

8 Lessons We Learned: Hurricanes Michael And Florence

When a hurricane or other natural blockbuster storm is headed your way, it is only natural to wonder if you are really and truly ready for anything that comes along.

In the last two months, Fred and I had not one, but two hurricanes considered high risk for doing damage to our area. As we watched the weather, we also found ourselves thinking “If we can’t do this right as professional preppers, what about others that have less experience”.

Thankfully, the impact from both storms in our area were relatively minimal. It still gave us a chance to stage closer to full implementation of our survival plans. Here are some things that we learned about where we were absolutely on the target, and other areas that we need to work on.

We hope that as you read this listing, it will also help you to think about different parts of your prepping plans and perhaps make some adjustments.

Married Vs. Single Prepping

No matter whether you grew up in the same community as your spouse, or you have only been married for a few months, there is no such thing as two people that think exactly alike. As enriching and enlivening as this can make married life, it can also cause stress at just the wrong moment. For example, when a hurricane or some other disaster is headed your way, the last thing you want to do is disagree on important matters.

If you are an unmarried prepper with no dependents, then you

can more or less do as you see fit when the crisis moment arrives. Even if you are working, chances are you have sick days, or can make other arrangements in case you decide to bug out or need to attend last minute details. On the other hand, when you are married or have dependents, the whole situation changes. While your dependents may have little or no say in what happens to them while in your care, your spouse is another story. In any marriage, the 50/50 balance can make for a gridlock that takes time, thought, and insight to overcome. When you are already stressed because of an oncoming disaster, it can be difficult to slow down, take those deep breaths, and work calmly towards a resolution.



Here are some things that Fred and I found worked well for the hurricanes as well as others that we have encountered over the years:

- Assign Departments – Since we are both preppers, we found out very early on that it was much easier to assign departments based on our areas of specialty and experience. Some areas we have shared interest and pool techniques, while others entail cross training time. For example, we are both avid gardeners that have spent many decades planting indoors and outside. These later years have found us both looking much more closely at container gardening for sustainable survival needs. Likewise, we both enjoy building things and using both hand and power tools. On the other hand, Fred has far more experience with hunting and shelter building, while I tend more towards computers, and power generation.
- Plan Together – One of the worst things you can do is sit down and make a batch of prepping plans, only to find out your spouse has other ideas. For example, you may think canned foods will be better than condensed survival meals. Since food stockpiles are bound to be a significant part of your prepper budget, rest assured you will have to pool resources in order to obtain your supplies. This, and many other areas work out much better when you open the topic for discussion as opposed to making an actual plan. Once you both decide on food options and how much of each option to pursue, it becomes much easier to formulate a comprehensive plan and stick to it. From allocating room for the food to budgeting and choice of brands, everything is much easier when you work together with your spouse instead of being at odds.
- Trust Each Other – When your life and well being are at stake, all kinds of instincts can take over. Never ever assume or believe that your spouse is automatically going to have the same instinct. It does not matter if the instinct is arising from ingrained habits and experiences or leftovers that give you a sour stomach. During a crisis situation, you will not find just one, but many crossroads that cannot be undone or changed.

Once you set on a specific path, you will both have to see it through. At the end of the day, you have to trust each other. If you have trust issues, it is better to work them out before a major crisis strikes. These kinds of life or death struggles will only highlight trust problems more and increase the potential for panic. It does not matter if you are facing a hurricane, a blizzard, or an oncoming mob of rioters. If you cannot trust each other during safer times, do not expect it to be any easier in times of stress. Take the time now to work through these issues, because no amount of planning and preparation can give you the level of trust you will need in a crisis to get through it together and with a solid focus on the situation itself.

Bug In or Bug Out?

Surprising as it may seem, this was the first area where we noticed a difference of viewpoint. Considering how everything afterward flows from this one irreversible decision, figuring out why we had a difference and overcoming it was very important. When you are making plans related to when to stay or leave, it all looks very easy on paper. We had long ago decided that if there is no evacuation order for our area, then we would shelter in place. That made perfect sense to me until the news about Hurricane Florence got worse and worse and it looked increasingly like it would stall out over our area.

