

How to Survive a Snow-In

It's that time of year again, where snow becomes a big part of many people's lives. I haven't seen any of it myself this year, as I'm too far south, but I've heard the reports. Colorado, where I grew up, seems to be getting plenty of early-season snow. That's a good thing, considering how much of the country counts on runoff from the Colorado Rockies for their water.

But there's a huge difference between sitting nice and warm, looking at reports of snow, and sitting in your house, watching the snow pile up outdoors. I remember living in Upstate New York, where the snow that fell in October would still be on the ground in March. The only difference would be that there would be four feet of packed snow sitting on top of it. I remember being snowed in a few times, and what I went through was nothing compared to the people living in some parts of the country.



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So, what's the big deal about being snowed in? Isn't that just a couple of days off from work; a couple of days to sit around and relax, watching the snow fall outside? Oh, that it was so. All too often, when people get snowed in, they're snowed in without power, without heat, and possibly even without water.

Been there, done that, burned the T-shirt.

This is actually a pretty classic survival situation, of the type that we prepare for. But surprisingly, many people who

are prepared for these sorts of situations don't stop thinking like preppers when the situation arrives. It's the same thing that happened during the pandemic; the thought that "it's not bad enough to get into my stockpile." Uh, if you need it, it's bad enough to get into your stockpile. You don't need six weeks of closed grocery stores to start eating the food you've saved up for an emergency.

Preparing to be Snowed In

Looking at it one way, preparing to be snowed in is such a classic survival situation, that one might think that we don't need to talk about it. "Wouldn't our time be better spent talking about the grid going down?" one might say. But in reality, that blizzard has the same impact as the grid going down, for the people who are snowed in because of it. Not only for them; but for everyone else in their community, including the local police department and the grocery store.

With the local infrastructure and supply chain shut down, you will be as isolated as if you were on the far side of the moon. Oh, you might be able to talk to friends and family on your phone, at least as long as fuel reserves for the generators last; but don't expect any of them to come knocking on your door, unless those hardy souls have snow mobiles or snowshoes. If they have enough reason, like they don't have any heat but you do, they might come over to visit then.

Granted, this is a short-term survival situation; but that doesn't mean that it's not a serious one. Every year, people die in their homes, in just this sort of situation. Why? Because they're not prepared to deal with it.

Dealing with it means being self-sufficient for those few days until the roads are dug out again. Specifically, we need to be self-sufficient in the basic survival priorities; heat, water and food. Of those, heat is the biggest and most important.

Heat

Your most critical need is going to be for heat. Based on what I've seen during some of the winter storms we've had in the last couple of years, you can't expect your home's insulation to keep you warm for more than a day or two, without having any heat on in the house. That means having some sort of off-grid heat source, like a wood burning stove.

There are a couple of potential problems here. The first that I encounter all the time, is that people will put in a wood-burner, but not put in much of a stock of firewood. Not only that, but the firewood that they do have is largely the wrong type. They'll have a pile of construction scraps and pine firewood (the same thing), which will burn too fast and not produce enough heat. You need good solid hardwood to heat your home. It costs more, but it more than makes up for it with the heat it produces.

The other problem I see all the time is that preppers will have their wood burning stove, but forget about a plan for living in that one room of their house. No wood burning stove is going to heat your whole home; you're going to have to camp out in the living room or family room, wherever that stove is installed. Where will everyone sleep in there? How will you cook? What about using the bathroom and the privacy for personal hygiene? These very real questions will have to be dealt with; better now, before the blizzard comes.

Insulating Your Home

Besides installing some means of off-grid heating, you really need to do an inventory of your home's weatherproofing. Just how well is your home sealed from the storm outside? Are there air leaks that are going to allow the wind in and the heat out? Can you do something to insulate your windows better?

One of the best tricks for windows is to cover them with clear

plastic, of the type that contractors use for drop cloths. You'll want something fairly thick and durable, so that it doesn't tear. Tape it in place, covering the windows and making sure that you don't leave any air leaks. You might just have small air leaks around the windows, where the weatherstripping has worn out. This plastic sheeting can help deal with that, at least temporarily.

Another great trick for windows is bubble wrap. Yes, you read that right. Buy a roll of the bubble wrap that they use for packing things for shipping. Cut pieces the size of your windows and attach it to the inside of the windows by spraying a little bit of soapy water to the window and then sticking the bubble wrap to it, bubble side to the glass. This can effectively turn a single-pane window into a double-pane one or a double-pane one into a triple-pane one.

Another handy trick, with really bad blizzards, where the temperature is well below freezing, is to spray water on the outside of your house, especially in places where there might be air leaks. Allow that water to freeze, and if necessary, go over it again. Wind can't make it through ice any better than it can wood or brick.

Water

Pipes freezing is an old problem when it comes to blizzards. Hopefully the water lines are buried deep enough, wherever you live. That's something which is covered in the building code. But if you have an old home, it might not be up to code.

Even if your home is up to code, there are still possible problems. The biggest potential place for broken pipes is your outside hose bibs. I don't remember how many homes I've replaced these on, because they froze during a blizzard. Make sure you've got the extended ones, that go far into your basement and that they are well insulated.

Other than broken pipes, water really shouldn't be much of an issue. I'm sure you will have water stockpiled; but even if you don't you can always melt snow. Just realize that you're only going to get a net return of about ten percent of the volume you try to melt. Be sure to stir it too, so that it doesn't scald. I realize that sounds ridiculous, but scalded water doesn't taste good.

Food

Food should be the least of your worries, as you probably have plenty in your stockpile. It would be best to eat a high-carbohydrate, high-fat diet, as your body will need the energy to keep itself warm. Move around a lot, even if you are only limited to one room of the house, as it is the movement of your muscles that generates heat for your body.

I always recommend that people buy a wood burning stove that has some sort of arrangements for cooking. An awfully lot of them are more decorative, than practical, especially the newer ones. If you have an actual fireplace, a fireplace crane allows you to hang a pot over the fire; but that doesn't fit into most wood burning stoves.

The last thing you'll need to worry about is food spoiling. I've placed food out on the back porch or deck many a time, allowing nature to keep it cold. Sometimes that meant that it was kept colder than I wanted it to be, but it never went bad.

Electricity

If we assume that the electricity will go out, you'll want at least some electricity reserves, if for no other reason than to charge your phone. A sizeable battery backup system is essential, and actually more useful than the solar panels that charge it. Generators can also be useful in such a time, if you've got enough fuel to keep them going. I keep about 50 gallons of gasoline on hand at all times, just for generators.

When the Storm Strikes

We all get weather reports, and while we can't count on the accuracy of them, they're usually pretty good at telling us when major storms are coming. I'd recommend treating every major storm as a potential survival situation, gathering your family together in the home and going into "survival mode" before the power goes out. The family will likely get tired of you doing that; but when the time comes, you'll be glad you did.



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Mostly what you want to do in the early part of the storm, while you still have power, is to get ready for when the power goes out. If you don't have a means of hanging blankets over door openings, separating the part of the house that's heated, from the rest of it, then work this out at that time. Take care of covering windows as well. Even if the power doesn't go out, it will help reduce your heating cost.

Times like this can be a great opportunity to pull your family closer together. Make sure that you put a positive spin on things, using the time to bond together. Whether that is through talking or playing board games, make it into family time. Just the fact that you're taking care of your family in the midst of adversity will help bring your family closer together.