, allowing you to use alternate roads. Police may tell you they don't advise it, but then again, are they advising you to simply sit and await fate? Police enforce the laws as required, and in times of crisis, where they are able. They are unlikely to inhibit your bicycle movement other than with a warning. As long as you have your route mapped out, you can bicycle to it if you need to. Carrying bicycles on your car would ensure you have another option available.

My preference is to use an on/offroad motorcycle. I am not talking about a big Harley, although if you intend to stick to the interstate this would probably do. This should be a very adaptable vehicle that allows you to simply cruise by on the shoulder when traffic is nearly stopped, and motor into and out of a ditch when required. The only tight spot for a motorcycle would be a bridge without shoulders or a similar tunnel those may slow you. But otherwise, using a motorcycle or two leaves you a much greater range of options in escaping disaster. If need be, you can rough it down the median or on the grassy shoulder of the road. You can take the back roads even if congested by running on the shoulder. You will require much less gasoline, and with a simple 2-gallon plastic can gain twice your normal range. If you were to tow a trailer with a couple of motorbikes, you could abandon your car roadside and take to the motorcycles if required by circumstances. 4-wheelers could also be used in lieu of

motorcycles, but in both cases, pack light.

If traffic is moving at 5-10 MpH, then the police will be stuck with that. You can simply motor away and not worry about them until later, if then. Crossing one simple ditch will make them unable to follow you in their cruisers, even if they were inclined to do so. Most will not be worried about you, other than you are not behaving as they expected. If necessary, you could even follow power line right-of-ways to get elsewhere. Just be sure to have a map indicating rivers and creeks you will still need a bridge or a shallow ford to cross them. But in our motorcycle or 4-wheeler example, you can use railroad bridges too, giving you many additional options.

Both of these options would have allowed you to bypass the traffic snarls caused by our recent, small 30% metro evacuation. In the event of everybody trying to evac from a metro area, you would be well advised to start on the motorcycle or 4-wheeler. The crush of people in cars will be incredible. You might want to stay away from the freeway to avoid people trying to take your motorcycle craziness happens frequently when people are in panic mode.

Another option is to use your local river or large stream to slip away. Naturally you would want to be going downstream, unless you have a power boat. But if this accomplishes your exit more efficiently, then it is an absolutely great evac path. People simply think auto-centrally. By using alternative modes and paths of transport, you can give yourself a much safer and more viable way to get out. In the recent Rita event, many boat captains simply motored down the coast ahead of the storm, towards Mexico. Sure, the storm might have followed them, but if they are far enough ahead, they can outrun it anyway (8-14 MpH storm speed). Worst case is exactly what they faced by staying loss of their boat.

If you have a power boat and enough gas to cruise for 3-4 hours at 40 MpH, then you have just put 120 miles between you and the problem. If the stream or river flows at 12-15 MpH (average), then in 10 hours you can be away and downstream in a canoe without anybody bothering you and without endangering your family in a crowded and panicky highway exit. Maybe you need to carry your kayaks or canoes over a couple of miles to another stream this is difficult, but it would be far safer than battling for water and fuel and position amongst the crowds on the interstate. Maybe you carry a canoe or kayak on the car as a second alternative, knowing where the interstate crosses streams or rivers that could serve as an alternate evac path.

Naturally, if it is winter, then you will need to rethink these plans and improvise. Walking is fine unless you are in a blizzard. Bicycles may not work so well in snow. But motorcycles or snowmobiles will work. Streams and rivers may be frozen, but this may also furnish you yet another route by traveling the edges of a solidly frozen lake or river. A snowmobile with a sled behind it can travel a very long way in winter and over incredibly varied terrain. It is a great option in the event of a real total evac.

To make your way safely, you need to get rid of your auto-centric thinking. The crowds, scarce resources and violence seen in the recent evacuation were just a small taste of what would happen in an all-out evacuation panic. Railroads, streams, rivers, oceans all are viable transportation routes. By slipping a canoe into the Ohio or Mississippi river, you can easily exit a big city and avoid the auto-centric nightmare. How many people think of leaving New York by boat? Yet at one time, it was simply the only way one could travel.

