

Quick Guide to Practical Preparedness

A Minimalist's Approach to Emergency Readiness

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Introduction

Over the years, through my time in law enforcement and countless days spent exploring the backroads and mountains of the American West in my converted RAV4, I've learned something simple but powerful.

Preparedness is not about collecting the most gear or planning for every disaster you can imagine. And yeah, that sounds strange coming from me, I know.

It's about smart planning, choosing gear that works in more than one situation, and building the mindset to stay safe when life takes a turn.

The idea in this guide is to break down the core concepts of real preparedness into clear, practical steps you can take without flipping your life upside down.

Whether you live in a high-rise downtown, chase weekends in the woods, or roll full-time in an adventure rig, these strategies will help you build the confidence and skills to handle emergencies with calm and capability.



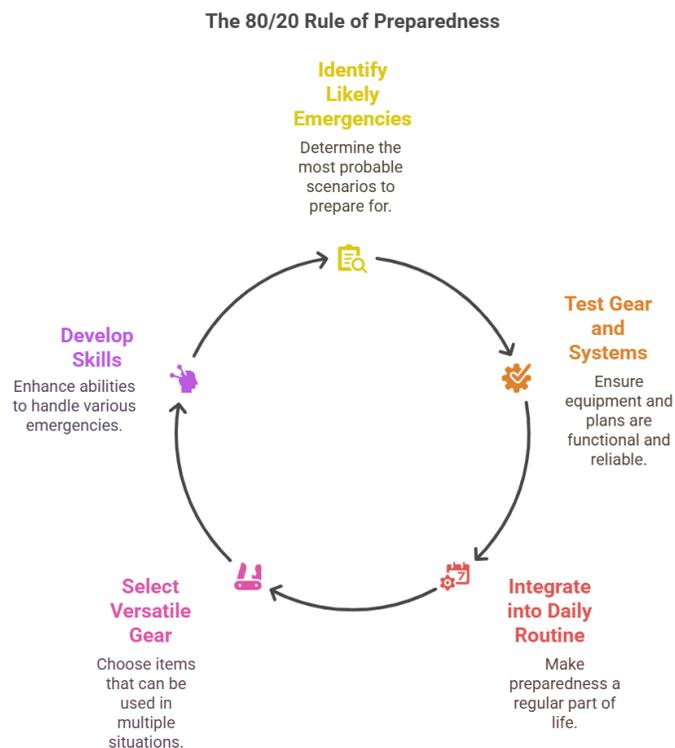
The 80/20 Rule of Preparedness

The biggest shift in how I approach preparedness came from a simple idea. Most emergencies, probably about 80 percent, can be handled with a small portion of the gear that most guides insist you need.

The trick is focusing on versatile items that work across multiple situations and gearing up for the scenarios you are most likely to face.

Core Preparedness Principles

- Start with the emergencies you are most likely to encounter
- Test your gear and systems before you need them for real
- Make preparedness part of your everyday routines
- Choose gear that serves more than one purpose
- Build skills as you gather supplies



Section 1: Home Emergency Essentials

When emergencies strike, your home becomes your first line of defense. Whether facing a power outage, natural disaster, or unexpected event, having essential supplies and plans in place can make all the difference.

Quick Assessment Checklist

Home Vulnerabilities to Address:

- Power outages lasting 24-72 hours
- Water service interruptions
- Severe weather events
- Medical emergencies
- Home security during emergencies

The Multi-Purpose Home Kit

Water (1 gallon per person per day, minimum 3 days):

- Store in food-grade containers
- Include a water filter for questionable sources
- Know your water shut-off location

Food (3-day minimum, items you actually eat):

- Canned goods with a manual opener
- Dried foods requiring minimal preparation
- Comfort foods for stress management
- Don't forget pet food



Power and Communication:

- Hand-crank or solar radio and flashlight combo
- Portable power bank for devices
- Battery-powered or candle lighting
- Know your electrical panel location

First Aid and Medications:

