

In the Face of a General Evacuation

As preppers, the idea of evacuating, or as we call it – “bugging out,” is one that we have an easy familiarity with. We build bug out bags, “ooh” and “aah” at pictures of different preppers’ ideas about the perfect bug out vehicle and act like we’re all ready, should it become necessary to leave our homes and head for the hills. But I have to ask myself just how ready we are.

When I talk to other preppers, very few of them have an actual survival retreat to go to, should they be forced to bug out. Many have the idea of just heading out into the forest and setting up camp. They’ll supposedly build a log cabin with the hatchet and wire saw in their bug out bag and spend the rest of their lives living off the land.

There are a number of problems with this scenario, starting with the idea that bugging out means bugging out forever. We all tend to be a bit focused on TEOTWAWKI events, forgetting at times that there are smaller disasters which can force us to leave our home; things like Hurricane Milton.



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Milton was so serious that over 50 of Florida’s 67 counties were ordered to evacuate. Considering that there are about 22.2 million people living in Florida, that puts the number of people ordered to evacuate somewhere north of 15 million. There’s a huge difference between trying to bug out as part of

a mass evacuation like that, as compared to trying to bug out by yourself, with your family and maybe a few friends in your survival team.

The biggest problem most of us face is not having that survival retreat. That might not be a problem if we're heading out alone, due to some problem which doesn't trigger a mass evacuation. But when it comes to a mass evacuation, having someplace to go is the number one priority. Not only that, but the destination you're headed for, has to be outside the evacuation zone. For the people in Tampa, it wouldn't have done any good to go to Orlando, which was also under the evacuation order, being in the storm track as well. They would have had to go a good 300 miles north to get to a place of safety.

Of course, just going 300 miles north may not give them a place of safety, if they are part of a 15-million-person evacuation. Even if it gets them out of the storm's path, that probably won't get them to any sort of shelter, as any available shelter would already be filled by those who didn't have as far to travel.

Can You Really Get There?

The first question any of us need to ask ourselves is whether or not we can get to wherever we're going to be evacuating to. Highways and secondary roads turn into slowly moving parking lots during these times, meaning that it takes a lot longer to get anywhere, than it normally will.

Your first consideration has to be the condition of your car. Will it make a several-hundred-mile trip, without causing you any problem? Can you count on it to not overheat? Will the battery remain strong enough to start and stop your engine, as traffic stops and goes? Are your tires good? Are belts and hoses on their last legs, or can you count on them?

On top of the condition of your car, you need to be concerned about fuel. If we're talking a 300-mile evacuation, it would be normal to think that one tank of fuel would be enough. But that's assuming traveling at normal speed, without stopping and starting. In reality, you'll use at least double the amount of gas you normally would, if not more.

As we all know, gas stations start running out of fuel early on in the evacuation process. While petroleum companies work hard to bring in fuel during a general evacuation, they are limited by the number of trucks that are in the area. It takes about five semi-loads of fuel to fill the tanks in just one gas station.

Hopefully, you can get to a place of safety with two tanks worth of gasoline. So, the question becomes, where are those two tanks worth of gas going to come from? For me and my family, I try to ensure that I always have that much gas on hand. We fill our vehicles' tanks when they get to the halfway point and we have enough gas in cans to provide another complete filling. Before leaving the house, we'll siphon gas from the vehicles we're leaving behind, ensuring that we have as much as possible for the vehicle that we're taking with us. Since each tank is at least half full, we're sure to have more than we can use.

Shelter is Key

While transportation is an important aspect in bugging out, shelter is key, especially in a mass evacuation. We've all heard stories of hotels and motels jacking up their rates to the extreme, taking advantage of the opportunity to make a buck... or a hundred. Several states have passed laws against that; but without anyone enforcing those laws, they may as well not exist.

But even with hotel prices running three to four times what they normally do, you can be sure that those hotels will fill

up quickly. Anyone who is not in the bow wave of evacuees is either going to have to go further to find shelter or have an alternate plan.

So, just what alternate plans can we use, if we don't already have a prepared survival shelter?