In this case, Fred has withstood many hurricanes, some worse than Florence, both as a regular citizen and as an emergency responder. I, on the other hand, have comparatively little experience with them. I've driven in a few tropical storms, placed a few sand bags, and made sure I have enough food and water for a few days. Quite frankly, I know more about hurricanes from watching at a distance and perched in the mountains as opposed to always being in the potential storm

path during hurricane season. This is definitely one place where media hype can overcome both common sense and experience. Here's what happened with us:

- At first, we were both absolutely certain we would shelter in place.
- Hurricane Florence continued to grow in size, and there were multiple indicators that it could dump several inches to a foot of water in our area. Friends of ours nearby were also considering evacuating, and those less than 50 miles away were under evacuation orders.
- All of a sudden, to me, it made sense to make preparations to evacuate and be ready to leave at a moment's notice. I was certain Florence was going to be disaster for our area. Fred, on the other hand, saw far less to worry about. Among other things, he cited the fact that our home is on ground higher than the road, and that the surrounding geography all flows away from us. He also felt, strongly, this house would more than likely survive a Category 2 storm; perhaps 3.
- As much as I was certain disaster was looming for our area, I finally committed to sheltering in place.
- It turned out we had little, if anything to be concerned about. The day Hurricane Florence arrived was warm and sunny. We barely got a few clouds and some drizzle. Even though the storm stalled out about 50 miles from us, it simply didn't come to our area.
- Interestingly enough, neither of us had considered tornado risk, even though this is a prone area during hurricanes and tropical storms. As Florence moved northward, we did get several tornado warnings, however they were not close enough to require taking shelter.
- As ready as we thought we were, the only test we had from Florence was the decision to bug out or not. Thankfully we didn't have other matters to contend with.

Coming into Hurricane Michael was entirely different insofar

as the decision to bug in or bug out. This time, since there were no evacuation orders for our area, we were both comfortable with bugging in. I must admit to watching the news with a much more jaundiced eye and tending to see the hurricane hype for our area as tantamount to the kind of ratings gold that goes along with all the calls for gun control. In short, for our area, and the reality of our situation, the main stream media and its excessive hype are like the boy that cried wolf. Sadly, one of these days the gross exaggerations are going to create a situation where people become so tone deaf to failed predictions, they will not evacuate or take action that could save lives.



After watching the media and my own responses to Hurricanes Florence and Michael, I arrive at the conclusion that it is very important to actually go out and talk to people in the local area. Get perspectives from people that were born in the area or spent most of their lives dealing with various emergencies. No doubt you can expect a different perspective. Only time will tell which answer is the right one. Nevertheless, perspectives from multiple sources can give you

the balance to overcome problems such as:

- Gross over or under exaggeration of the crisis as evaluated by mainstream media. Just as another case in point, have a look the migrant situation unfolding at our southern border. Has anyone noticed that these migrants are being portrayed in the same glowing terms as the Syrian refugees? Even as the media portrays these people as harmless people trying to escape a bad situation in their country, the fact remains Europe is aflame as it tries to manage cultural clashes and sky rocketing crime rates. While our society may be better adapted to accepting people from the south of our border, that does not mean a crisis won't happen. One has only to take a deeper look at our society to realize that these people are going to be trapped between conservatives and liberals that will not hesitate to use them as pawns in various power games. Will that create riots in and around sanctuary cities? Are we on the verge of martial law? The more the media downplays the risks associated with the caravans entering our nation, the worse the situation may actually be.
- Crisis Daze – I'm not sure what to call it, per se, but there are times when you know something very bad is coming, but you can't seem to adjust course no matter how necessary it may be. This daze can happen in both short and long term situations. In the case of hurricanes or other crisis with some kind of warning, individuals will often make wrong assessments because they literally cannot face the reality that the situation may cost their life or well being. With regards to hurricanes, people may feel it is more important to try and safeguard their stockpile, or they may be afraid that looters will get into their homes during the time after the storm. Perhaps it can also be said that people suffering from the delusion that gun control works are crisis dazed in the sense that when