- Basic first aid supplies plus personal medications
- Pain relievers, anti-diarrheal, antihistamines
- Emergency contact information
- Medical information for all family members
- Spare glasses if you need them

Sanitation and Personal Hygiene:

- Moist towelettes, garbage bags, and plastic ties
- Personal hygiene items (toothbrush, toothpaste, soap)
- Feminine supplies and personal hygiene products

Tools and Safety Items:

- Multi-purpose tool
- Whistle to signal for help
- Dust masks to help filter contaminated air
- Plastic sheeting and duct tape for sheltering in place
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities

Important Documents:

- Copies of personal documents (medication list, pertinent medical information, proof of address, deed or lease to home, passports, birth certificates, insurance policies)
- Store in a waterproof, portable container

Additional Items:

- Extra batteries
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers and a backup battery
- Cash or traveler's checks
- Emergency blankets
- Complete change of clothing appropriate for your climate and sturdy shoes

Home Safety Zones

Identify and mark:

- The safest interior room for severe weather
- Two exit routes from each room

- Utility shutoff locations (water, gas, electricity)
- A meeting point near your home

Family Communication Plan Template:

- Out-of-area contact person: _____
- Local meeting point: _____
- Neighborhood meeting point: _____
- Children's school emergency procedures: _____

Section 2: Vehicle Emergency Readiness

Your vehicle can be both a lifeline and a liability during emergencies. Whether you're commuting through the city or exploring remote trails, being prepared for unexpected situations on the road is crucial.

Year-Round Vehicle Essentials

Core Items:

- Portable jump starter with USB ports
- Reflective triangles or LED road flares
- Multi-purpose tool and basic repair supplies
- First aid kit suitable for trauma
- Emergency blankets and extra clothing
- Water and non-perishable snacks
- Paper maps of frequently traveled areas
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Fire extinguisher rated for automotive use
- Tire repair kit and portable inflator
- Spare tire, jack, and lug wrench



Winter Additions:

- Folding shovel
- Ice scraper and snow brush
- Sand or kitty litter for traction
- Warm clothing and waterproof gloves
- Hand warmers
- Extra hats, socks, and insulated boots

Summer Additions:

- Extra coolant and motor oil
- Sunshade for the windshield
- Additional water
- Electrolyte replacement drinks
- Sunscreen and insect repellent
- Wide-brim hat and breathable clothing

*Vehicle Emergency Procedures***If You Break Down:**

- Move completely off the roadway if possible
- Turn on hazard lights immediately
- Raise the hood if it's safe to do so
- Stay inside the vehicle on busy roads
- Use your phone to call for help
- Set up warning devices only if safe

Using Your Vehicle as Shelter:

- Run the engine periodically for heat/AC (never with blocked exhaust)
- Crack windows for ventilation
- Use floor mats for insulation
- Signal for help with mirrors during the day, lights at night

Section 3: Outdoor and Adventure Preparedness

Venturing into the wilderness offers unparalleled experiences, but it also demands a heightened level of preparedness. Whether you're hiking, camping, or exploring remote areas, having the right gear and knowledge is crucial.

The 10 Essentials - Minimalist Version

Navigation:

- Topographic maps in a waterproof case
- Quality compass with adjustable declination
- GPS device with extra batteries

Sun Protection:

- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Wide-brimmed hat
- Long-sleeved shirt

Insulation:

- Layering system appropriate for conditions
- Emergency bivy or space blanket

Illumination:

- Headlamp with extra batteries
- Backup light source



First Aid:

- Wilderness first aid kit
- Personal medications
- Emergency whistle

Fire:

- Waterproof matches
- Butane lighter
- Fire starter material

Repair Kit:

- Multi-tool
- Duct tape
- Super glue

Nutrition:

- Extra food beyond planned meals
- High-energy emergency food

Hydration:

- Water bottles
- Water purification method
- Knowledge of water sources in your area

Emergency Shelter:

- Lightweight tarp or emergency bivy
- Know how to improvise a shelter

Weather Awareness Signs

Storm Approaching:

- Darkening clouds, especially towering cumulus
- Sudden temperature drops
- Wind direction changes
- Animals seeking shelter
- Barometric pressure changes (if you have an altimeter)

When to Turn Back:

- Weather deteriorating faster than forecast
- Group member showing signs of illness/fatigue
- Behind schedule with daylight running out
- Equipment failure affecting safety
- Gut feeling that something isn't right

Section 4: Everyday Preparedness Mindset

Preparedness isn't solely about gear or checklists; it's about cultivating a mindset that enables you to navigate daily life with confidence and adaptability.