Red Cross or FEMA Shelters

It has become quite apparent that the government expects everyone to calmly put themselves under the government's control, by going to a FEMA camp. Of course, FEMA isn't in all that much of a hurry to establish those camps, so it's hard to say what to do in the meantime. The American Red Cross is considerably faster at getting their shelters set up. Even so, make sure you leave your guns at home or at least lock them in the car. You can't take weapons into a Red Cross shelter, any more than you can one of FEMA's.

Although I've mentioned this first, it's the last choice as far as I'm concerned. There's no way I want to put my family in the hands of the people running these shelters, or to trust the other people who are staying in them. I'd rather sleep in the car.

Family & Friends

A much better solution is to make an arrangement with friends or family who live outside of your area, where they won't be impacted by the disaster. Ideally, they should be somewhere around 300 miles from your home. That should be far enough away to be outside the major damage, while still close enough to make it possible to get there.

The big advantage of using a friend or family member's home is that they will likely be the most understanding of what you're going through. Even if they aren't, they'll try to be. It might be a strain, especially if you end up having to stay for

a couple of weeks; but at least you'll be staying with someone you can trust, who cares about you.

Arranging for this in advance can also provide the opportunity to stage equipment and supplies that you might need, either at their home or if they don't have the space, nearby their home. There are rental storage lockers everywhere, allowing you the opportunity to store whatever you need to, close to their home, at a reasonable rate.

Camping

Camping actually comes closest to what most of us think of as bugging out. But I'm not actually talking about going back in the middle of nowhere and setting up a campsite with what you can carry on your back type of camping. Rather, I'm talking in terms of camping in a campground somewhere. If a campground isn't available, then camping alongside the road in a rest area or other convenient location.

I lived in a motorhome for nine years, traveling back and forth across the country. I wish I still had that motorhome, to use as an emergency bug out vehicle/survival retreat. While it was quite a gas hog, it would provide me with a place to stay, wherever I go. In other words, I wouldn't have to worry a bit about where I was going to bug out to. I could stay in a Wal-Mart parking lot, if I needed to. I've spent many a night in their expansive parking lots; then woken up in the morning to go inside and buy whatever I needed for breakfast.

Granted, motorhomes are expensive, even old ones, like I had. But you can get a pretty good deal on a used travel trailer, if you take some time to look. That's just as good, and probably better on gas mileage, assuming you have a truck or large SUV that can tow it. You would have the same ability to sleep wherever you want, as well as the ability to drop off the trailer (being sure to lock the hitch) and take off with your truck to go buy supplies.

If all else fails, you can do pretty well in a good-quality tent, assuming you spend enough to buy one that will handle the weather and take the time to pitch it properly. I've camped through many a storm in a tent; and while it wasn't always enjoyable, it wasn't all that bad either.

Pre-book a Hotel or AirBNB

The only way you can count on any sort of hotel, motel or even an AirBNB is if you pre-book it. But that may not be as easy as it seems. Keep in mind that hotels and motels typically generally over-book, expecting that not everyone will show up. That means that you need more than a reservation, if you're planning on staying in any of those places. What you actually have to do is to not just reserve the room, but pay for the room, before you even get there. In other words, when you make contact, tell them you want the room from that very minute and give them your credit or debit card information. There's much less chance that they'll try and rent out a room that's already rented.

This will work out better if you can use a privately-owned inn and develop a relationship with the innkeeper. Staying there a few weekends per year and taking the time to sit down and talk with the owner, will naturally motivate them to put you at the top of the list, when you call for a room. Offering to pay for that room, from the time of your call, will cement the deal.



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A Couple of Thoughts About Packing

Regardless of where you end up going, if you are forced to evacuate, keep in mind that you will likely be there for a couple of weeks. Hopefully it won't be that long; but flood waters can be slow to abate, making it necessary to stay longer than you might like. Be sure to pack enough clothing and other necessities to last.

Speaking of necessities, keep in mind that there will be a lot of other people who are heading to the same general area that you are. This will probably cause the local supply chain to be overwhelmed. Grocery stores, gas stations, pharmacies and others will naturally run low on inventory and will probably not be able to restock quickly enough. You already have supplies in your stockpile, so be sure to take enough with you to see your family through those two weeks or more.