they let go of the idea that government, pieces of paper and laws can fix everything, they must embrace the cold stark reality that it takes a good person with a gun of sufficient caliber to stop a bad one. Unfortunately, media hype and all the stress that comes with it can easily keep people stuck in crisis daze because it seems like too much of a jump to even begin grappling with smaller sized possibilities. If you have ever had to break an enormous task into workable goals and follow a process, then you will easily see how this works. When you are presented with something that is too big to manage it looks impossible to overcome, and you may just shut down. On the other hand, if you have more accurate information, you may just take the necessary steps because they seem feasible.

- Lack of experience – When you live in an area for decades or more, it is much easier to gage what is going on around you. Let's consider a situation where you are watching the news about riots in a major city. As you listen to information about the street names, they may not really mean much to you because you don't live there. Under these circumstances, when the call comes for gun control or even martial law for that area, you may feel that it is the right thing to do, not just for that area, but throughout the nation. On the other hand, someone living in or near that area may have a totally different view. To them, hearing those street names may be little more than "yep, there goes the bad part of town again". For these people, having unfettered access to a gun may be far more important because it means if trouble does come to their door, they will have the means to take care of it. Now, for people living on the streets affected by the riots, their focus may be far different from what the news portrays by their cherry picked testimonials. If you ask the silent majority in the area, they may focus interest on increased police patrols, better activities and programs for youths and

teens, better schools, more job opportunities, and medical care for people with addictions or mental problems. Unless the people have been sexed up with all the media hype about gun control, in private it is likely they feel that many other factors need to be addressed; however they will talk about guns because it is ratings gold and gets attention. The bottom line is lack of experience combined with media generalizations can easily create different views of the same situation. When you are facing an oncoming hurricane or any other disaster where you have to choose between bugging in and bugging out, it is a good idea to ask people that have been in the area longer. Their specialized knowledge can give you a necessary balance that will help you sift through the information more easily and be at peace with the decision that you make.

All Those Last Minute Adjustments

Even as we were working through whether to bug in or bug out, it seemed like we needed to do more than expected to be ready for a hurricane. First, we decided to go over our tools and make sure they were properly zoned. Upon visiting the attic, we found there was no axe up there. Since Fred had mentioned many times that we would wind up retreating upstairs if the house started flooding, the lack of an axe could have spelled disaster. As you may be aware, a significant number of people that died during Hurricane Katrina were found drowned in their own attics.

Unfinished attics and their uncontrolled temperatures make horrible storage places for food, water, and other items that need to be in good condition. While we knew going in that we would have to move some supplies upstairs, it still took a good bit of work to get the job done.

No matter whether you have a whole house to yourself or just a

few rooms in an apartment, day to day living is very different from preparing for a crisis. In our case, we had to consider the cats, the plants, and the basic sprawl that comes with being at home and living a normal life.

Here are just a few things that turned last minute preparations into something that took the better part of several days:

- Making sure that we had a safe place upstairs and downstairs for operating propane stoves and candles.
- Making sure we had all the crates, ID tags, leashes, blankets, food, water, and other needs for the cats. This includes making sure that we could confine them or keep them out of the areas where we would be operating propane stoves and candles. We also needed to be able to get them into their crates quickly and upstairs if the flooding started.
- Deciding which room downstairs would serve as our panic room. Even though we had this one worked out beforehand, we still had to do some work to move the most important supplies and tools into that room.
- Since this was my first year of increased container gardening indoors, I found myself spending a good bit of thinking about just how unprepared I was to take care of live plants if a hurricane damaged the house. This time around, I settled for moving the plants out of rooms that might be crushed or damaged by falling trees and making sure that all of my seeds were packed and ready to travel if we needed to evacuate or stage to the attic.