Situational Awareness Basics

Understanding your environment and recognizing potential threats are foundational to personal safety. The "Color Code" system, developed by Jeff Cooper, outlines levels of situational awareness.

The Four Awareness Levels:

- **White:** Relaxed and unaware (safe environments)
- **Yellow:** Relaxed alertness, aware of surroundings without specific threats (public spaces, unfamiliar areas)
- **Orange:** Focused attention on a potential threat (noticed something concerning)
- **Red:** Immediate action required to address a confirmed threat

Daily Awareness Practice:

- Notice exit locations when entering buildings
- Observe normal patterns in your environment
- Monitor weather and seasonal changes
- Trust your instincts regarding situations and people



De-escalation Techniques

Effectively managing conflicts can prevent escalation and promote safety.

Verbal De-escalation:

- Use a calm, respectful tone
- Engage in active listening to understand concerns
- Avoid accusatory or confrontational language
- Look for common ground and shared interests

Body Language:

- Keep hands visible
- Maintain a non-threatening posture
- Respect personal space
- Position yourself to allow for safe exit routes

When to Disengage:

- If the situation is escalating despite efforts
- Multiple people are becoming involved
- You feel physically threatened
- Your gut instinct says leave

Decision Making Under Stress

The OODA Loop:

- **Observe:** Gather information about the situation
- **Orient:** Understand what the information means
- **Decide:** Choose the best course of action
- **Act:** Implement your decision

Stress Management Techniques:

- Practice deep breathing to maintain composure (I like [box breathing](#))
- Focus on what you can control
- Break complex problems into smaller steps
- Use checklists for important decisions

Regional Considerations for the American West

The American West offers diverse landscapes, each presenting unique challenges. Understanding these regional specifics ensures safer and more enjoyable adventures.

Desert Travel Specifics

- Hydration: Carry at least one gallon of water per person per day. In extreme heat, increase this amount.
- Sun Protection: Wear a wide-brimmed hat, UV-blocking sunglasses, and apply sunscreen regularly.
- Clothing: Opt for loose-fitting, light-colored clothing to reflect sunlight and maintain body temperature.
- Wildlife Awareness: Be cautious of venomous creatures like snakes and scorpions. Avoid placing hands or feet in areas you can't see.
- Flash Floods: Stay informed about weather conditions. Avoid hiking in narrow canyons during rainstorms due to flash flood risks.

Mountain Environment Awareness

- Weather Variability: Mountain weather can change rapidly. Always check forecasts and be prepared for sudden shifts.
- Altitude Sickness: Ascend gradually to allow your body to acclimate. Recognize symptoms like headaches, nausea, and dizziness.
- Layering: Dress in layers to adjust to temperature changes. Include moisture-wicking base layers and waterproof outer layers.
- Avalanche Awareness: If traveling in snowy regions, understand avalanche risks and carry appropriate safety equipment.

Forest and Wilderness Areas

- Fire Safety: Adhere to local fire regulations. Use established fire rings and ensure fires are completely extinguished.
- Wildlife Encounters: Store food securely to avoid attracting animals. Maintain a safe distance from all wildlife.
- Navigation: Cell service may be unreliable. Carry physical maps and a compass, and know how to use them.
- River Crossings: Exercise caution when crossing rivers, especially during snowmelt when water levels are high.



Emergency Scenarios and Responses

Preparedness becomes real when theory meets action. Here are clear, practical steps for handling common emergency situations with confidence.

