

# **Suburban Dad Survivalist Newsletter**

Analysis and Guidance on Practical Preparedness Solutions

## ***In This Issue....***

- Bugs, TV Shows, and Yuppies: The Prepper Nation Faces Fundamental Questions
- You Gotta Eat: Part One In a Series of Creating a Workable Food Storage Plan
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August 2011

## **Ants, Grasshoppers and OPSEC**

Since last month's newsletter, Norway joined the Terrorism Club, Americans of all ilk shifted their fascination away from Casey Anthony and onto our national debt limit deadline, and the nation's power grid groaned under the stress of the Sun Surface Simulator which has become two thirds of the continental United States. And lest I forget to mention the tropical ocean waters continue to warm up, Gulf coast residents got a gentle reminder on July 22 that we are well into hurricane season with a tropical wave forming southeast of Miami on a west/northwest heading. If anyone needed a reason to think about preparing for an emergency, they need only watch the news and pick from the cornucopia of *crisis du jour*.

Or they could just tune into NatGeo on television. The National Geographic Channel ("NatGeo" for the cable TV savvy) recently ran a television show entitled "Doomsday Preppers."<sup>1</sup> The hour-long show featured four families preparing for hard times. Each family had a different reason for preparing. One family worried about the potential of a coronal mass ejection (CME). (Imagine the sun spitting on us with a kajillion<sup>2</sup> electrons and protons of plasma, capable of frying every iPad and cell phone on the block. That's a CME.) Another family worried about the potential of a nuclear attack of some sort. A third family prepared for a total breakdown of the financial markets. The fourth family stocked up on food and supplies in anticipation of hyperinflation destroying our economy.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMPepJpadbo&feature=feedf](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMPepJpadbo&feature=feedf)

<sup>2</sup> A "kajillion" is precisely halfway between a bazillion and two million billion.

After every family discussed their concern and the preparations they were making, the producers of the show would have unidentified, off camera "experts" critique their plans offer suggestions. For one of the families living in suburban Phoenix, the experts recommended that they encourage their neighbors to get prepared and trained them on how to do it.

Interestingly, these same purported experts commended another Phoenix family for maintaining a level of operational security, or "OPSEC."

OPSEC simply refers to the practice of sharing information on an absolute need to know basis, so those around you won't know what you're up to; in other words, it means keeping your mouth shut about your preparations.

*.....nothing screams OPSEC like going on national television, showing off all your gear and supplies, and then telling people your name and where you live.*

Ironically, the family receiving OPSEC game balls from the National Geographic experts were the same people who invited a camera crew to their house for a national television show to show off their extensive medical supplies, food storage and firearm collection. I could barely contain myself when the family matriarch said something to the effect of, "Hi, my name is (insert name here) and we live in Phoenix and we're very concerned about operational security." After all, *nothing* screams OPSEC like going on national television, showing off all your gear and supplies, and then telling people your name and where you live.

Like a number of preppers, I belong to several internet forums devoted to the subject. As I watched the show, I knew one of my colleagues in one of the more savvy forums would figure out where these people live. Sure enough, within a matter of a few minutes, they identified the family featured in the show and had used Google Earth to show satellite pictures of their home. Busted!

This television show illustrates a true quandary for those of us advocate preparedness. On one hand, would like to see everyone be prepared. We want to be an example, and inspiration, and a source of expertise to help those new to the cause get where they need to be. Many people have moral or spiritual values, compelling them to help their fellow man. They figure the best way to do it is to share their thoughts and beliefs about preparedness with others.

On the other hand, many preppers understandably worry about operational security. The more people who know about their supplies, the more likely it is someone will come post disaster and try to take it away from them. To that end, they often tell no one about what they are doing. They pay cash for all their supplies. They have elaborate cover stories for anyone who asks them questions about their training or gear.

