

Surviving the High Cost of Wintertime

Here in the prepping community, we tend to think about “survival” as something that only kicks into gear when a disaster strikes. We spend lots of time and money, making sure that when the brown stuff hits the rotary air movement device, we’ll be ready and able to survive, even if nobody else is. After all, that’s why they call us “preppers,” right?

But it doesn’t take a major disaster to make it hard to survive. A few short years ago a pandemic hit the world and the government reacted with shutdowns and other restrictions. During that time, I saw an awful lot of preppers complaining about shortages of food, toilet paper, alcohol and Clorox wipes, while sitting on those things in their prepping stockpile. For some reason, there were those amongst our ranks who didn’t recognize the disaster they were living through; perhaps because it didn’t meet their expectations. Whether the pandemic itself was a disaster or not, the supply chain shortages certainly was.

Another such “disaster” hits millions of people every year, as winter comes, bringing cold weather and lots of snow. While that’s not an issue for those of us who live in warmer climates, those who live in the north are already receiving their first snowfalls, in anticipation of many more to come. For them, getting through winter can be a challenge; and it’s a challenge that some don’t manage to survive.

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As preppers, we must remember that much of what we do started

with our ancestors working to prepare themselves, so that they could survive the winter and plant their seed the next spring. Planting your own food, harvesting it, preserving it and building up a good woodpile were all aimed at surviving the winter as recently as a century ago. Those who didn't do well at those common tasks weren't likely to make it through till spring. That was especially true for those who lived in more remote areas.

We are much more protected from the ravages of winter today, as long as we have the money to pay for heating our homes. Nonetheless, there are reports every winter of people who don't make it; usually elderly retirees on fixed incomes, who can't afford the ever-increasing cost of trying to buy food and heat their homes at the same time. The same could happen to any of us; all it would take is the loss of our jobs, leaving us without the income to pay the bills.

The Challenge of Winter Heating

The biggest challenge for surviving the cold of winter is heating our homes. With energy costs being one of the leading drivers of inflation, it is constantly getting more expensive to heat our homes. Few people's salaries truly keep up with inflation, meaning that just about everyone is getting closer and closer to the point where they don't have enough income to pay their energy bills.

Ok, so how do we solve that problem?

First of all, we need to realize that our western way of heating our homes is very inefficient. Heating an entire house, especially a large house, when it isn't all in use, all the time, is a waste of energy. We could save ourselves a bundle by only heating the parts of the house we are occupying at any one point of time. The rest of the house doesn't need to be kept freezing; but it doesn't need to be kept as warm either.

There are actually dampers that we can put into our heating and cooling ducts, which will allow us to individually control the temperature of rooms. While it costs a bit to put them in and to wire thermostats in every room, it provides us the ability to much more closely monitor and control the heat that we are using. Spread the cost out, adding in these dampers and controls one room at a time, until you've managed to go all the way through your house.

Hand in hand with that, is the fact that we heat our homes so that we can dress like we're living in the summer heat, even during the cold of winter. Rather than wearing sweaters or jackets, we're in shirtsleeves. So, instead of using our body heat to keep us warm, we're counting on external heat that we have to pay for. We can lower the temperature we keep our homes at, if we'll just wear warmer clothing on cold days.

Then, of course, there are the air leaks that many of us have in our homes, which allow the heated air to escape. This may be a commonly known problem; but there are still a lot of people who haven't taken the necessary steps to solve it. If you have gaps in windows and doors that you can see though, you're losing heat. The same can be said if your home's insulation isn't up to snuff, especially the attic insulation. An energy audit, which can often be done for free, will help you to define what work needs to be done on your home, so that you can more easily survive the winter.

Put that Wood-Burning Stove to Work

Many of us have installed wood-burning stoves in our homes, as an emergency heating measure, in case the power goes out. As far as I'm concerned, it's an emergency any time the temperature drops below about 40 degrees. If I'm having to heat my home, I may as well heat it with wood.

Wood may not seem like a very cost-effective means of heating your home; but that all depends on where you get your wood. I

don't buy firewood for my home, I cut it myself; and rather than having to pay to cut it, I'm often paid to cut it.

What I do is keep my eyes open for dead trees, deadfalls, branches that have fallen down and anything else that might need to be cut up and hauled off. When I find them, I stop to talk to the property owner, offering to cut it up and haul it off. That gives me a constant supply of wood for my fire, making it possible for me to use my wood-burning stove essentially for free.

Cutting Down on Transportation Costs

The other big energy cost for most people is transportation. Gasoline prices keep going up and down, with the general trend being upwards. It costs us more to get anywhere today, than it did a few short years ago. That's just going to keep getting worse, especially with a president who is pushing for us all to switch over to electric cars. High gas prices aren't a bug in the system, as far as he's concerned, they're a feature of the system.

There are a lot of different ways that we can cut down on our transportation costs, most of which require some lifestyle change. We can save a lot of gasoline by taking public transportation; but who wants to stand out in the cold at a bus stop? On the other hand, if we're having trouble making ends meet, then that sort of sacrifice may just be what's needed.

On a simpler note, make sure that the vehicle you're driving is running as well as possible, so that it consumes the least possible amount of gasoline. It might even be necessary to trade your gas guzzler in for something more fuel efficient. I've found that paying the extra insurance on having a small car is worth it, as I save more on gas, than what I spend on

insurance. Of course, that's with cars that are paid for. Another option, which saves from standing out in the cold, is car-pooling with co-workers.



Plenty of Food

The other big driver of inflation that really concerns us in the wintertime is food. Like our energy costs, food prices rise faster than the average inflation rate, making it harder and harder to pay for food.

This should never be an issue for preppers. After all, we all stockpile food for an emergency. That's what defines us as preppers, more than anything else. As I mentioned earlier, there were preppers complaining about the difficulty in finding food, during the pandemic, when they had pantries full of food back home.

I rotate stock on my prepping pantry, which also allows me the option of using some of my food and then restocking later. While I try to avoid letting my food supplies drop below a certain level, I have no problem using my home-canned foods, knowing that I'll be able to restock when growing season comes around again. I also buy as much of my meat as I can in bulk, taking advantage of the price break that comes with buying larger quantities or buying on sale.

Although I'm a true carnivore, I recognize the need to increase my carbohydrate intake in the wintertime, reducing my meat intake to make up for it. This provides my body with the

fuel it needs to ensure it is producing enough heat. At the same time, I'm not usually getting as much exercise in the wintertime, so I don't really need as much protein. Together, these dietary changes help reduce my grocery costs, as carbs tend to be much cheaper than meat.