Overall, we were very lucky that our last minute assessments turned up relatively few things that needed to be purchased. Other than the axe, we decided to purchase some extra canvas, tarp, and a few more bags of sand. Since we had already gone through our bug in bags earlier in the month, there was no need to go through those again.



What Worked

While Hurricane Florence did very little in our area, Hurricane Michael was another story. This one caused a power outage that lasted several hours plus a good bit of flooding in the area around us. It gave us at least some chance to evaluate some of our survival plans and equipment. Here is what we found out:

- It pays to have good battery banks and batteries. Since I have been acquiring good quality small (AAA through 9V) batteries for several years, I had more than enough power to run the phone, tablets, flashlights, and other small items for three days. I also have a small solar power kit that I knew could charge up both the battery banks and the batteries; not to mention various experimental devices that provide a few extra volts here and there. Insofar as low power devices, I have been “off grid” for almost 10 years, and have complete confidence in my ability to power these devices in any situation. The short power loss we experienced during Michael posed no concern on this front. If anything, it only validated the work we had done over the years to

secure this aspect of our power consumption needs.

- Pre-cooking and baking – when a crisis is oncoming, food is one of those things that seems more important than usual. As strange as it may sound, I have yet to see a situation that didn't feel so bad after consuming some kind of comfort food. For me, that happens to be apple pie, home made bread with jam, and a good hot cup of tea. Since apple pie can last outside of the refrigerator for 2 days, and bread for a bit longer, it made perfect sense to get some baking done ahead of time. Even though I wasn't likely to have an interest in baking during the power outage caused by Hurricane Michael, it was still nice to munch on some of my favorite foods while waiting for the storm to pass.
- Heat sources ready for cooking and more – as an avid camper and Eagle Scout, I should not have been surprised that Fred had this part of our prepping well in hand. From propane cylinders and paper logs to pine cones for building a fire in the back yard if necessary, we were more than able to cook, heat up water (including for my tea!), and stay warm no matter what the hurricanes decided to dump on us.
- Combatting mold, mildew, and dampness – even though we did not get a direct hit from Hurricane Michael, it left behind heat and dampness for several days. This was the perfect situation for mold and mildew to blossom. No matter whether you have allergies or not, the risk of black mold infestations in the post hurricane period is something very few people ever talk about. Fortunately, once we got electricity back, the fans we had going in every room were more than enough to remove mold and mildew spores. Even though it was still humid and muggy, with slight odor, we had no signs of these disgusting infestations on the walls, ceilings, furniture, or drapes.

What Didn't Work

Insofar as food and water, providing heat, and powering at least some devices, we were more than ready for anything the hurricanes could have brought our way. That doesn't mean we had everything covered as much as we would have liked.



Here are the areas that stood out most:

- Landscape issues – when a hurricane or tornado is oncoming, the last thing you want around are shallow rooted trees or ones that are so weak they run a chance of falling to the ground. On the other side of the equation, a lack of shrubbery for wind breaks can also be a problem. While we have been working hard on getting rid of scrub brush and some of the larger trees, we still need to plant some shrubbery that will act as a windbreak and also a deterrent to unwanted visitors.
- Surveillance and safety – over the years, I've tried a few different camera and security systems. Some work better than others. The biggest problem I found was with no power, the cameras did not run. If we had been out of power for days and in a situation where looters were active, the cameras would have been useless.

- Keeping foods cold – since the power outage was very short, we only had to keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed in order to avoid spoilage. While I had plenty of ice and salt onhand, it was difficult to determine when we would have had to make the move to transfer everything out of the freezer. We could also do with a cooler that has better insulation. A 12v camping refrigerator and freezer also seems more appealing. I did manage to test the zeer pots out for a day during Hurricane Michael just to see what would happen. As I suspected, the increased humidity levels in the surrounding area all but made the pots useless. While I may love the idea behind the zeer pots, I no longer feel they are a viable option during and after a hurricane.
- Air quality – Without power, the fans we rely on to remove allergens and pollution do not run. Activated carbon masks were very helpful, however they can only clean the air entering the mask. As such, without the fans running, there is no way to remove mold and mildew spores in sufficient quantity to prevent overgrowth. If we had not gotten electricity back as quickly as we did, it is very safe to say we would have had a major air quality and living conditions problem.