This dilemma reminds me of the fable of the ants and the grasshopper you probably remember from your childhood. The ants, the hard workers they are, diligently store food away during the summer months so they may have food to eat in the winter. The grasshopper, on the other hand, does not prepare for the coming cold season and lounges all summer unproductively. When winter comes, the ants have food, and the grasshopper's left out of the cold. The grasshopper begs the ants for some food, much to their dismay.

Assuming all of you are ants and not grasshoppers, how would you describe yourself? Are you the ant who wants to help the grasshopper get motivated to prepare for the coming winter? Are you the ant that keeps all your preparations a secret? During times of hardship or emergency, are you the ant that provides charity to the grasshopper, despite the fact the grasshopper could've done something for himself? Or are you the ant that puts its family and itself before the grasshopper's needs, telling the grasshopper there's nothing you can do for him?

*One of the more important decisions any prepared person must make is whether to out themselves as a prepper. It's a very personal decision, which in my opinion has no right or wrong answers.*

I'm not here to advocate that you should be one type of ant over another. *However, I am advocating that you start thinking about this now.* Should you tell your friends and neighbors what you're up to? If so, who do you tell? If you tell some of them, will they tell others? Regardless of whether or not you tell, what do you plan to do when someone knocks on your door asking for assistance?

Two of the best preppers in the business take different tacks on this. Ragnar Benson, my all-time favorite preparedness author, shared this hypothetical in his seminal book *The Survival Retreat*:

Let us suppose there is a home for the retarded about a mile from your retreat. At the time of the collapse, the workers, hearing you have shelter, come walking up with 30 wards in tow. Do you put a couple of bursts of M-16 fire into the group and send the survivors scurrying on their way?

If your answer is yes, how do you sleep at night or look yourself in the mirror afterwards? If your answer is no, then how do you accommodate the added number of dependent souls in your retreat? How do you feed them? What about sanitation?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Benson, Ragnar. *The Survival Retreat*, pg. 57-58 (1983). You can tell the book is a bit dated by his choice of the word "retarded." I suspect he would choose a different word if he were writing this today.

Unfortunately for those seeking guidance from Benson on this issue, he consistently fails to offer guidance. Rather, he gives you both sides of the coin and let you choose your own course.

Noted author James Wesley Rawls takes a different approach. In his most recent book, *How To Survive The World As We Know It*, Rawles implores his readers to be charitable during an emergency:

I believe that my responsibility begins with my immediate family and expands in successive rings to supporting my immediate neighborhood and church, to my community, and beyond, as resources allow. My philosophy is to give until it hurts in times of disaster.<sup>4</sup>

He even demonstrates how he would carry this out during an emergency in his novel, *Patriots – Surviving The Coming Collapse*. My goal is not to advocate any particular position. I would suggest that you need to have a clear plan and philosophy in place to deal with this particular situation before the emergency occurs.

*When in doubt, turn to NPR.*

In what will likely be the only time I ever cite a story from National Public Radio (NPR), I suggest you read Shankar Vedantam's piece on community involvement in the post-disaster environment.<sup>5</sup> In a nutshell, Vedantam concludes, "it is the personal ties among members of a community that determine survival during a disaster, and recovery in its aftermath."

It makes intuitive sense. When something bad happens to a neighbor, regardless of nationality, decent people reach out and help. Think about the stories from Hurricane Katrina. People took leadership roles in their neighborhoods, following Teddy Roosevelt's creed: "*Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.*"

Having said that, I'm going to offer you some guidance in the coming paragraphs on why I have elected to "out myself" as a prepper and how I intend to handle requests for charity.

*What Are You Called To Do?*

Ask yourself – do you feel the need to be open about your preparedness efforts, and if so, how open? I don't throw stones at those who keep their prep operations quiet. I get it; they have reasonable concerns. But if we all did that, how would we inspire our friends and neighbors to do the same?