Power Outage (24+ hours)

Immediate Actions:

- Check with neighbors or the news to determine if the outage is localized or widespread
- Turn off and unplug major electrical appliances to prevent damage from surges
- Use flashlights instead of candles to reduce fire risk, when possible
- Monitor a battery-powered radio for updates

Extended Outage:

- Eat foods that require no cooking to preserve fuel and cooking resources (also, eat the ice cream because, why not)
- Conserve phone battery for essential communication (put it into airplane mode to help save the battery)
- Check on vulnerable neighbors and family members
- Keep refrigerator/freezer closed to maintain temperatures and prevent spoilage (unless it's the ice cream)

Vehicle Breakdown in Remote Area

Stay or Go Decision Factors:

- Evaluate how far help is and whether you're physically capable of reaching it
- Consider weather conditions, daylight hours, and your group's condition
- Assess how visible your vehicle is to other drivers (or even aircraft)
- Inventory your supplies, including food, water, and shelter gear

If Staying with the Vehicle:

- Make your vehicle as visible as possible (hood up, use reflectors or signal panels)
- Use mirrors or lights to signal aircraft or passing cars
- Run the engine briefly for climate control, but only if the exhaust is clear of obstructions
- Use floor mats or extra clothes as insulation

Getting Lost Outdoors

Immediate Response:

- Stop moving and stay calm
- Try to return to your last known location using a map and compass (also try to retrace your steps to your last known location)
- Avoid walking in circles or guessing directions
- Call out or make noise if others are nearby

If Rescue Needed:

- Stay in one location to aid search efforts
- Make yourself visible from the air and the ground (bright gear, signals, or reflective surfaces)
- Conserve energy and prepare for an overnight stay
- Ration your food and water, even if you expect rescue soon

Building Your Support Network

Preparedness doesn't end with personal readiness, it extends to your community. A strong support network improves resilience, speeds recovery, and turns emergencies into manageable challenges.

Community Preparedness

- Get to know your neighbors and their skills, especially those with medical, mechanical, or logistical backgrounds
- Participate in local emergency response training or drills, such as CERT programs
- Share resources, tips, and tools with others in your neighborhood or friend group
- Consider starting or joining a small preparedness group that meets regularly

Professional Resources

- Know where your nearest emergency services are located, including fire, police, and utility departments
 - Keep a list of nearby hospitals, urgent care centers, and 24-hour pharmacies
 - Review and understand your health and home insurance policies ahead of time
 - Post emergency service numbers in a visible spot at home and store them in your phone
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Maintenance and Testing Schedule

Preparedness isn't a one-time task; it's an ongoing commitment. Regular checks and updates ensure that your emergency plans and supplies are ready when you need them most.

Monthly Tasks

- **Test Flashlights and Radios:** Ensure all battery-operated devices are functioning; replace batteries as needed.
- **Check Emergency Food and Water:** Inspect expiration dates and rotate supplies to keep them fresh.
- **Review Emergency Contacts:** Update contact information for family, friends, and emergency services.
- **Practice Emergency Procedures:** Conduct drills with family members to reinforce response plans.

Seasonal Tasks

- **Update Vehicle Emergency Kit:** Adjust supplies based on seasonal needs (e.g., blankets in winter, extra water in summer).
- **Inspect Home Emergency Supplies:** Check the condition of items like fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, and first aid kits.
- **Review and Update Emergency Plans:** Modify plans to account for any changes in household or local conditions.
- **Test Communication Methods:** Verify that all communication devices and backup power sources are operational.

Annual Tasks

- **Replace Expired Medications and Food:** Dispose of outdated items and replenish your supplies.
 - **Update Important Documents:** Ensure that identification, insurance policies, and medical records are current and accessible.
 - **Review Insurance Coverage:** Assess your policies to confirm adequate protection for your needs.
 - **Participate in Emergency Preparedness Training:** Engage in community programs or courses to enhance your skills.
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Getting Started: Your 30-Day Action Plan

Embarking on your preparedness journey can feel overwhelming, but breaking it down into weekly tasks makes it manageable. This 30-day plan focuses on building practical skills and assembling essential supplies, ensuring you're ready for common emergencies.