The key to a non-auto-centric evac is maps. You should have detailed maps of the routes you

might take, and test them on the weekend. Don't forget to get railroad details too they have bridges you can use on a motorcycle or 4-wheeler that auto-centric people will not even think about. If you plan a possible boat evac, have coastal or river maps and try the route out on a weekend.

Finally, provided you have the cash, don't be afraid to charter a plane if circumstances dictate and you have enough time. Pooling with others can give you enough cash to hire out a sizable private plane to get you, your family and neighbors out of harms way. And its only money. they are always printing more.

PROTECTING YOUR EMPTY HOME

Most people simply lock their doors and leave their homes. In cases of civil unrest, this does nothing to keep people from breaking a door or a window and getting access to your home and contents. In the long run, unless you remain to defend your home, it will be vulnerable to looting and trashing.

But bear in mind that in situations of civil unrest, most crimes are those of opportunity. You did not see New Orleans looters pulling down plywood and breaking into boarded up store fronts they chose the stores WITHOUT boarded windows, where they could easily break the glass and attain entry. Few looters and angry people carry crow bars or hammers around in their pockets. Most of them have nothing, which is why they want your property.

If your home is strongly boarded up and the other homes are not, then the chances increase that the looters will go for the easier targets, at least on the first pass. So, what to do?

First, make sure you have turned off the gas going to your home. There is a valve on your gas meter that can be turned off with an adjustable wrench. Turn the gas off at the meter this will keep your home from catching fire in the event of a line rupture or keep your home from filling with gas in the event your pilot lights go out.

Second, make sure you have turned off the water AT THE METER. Again, this requires an adjustable wrench and simply turning a valve on the STREET side of your water meter. You should drain your pipes, especially if there is a chance of freezing weather. Most homes have the water entering the slab next to an exterior faucet. Sometimes there is a valve between the water main line and the house. But the key here is to find the lowest possible faucet and open it to let the water drain out from all the pipes in your house. You should also drain the water heater once it has been turned off. This will usually require you to hook a water hose to the heater and then turn a drain valve. But drain it, as the freezing of that much water can rupture the tank. Flush your toilets as well, after the water is off and before leaving.

Third, turn off your electricity. Every home has a main disconnect. This is sometimes called the Master Breaker. It is obvious in a breaker box it is the huge breaker at the top of the circuit breaker box. Other homes may have a separate switched box between the electric meter and the main breaker box. But in either case, flip these to the OFF position. If you cannot determine how to do this, the final way to shut off your power is to remove the meter itself. It has a tamper-proof seal on it. Once this seal is removed, the meter can be pulled out by hand. But bear in mind that there is 220 volts running through the meter be careful not to touch the contacts, and never use a screwdriver or other item to lever the meter out. You should be able to pull it just grasping the glass part of the meter. Flat meters usually have a

handle to let the electricians pull them.

Time-Life books has a publication called Basic Home Electricity that illustrates all of these methods of turning off your power. Your local electric company can also help you with this.

BOARDING UP

Boarding up a house is relatively straight forward, but to prevent easy entry, requires some thinking. Your intent is to secure your home as much as possible. Careful measuring and placement of your protective boarding can make things very difficult for the would-be looters.

You should use plywood for boarding. This is thick enough that it requires a sledgehammer to bust through it. Using plywood is wasted effort a screwdriver can pierce this type sheathing. Using plywood rather than pressed wood provides added strength. Pressed wood is basically similar in strength, but the random nature of the wood pieces can create unseen weak spots.

You should use square-headed drywall screws as fasteners. Nearly everybody has a Phillips screwdriver that could let them unscrew a corner and then pry your boards off. Few people carry a square-head screwdriver. You should also use drywall screws at least 2 in length. This allows them to pull up very tightly, and insures they bite into the door or window frame.