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<sup>4</sup> Rawles, James Wesley. *How To Survive The End Of The World As We Know It*, pg. 16 (2009).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.npr.org/2011/07/04/137526401/the-key-to-disaster-survival-friends-and-neighbors>

I made the tactical decision years ago to be out and open about being a prepper. Truth be told, the OPSEC concerns never really entered my mind at the time. I enjoyed collecting my various survival toys and sharing stories about what I was doing with others. Most thought I was nuts, many thought it was interesting, and a few thought it was a good idea. Being someone who doesn't mind being seen as being a colorful or even a bit odd, deep down I relished (and still do to this day) the notion that people thought I was a "unique individual" for preparing for various problems.

After lots of soul searching and prayer, I determined I was being called to be an advocate for preparedness. I don't know how successful I've been evangelizing to the public on the need to be ready. I do know someone has to push the message and sell the concept. I've accepted that's what I am supposed to be doing.

Even if you feel you are called to be open about your efforts, ask yourself these questions:

- Who would you tell? Just your close friends? Your family? Your neighbors?
- Can you find ways to prep without calling it "prepping?" For example, if your neighbor asks about your rainwater collection system or new vegetable garden, are you able to come up with a good cover story to explain why you're doing it?
- Are you comfortable knowing your neighbors and friends know you have emergency supplies at your home?
- If those friends and neighbors who know you're a prepper show up at your door in an emergency, how are you going handle it?

### *Be Ready to Throw Down*

When those friends and neighbors show up, as Ragnar Benson points out, I suggest you have an idea on how you plan to handle that. But be aware your decision may be challenged by the others in your family. If one of my stepdaughter's friends were to show up here needing food or water, me telling her we won't help the friend isn't really an option. If we were to do that, we'd have a critically depressed girl in our home, which isn't something we want to deal with during an emergency.

So to prepare for that contingency, I plan to offer those seeking assistance what I call "throw down foods." Like a throw down wallet you might use to thwart a mugger, throw down foods are something you can give those needing assistance which provide something useful without compromising your own readiness. Throw down foods include:

- Spam and other canned goods we'd prefer not to eat for whatever reason
- MREs approaching the end of their useful life

- Multivitamin tablets at or near their expiration date

I suspect you may have some aversion to offering outdated foods and medicines to those in need. In response, I would make a couple of points. First, *older food and meds are better than none*. Those “best before” dates are guidance and not hard and fast rules. I make the case for this in detail later on in this newsletter – using my own outdated supplies and gastrointestinal system as the proof. And second, *your primary obligation is to yourself and family*. **Your** team gets the good stuff – the newest, the freshest, and the best. To the extent you can help someone without harming them (I would never offer someone food or medicine I suspected would make them sick or be ineffective), I believe you can do so without jeopardizing your team’s well-being. Even Jim Rawles puts his family’s needs ahead of his church or community.

*“I’m Coming To Your House!”*

If you’ve been into prepping any time at all, and if others know that you’re into prepping, you will invariably have this conversation:

*Your Unprepared, Preppy-Party Iconic Example:* So....you’re into “disaster preparedness.” What’s that all about?

*You:* It’s about being able to manage any disruption in the infrastructure so that my family and I are not inconvenienced.

*YUPPIE:* You mean like zombies or terrorists, right? Are you really worried about that?

*You:* I’m not worried about zombies, but I am concerned not only terrorism, but also severe weather, power outages, crime, wild fires, and economic uncertainty.

*YUPPIE:* So why are you concerned about those sorts of things?

*You:* Because I watch the news. I see stories of wildfires in our state, where people lose their homes, their pets, their livestock, and occasionally their lives. I read stories about record unemployment and economic uncertainty. I see we are expecting an active hurricane season. Given the significant news coverage these topics receive, I think the prudent thing to do is to be ready.

*YUPPIE:* Hmm. I never thought of it that way. If something bad happens, I’m coming to your house!

It took me a while to figure out how to respond to this. After reading a number of blog posts and internet forum threads on this particular topic, I formulated my own canned response. Here's one way you might respond:

*You:* Why would you come to my house?

*YUPPIE:* Well, because you're prepared!

*You:* Why not just get prepared yourself?