Improvements We Made

The close proximity in time of both storms gave us a chance to take a much better look at our plans as well as make some changes that we could see the immediate results of. Here are three things we did almost as soon as Hurricane Florence was over:

- Going into Hurricane Florence, it crossed my mind more than once that if we lost electricity, we would also lose internet access because our router required more electricity than I could provide with small batteries. While I do have a SIM based phone for emergency access,

it simply doesn't have the capacity to get the kind of emergency information we might need. As useful as crank weather radios may be, the potential loss of interaction that comes with the internet was of major concern. These thoughts led me to changing our ISP entirely in exchange for a 4G data plan. Since these plans are accessible via a SIM card and hotspot, we now have a much better chance of staying online through a larger number of situations that cause power outages, but not sufficient to take out cell towers and their associated transmissions. During our power outage, we had full access to the internet and were able to use all our devices with no problems. Together with that, we also decided to expand our SIM library to include at least one from each major carrier. In the event of a major storm or other crisis, all we have to do is activate subscriptions to each carrier. Unless all the towers go down, we should still have some degree of capacity to communicate via these devices.

- Battery power for the cameras – since the cameras we have take relatively little power, I was able to find suitable batteries to keep them running.
- Improved seed storage – one thing I realized almost immediately was if the house was damaged, I would also more than likely lose all the work I had put into the container garden. Since it took a good bit of time and effort to build up my herb and vegetable collection, I did not want to lose the seeds or a good accounting of how long they would remain viable in storage. In between storms, I went back over all my seeds and made stickers for their packets that included the date they were purchased, approximate seed viability ranges, and notes about reputable sellers.

Things We Need to Work On and

Looking Ahead

As noted earlier, two of our biggest problem areas involved devices that required more than 9 volts of electricity. At the same time, all of the devices that are of concern are available in 12 volt options for campers and boats. Here are some things we will do to solve this problem:

- One vital goal to reach is the capacity to generate at least 12 volts of electricity that can be used to power 5 – 7 devices around the clock. We have the option of purchasing solar power cells that can produce more electricity. Unfortunately, larger solar panels also come with an increased risk of failure. I feel it would be much better to focus on DIY power generation options including pedal bike generators, improved wind turbines, coil design development, and generating steam via tin can heaters and solar cookers. The former will also come in very handy for providing hot water and assisting with water purification needs. Since I have been saving up cans for some time, a tin can heater will probably be on my list to install before the end of this year.
- Get a better cooler chest – we will be looking for a better cooler chest that will be big enough to accommodate ice, salt, and whatever we have stored in the freezer. In the future, we will also rely much less on foods that need to be frozen or kept in the refrigerator.

Another major area of concern for us was the lack of windbreaks around the property. With winter setting in, planting suitable shrubs will have to wait until the spring.

Insofar as long term sustainable food, I was, quite frankly, very concerned about the lack of emergency planning for taking care of our container garden. If one of the hurricanes had caused serious flooding, it is likely we would have lost several months worth of work and supplies. Unfortunately,

carting large buckets up a narrow stair case to the attic would only add more work during a time when other things need to be moved. On the other hand, creating better temperature conditions in the attic might create a viable means to leave more items up there including plants and other resources.

If we can get one tin can heater to work and generate enough heat for one room, then I will see about building more heaters and installing them along with the piping and radiators so that hot water can be used to keep the attic warm. With regards to cooling off the attic during the summer months, I will revisit fan based air conditioner systems and installing LED lights so that I can completely close off the windows during the hottest part of the day.

This Device Easily Turns Air Into Water!