I prefer to set screws every 6-8 along the edges. An electric screwdriver makes removing them easy work, and a little caulk and sandpaper plugs the holes when you take them down. And this spacing makes it a real pain in the ass for would-be looters. Looters are usually in a big hurry, knowing they are doing something illegal. Anything that forces them to slow down or prefer easier pickings is helpful in keeping them out of your home.

When cutting your boards to size, look at the doorway or window trim carefully. Cut your boards so that they line up with the edges of the window trim exactly. If they hang over your window trim boards, it provides a leverage point for easier prying. When boarding your doors, try to do the same match the frame edges exactly. If your door is recessed into an alcove, board the entire alcove section up around the door, edge to edge. This basically makes it impossible to pry the boards loose without extreme effort.

If your doorways are such that you can fit your sheathing boards into a recess that makes them flush with the door framing, then this is the best method.

If you have a second story, and there are windows above a porch or lower roof, then be sure and board these up as well. High windows on a vertical wall require a ladder, not usually something happenstance criminals carry. So its your call whether to board up these 2nd story vertical windows.

If you have a skylight, you should board this up if possible for hurricanes, or to keep thieves out if your roof is overly accessible.

If you have a large glass patio area, you can opt to simply board the entry into the house and accept the broken windows. This will reduce the boarding time considerably. Trying to board up an entire glass patio is problematic at best, and what you really want is to prevent entry into your home and protect the contents.

Hopefully, you already have a metal garage door. You can board these up from the inside to avoid leaving the unsightly screw holes in your metal garage door. If your garage door is wood, then a simple foot kicking one of the lower door panels will allow entry. My suggestion is to use plywood as replacement panels in a wooden garage door or else change to a metal door. If you have an electric garage door opener, don't worry you're turning the power off, remember?

The only other item I have seen that intrigued me was boarding up with porcupine sheathing. This is plywood with drywall screws drilled into the inside (home facing) of the boards, leaving their points facing outward when you install your door and window sheathing. Drywall screws are very sharp, and made of hard steel. While this does require a lot of screws (one 1-1/4 screw every 3 inches), the boards you put up are basically a really nasty thing to even lean against, much less try and pry up. They scream get away to most people, and are definitely worth considering if you have the time or evacuate frequently due to storms. Do not use standard nails they bend and don't work. I tried this and all you need to do is bend the nails over. Drywall screws are sharper, don't bend, and much more intimidating.

So, here is the quick list:

- 1) Have a planned evacuation place with main and secondary road access plans.
- 2) Save or discard perishable food in fridges, freezers and pantries.
- 3) Have your Bug Out kit ready to go (food, water, lights, shelter)
- 4) Board up everything except your doors
- 5) Shut off all your utilities and drain your pipes
- 6) Board your doors.
- 7) Fill up your car, and your spare gas cans and water containers
- 8) Make sure your spare tire and vehicle fluid levels are all good
- 9) Make sure you didn't forget the dog/cat
- 10) Make sure you take enough cash with you
- 11) If you are leaving a car, remove the battery and place it in your garage. Make the car harder to steal.
- 12) Bring bicycle/motorcycle/4-wheeler in case you need to abandon car due to speed
- 13) If you are Bugging Out in the midst of a Big Panic, think about which mode of transportation will give you the best survival chances, and act accordingly

I realize that much of this may seem obvious to those who have done it before, but there are many people who haven't ever had to evacuate for any reason. And having somewhere definite to go is obviously one of the things many people didn't think about with Katrina. There were people from New Orleans who actually evacuated to Biloxi not good thinking.

Think non-auto-centric for a really bad, total evacuation. Crowds and panic are not where you want to be, so use an alternate, outside-the-box strategy. Remember what happened in the 30% evac of Houston metro.

Think about what you would really need in the event of something like Katrina, and then plan for it. This mental exercise is simple, effective, and increases your survival chances dramatically if you ever have to evacuate. And there is absolutely NO SUBSTITUTE for testing your routes and knowing them everybody likes a leisurely Sunday drive. Make yours a test of your evac plans and you will feel much less vulnerable if you ever are faced with a real Bugout.