*YUPPIE:* Oh, I don't know how. Plus that could get expensive.

*You:* Sure you can. You go on line and read one of the thousands of free articles on the subject, and set up a budget to allow you to acquire the supplies and pay for the training you need.

*YUPPIE:* It just seems so hard to do that. It would be easier if I just came over to your place!

*You:* So....I am supposed to spend my money to buy extra food for you and your family, my time taking training to be prepared to protect you, treat your injuries and illnesses, and configure my house so all of you will have a room to stay here?

*YUPPIE:* (realizing – hopefully – they've just been owned): Oh, well I didn't think about it that way.

And that's the problem. Those who don't prepare – the grasshoppers – think the ants among us will charitably pull their collective gluteal muscles from the proverbial fire if society goes *tango uniform*.<sup>6</sup> If you decide to out yourself, be prepared to deal with this.

A couple of final thoughts: first, the odds that a) things get so bad that b) marauders who c) know that you're storing a bunch of stuff they want will d) risk death or serious injury by e) burning fuel and calories to come to your house and f) try to enter it with you on the other side of the door holding g) one of your "preparedness tools" are very low in my opinion. That's not to say you shouldn't take your physical security seriously during a crisis; just ask the Hurricane

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=tango%20uniform>

Katrina survivors. But in planning for emergencies, we should always be assessing the true level of risks facing us in an emergency.

And second, keeping your efforts on the “down low” is not the panacea many people think. It is difficult to build community with other preppers if you elect to keep to yourself. Outing myself as a prepper has led me to many meaningful friendships and sources of knowledge I would not have had if I kept my efforts quiet.

## **First Steps – Food Storage Program, Part One**

I have bad news for some of you. All the guns, ammo, solar panels, ham radios, razor wire, bug out bags, bug out 4x4 vehicles, propane tanks, survival knives, fishing gear and tactical clothing will be *worthless* to you if you don't have food and water. We must get our food and water issues secured before we worry about these other issues.

I think one of the main reasons many preppers make poor decisions (or no decision whatsoever) about food and water storage is because it may be the most difficult subject for a prepper to grasp. To be sure, I've made my fair share of mistakes in this area. Greatly distressed over the adequacy of my food storage plan, I recently forced myself to start completely over. In doing so, I learned a tremendous amount about the science of food storage and the realities of relying upon foods well past their “best before” dates.

### *Big Money, Big Space Requirement*

As you might imagine, your food storage system, or your “larder,” can take up a tremendous amount of storage space. Storing a year's worth of food for four people will require you to be efficient about packaging and storing your supply. And once you get the space issue resolved, you will need to determine how to pay for it. Most of us cannot simply write a check for a year's worth of storable foods for our entire family. Given these challenges, I want to share with you the steps I took to make this work at my house.

You might not think Craig's List and eBay are your best friends in helping you meet both of these challenges, but they are. We Americans have closets, “junk rooms,” and storage units filled with useless garbage we don't need. Fortunately, America is filled with people who would love nothing more than to buy that useless garbage from us. Using Craig's List and eBay will enable you to get people to pay for your larder expansion and create the storage space for it.



Both of these e-commerce sites require little expertise. You can find many articles on line on how to best to sell products using those websites. And don't think people won't buy what you're selling. I sold hundreds of ten year old MREs on Craig's List in less than an hour, which I didn't think was possible. To date, I've made hundreds of dollars cleaning out closets and other storage areas in preparation for expanding my food storage.