Week 1: Home Basics

- **Assemble a Basic Home Emergency Kit:** Include water (one gallon per person per day for at least three days), non-perishable food, flashlight, batteries, first aid kit, and necessary medications.
- **Identify Home Safety Zones:** Determine safe spots in your home for events like earthquakes or severe storms.
- **Create a Family Communication Plan:** Establish meeting points and emergency contacts. Ensure all family members are familiar with the plan.
- **Locate Utility Shut-Offs:** Know how to turn off water, gas, and electricity in case of emergencies.

Week 2: Vehicle Readiness

- **Build a Vehicle Emergency Kit:** Include items like jumper cables, flashlight, first aid kit, water, non-perishable snacks, and a blanket.
- **Practice Basic Vehicle Maintenance:** Learn how to change a tire and jump-start your car.
- **Identify Alternate Routes:** Familiarize yourself with different routes for your regular commutes in case of road closures.
- **Update Vehicle Maintenance:** Ensure your vehicle is in good working condition, with regular oil changes and tire checks.

Week 3: Outdoor Preparedness

- **Assemble a Basic Outdoor Emergency Kit:** Pack essentials like a map, compass, flashlight, extra batteries, a first aid kit, and an emergency shelter.
- **Practice Navigation Skills:** Use a map and compass to navigate without GPS.
- **Learn Basic First Aid Skills:** Understand how to treat common injuries and illnesses.
- **Plan for Outdoor Emergencies:** Know the signs of weather changes and have a plan for unexpected situations.

Week 4: Mindset and Skills

- **Practice Situational Awareness:** Stay alert to your surroundings, noting exits and potential hazards.
- **Learn De-escalation Techniques:** Understand how to defuse tense situations calmly and safely.
- **Test All Emergency Equipment:** Regularly check that flashlights, radios, and other gear are functioning properly.
- **Connect with Community Members:** Engage with local groups or neighbors to share resources and information.



Confidence Through Preparation

Being prepared does not mean living in fear or expecting the sky to fall. It means having the confidence, tools, and know-how to handle life's curveballs, no matter how big or small.

Whether you are stuck without power at home, dealing with a flat tire on a remote road, or caught in a sudden downpour miles from the trailhead, the tips in this guide are here to help. And the best part? These strategies are just as useful in your everyday life.

Start simple. Focus on the things that are most likely to go sideways in your world. Build your skills and gear slowly, test them often, and remember that preparedness is not a finish line. It is a process.

Knowing you can handle the unexpected makes your adventures more enjoyable. It makes everyday stress a little easier to manage. And when someone else is in a tough spot, you will be ready to help.

Keep your head up. Stay ready. And do not stop exploring.

Additional Resources

For those looking to deepen their preparedness knowledge and skills, the following resources offer trusted information and training opportunities:

Essential Gear Recommendations

- **Emergency Supply List:** A comprehensive checklist for building your emergency kit. [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov)
- **Disaster Supply Checklist:** Detailed list tailored for various disaster scenarios.

Training Opportunities

- **FEMA Training and Education:** Courses for individuals and communities on emergency preparedness. [FEMA](https://www.fema.gov)
- **American Red Cross Training:** Offers first aid, CPR, and disaster preparedness courses. [FEMA](https://www.redcross.org)
- **CERT Training:** Community Emergency Response Team programs to train volunteers in disaster response. [Red Cross](https://www.redcross.org)

Information Sources

- **Ready.gov:** Official U.S. government site for disaster preparedness information. [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov)
- **National Weather Service:** Updates and alerts on weather-related emergencies.

By exploring these resources, you can further enhance your preparedness and resilience.

This guide represents years of experience in law enforcement, outdoor adventures, and practical preparedness applications. Continue learning, practicing, and adapting these concepts to your specific needs and environment.