Also, related to sustainable food, I soon realized that I have enough seeds to plant again if needed, but not enough seeds onhand to grow microgreens over an extended period of time. No matter how rapidly seeds germinate and the amount of biomass the produce, the fact remains it can't be done without a sufficient number of seeds. Aside from working harder to get more seeds from plants that will be used for producing microgreen seeds, I will also look into buying a larger number of seeds to have onhand for a time of need. I will also be looking into setting up more jars so that I can have at least 6 in various stages of growth at one time.

Finally, another area that we need to work on is one that everyone talks about: water. Right now we have several water purification methods onhand, and are sure that they all work. We also have the basic plastic covering and a suitable container to draw at least some water from ground based evaporation. Sadly, however, we do not have a the following:

- Sufficient food grade buckets to capture enough rain and snow to provide 3 – 5 gallons of water per day, plus

store away enough for at least 4 weeks. While we do have some good areas around the yard for water capture, the lack in a suitable number of buckets means we cannot capture enough water at one time. I am also considering purchasing a water tank and then figure out a water capture method that will pipe the water from multiple sources directly into the tank.

- A means to capture water from the air. This is something I have been looking into for some time. There are devices available, however, they are quite expensive. I am very interested in creating a DIY device that will run on solar power or some other low power option.

Looking Ahead

As we head into the winter season, we may or may not get another hurricane that will further test our readiness for this type of situation. This is not, however, the only kind of crisis that we must think about. Fortunately, many of the things that we found worked well during the last two hurricanes will also work well in just about any other crisis. Here are a few other things we are considering and will be focusing more on even though they weren't a high priority during the hurricane:

- Massive social revolt – Every day, it seems like we are hearing more about violent riots. Large scale protests, vigorous debate, and firm investigation of politicians and lobbyists is always healthy and necessary. The kind of violence and cult like behavior that is on the rise, however, is a serious problem. As liberals and conservatives become more polarized, just about anything can turn into a flash point that paves the way for more violence. You have only to look at Syria to see how it works, and the consequences. Unfortunately, gun grabbers succeeded long ago in removing the vast majority of machine guns, and other vital weapons from the average

citizen. This leaves fortifying walls with sand bags and doing everything possible to harden doors and windows against unwanted entry.

- Currency collapse – no matter who wins the election, it is fairly obvious that stock market gyrations, trade problems, and petro dollar woes can generate a string of currency collapses that span the globe. While neither of us had to give much thought to bartering and trade, we are both thinking about what skills we can specialize in during a time when money has no value or use.
- Nuclear Readiness – while the North Korean nuclear crisis may be on a slower simmer, that doesn't mean we can ignore Iran, other nuclear nations, or our aging nuclear power plants. One thing I have long had an interest in building is an underground bunker. As with the wind breaker shrubs, the winter will be a time to make plans, secure permits, and make ready to build in the spring or summer.
- Germ Weapons – it is no secret that the upcoming flu season may be more dangerous than the last. To add insult to injury, children are dieing from a polio like disease that is increasing in magnitude as the years ago by. While we don't need any more germ based problems, the fact is terrorists and other dissidents have all kinds of diseases at their disposal. During and after Hurricane Michael, I was able to see first hand how useful fans with suitable filters are for getting rid of mold and mildew. I will be looking into replacing our usual Merv 13 filters with Merv 16 or above in an effort to have filtration onhand that will filter out more bacteria and other pathogens. Alternatively, we might set up UV lights behind the fans that will clean the air of pathogens as it is pulled into the fan.

As long time, experienced preppers, it is all too easy to sit back and think we have all the answers and that the vast majority of our work is done. While Hurricane Florence didn't

pose much of a physical challenge, it did teach us a lot about evaluating the media and its activities during a crisis as well as how our experiences shape our outlooks. The challenges presented by Hurricane Michael were far more useful in terms of testing out some of our equipment and plans during a time of actual need. There is nothing like a crisis to give you the chance to look back with 20/20 hindsight and see what should have been obvious all along.

We remain grateful that neither hurricane had a serious impact on us, and that it also gave us a chance to improve for worse situations. In closing, we look forward to hearing about how your survival plans have been tested by relatively minor events and what you learned from them.



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