Where might you store food in your home? Understanding your food storage areas need to be in cool, dark places, some ideas include:

- *Closets.* Making storage space for your food supplies will give you added incentive to do the dreaded task of cleaning out your closets – bathroom closets, bedroom closets, hall closets – you name it. Closets provide prime storage space by design. Get rid of the stuff you don't need, selling as much of it as you can.
- *Under beds.* You will be amazed at how many canned goods you can fit under your beds. The real estate under our beds meets the cool, dark requirement as well. Most of us have all sorts of junk underneath our beds. (And no, please don't write me to tell me what's under your bed. I don't want to know.) Clean that crap out.
- *Pantry.* Sadly, we do not have a walk-in pantry at our house. This forces us to be extremely efficient with our pantry space. Recently my wife and I completely reorganized our pantry, and in doing so she came up with a simple but brilliant idea. We have now assigned sections of the pantry to each of us, along with a section for emergency food supplies that need to be consumed as part of the rotation process. Our rule is that you can only eat what's in your section of the closet. This effectively eliminated the “*You-ate-my-Poptarts-again/no-I-didn't/yes-you-did/so-what-I-paid-for-them/but-that's-my-breakfast/you'll-live-eating-toast/no-I-won't/kids-in-Africa-get-less/I-hate-you-sometimes*” argument often heard at our house between myself and step-daughter. Get serious about organizing your pantry.
- *Cabinets.* Depending on who built your home, you may have a tremendous amount of cabinet space. We are blessed with ample cabinet space in our home. And I am blessed with a wife who has all sorts of dishes, pans, towels, bowls, and other culinary hardware we never use. She can't bring herself to get rid of it. Perhaps you will have better luck in convincing your spouse to let you use those items as skeet than I did with mine.

- *Inside of furniture.* So much furniture these days - the stuff that's non-functional and is just there to look pretty – contains storage space. It may not be a lot, but start learning how to take advantage of it.

### *The Prepper's Concern – Expired Foods*

One of the major impediments I had when formulating earlier food storage plans centered around the risk of not rotating your foods fast enough, and a result having to decide whether to eat expired foods. And by expired foods, I mean those foods which have exceeded their published "best before" date. Can you eat expired foods? Should you eat expired foods?

To answer this question to my own satisfaction, I pulled out some foods I knew to be well past their prime. Below, I catalog my taste test results, completed this July, on a number of foods.

Progresso Chicken Noodle Soup. *Purchased circa 2005; best before August 2008.*

Progresso markets itself as the Cadillac of Canned Soups. Apparently 2005 was a great year for the Coupe' de Ville of chicken noodle. I heated the soup up in my solar oven; it tasted great. I added Tabasco to it as I normally would.

Kountry Fresh powdered milk. *Purchased circa 2005; best before date not published anywhere on carton or envelopes.* Let's face it. With a name like "Kountry Fresh," you can't go wrong. Or can you? It turns out the folks at Kountry Fresh make a fantastic product. Despite being past its prime, it made a normal tasting batch of instant milk. Crazy! And high quality to boot!

Jack Link's Original Beef Jerky. *Purchased circa 2005, best before 2008.* Ever since the sad news of jerky pitchman/professional wrestler Macho Man Randy Savage's passing earlier this year, I will admit to a slight craving for a Slim Jim. I'm not a big fan of jerky, although one of my dad's patients makes venison jerky which is some of the best meat I've ever eaten. I purchased these circa 2005 for my stepdaughter who does like a little jerky every now and then. Jerky may be one of the ultimate survival foods, and this sample didn't disappoint – it still tasted and smelled like the real thing.

Mountain Horse Freeze Dried Lasagna with Meat Sauce. *Purchased in 2003; best before August 2007.* Few things repel my 13-year-old stepdaughter as much as the sight of her stepdad eating freeze-dried food that is four years out of date. In that regard, Mountain

Horse did not disappoint. And like the Progresso soup, the food was surprisingly good. It was a bit bland for me. But with a little help from Tabasco, I found it quite enjoyable.

Grape Jelly From an MRE. *Purchased approximately ten years ago; best before date unknown.* I would have bet the little brown packet of grape jelly would have turned to congealed wine by now. I toasted an English muffin and spread the jelly on top of it. It turns out ten year old MRE jelly tastes a lot like one year old MRE jelly: fair, but tolerable in an emergency. No Tabasco required.

DAK Canned Ham. *Purchased October 2003; best before June 2007.* DAK, a product of Denmark, has been making canned hams as long as I can remember. I opened up a can of their product using the convenient pull tab design (making it handy for use in an emergency). This well-aged product tasted very salty and had a slightly metallic after taste. It would probably be suitable as a condiment with pasta, but for me, eating it as a stand-alone entrée left something to be desired. I did experience a slight twinge in my stomach after eating four or five bites of the canned ham. After eating some fresh food and chasing it with that great elixir, Diet Mountain Dew, the twinge went away.

In addition to palatability challenges (which would likely be reduced if I actually ate the meat *during* its “best by” time frame rather than four years past that date), many canned meats (and cold cuts) utilize sodium nitrite as a preservative. Sodium nitrite remains the subject of controversy, as some believe consuming products containing it may lead to an increased risk of cancer.<sup>7</sup> Before you pooh-pooh canned meats on this basis, I urge you to remember such preservatives will be your friend if you are relying on them as a source of nutrition in a long term emergency. As I knew I wouldn’t eat it based on the taste, I tossed it.

Nestle’ Media Crema (Table Cream). *Purchased 2005; best before July 2007.* I had never heard of table cream until I read Daphne Nikolopoulos’ *The Storm Gourmet*.<sup>8</sup> This versatile cream product can be found in the canned milk aisle at your local supermarket. A bit bland in taste, with a little practice and a good cookbook like *The Storm Gourmet* you can create some fantastic dishes with table cream. I feared opening a can of this stuff so far out of date. My fears were quickly allayed when I opened a can and wasn’t killed instantly by airborne botulism vapors. I used the four-years-past-its-prime cream

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<sup>7</sup> <http://recipes.howstuffworks.com/question233.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Nikolopoulos, Daphne, *The Storm Gourmet – A Guide to Creating Extraordinary Meals Without Electricity*. (2005) pg. 14.

to create something akin to an alfredo sauce for some whole wheat pasta and left over brisket dish I concocted. The table cream did a great job of providing a creamy texture and moisture to the pasta and beef.

Natural High Chicken and Broccoli Over Noodles (freeze dried). *Purchased 2003; no best before date.* You would think a product called “Natural High” would have some secret “herbs” to keep it interesting. I cooked this product up in our kitchen, and it gave off an odor which, having been to a Motley Crue concert, led me to believe the product did in fact have those “herbs” I mentioned earlier. The flavor was less than desirable, even with Tabasco. Again, had I eaten it sooner than now, it would likely have been just fine. And even in an emergency, it would have been nice to have on the shelf as a backup or throw down food.

So – I lived to tell about my food adventures. But did these foods provide me with any nutritional benefit? According to the USDA, those codes on the food cans

....enable tracking of the product in interstate commerce. This enables manufacturers to rotate their stock as well as to locate their products in the event of a recall.

These codes, which appear as a series of letters and/or numbers, might refer to the date or time of manufacture. They aren't meant for the consumer to interpret as "use-by" dates. There is no book or Web site that tells how to translate the codes into dates.

Cans may also display "open" or calendar dates. Usually these are "best if used by" dates for peak quality.

**In general, high-acid canned foods such as tomatoes, grapefruit and pineapple will retain best quality on the shelf for 12 to 18 months; low-acid canned foods such as meat, poultry, fish and most vegetables will retain best quality on the shelf for 2 to 5 years — if the can remains in good condition and has been stored in a cool, clean, dry place.<sup>9</sup>**

(emphasis added)

It's hard to say how much nutritional value I got from these expired foods, so my plan to maximize the nutritional benefits of my stored foods is two pronged. First, and this is obvious,

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Factsheets/Food\\_Product\\_Dating/index.asp#5](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Factsheets/Food_Product_Dating/index.asp#5); see also <http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/guide/do-food-expiration-dates-matter?page=2>

we'll eat the stored foods before their "best by" date. My wife the CPA refers to this as the FIFO method, meaning *First In, First Out*. Without boring you on the accounting application of FIFO, for our purposes it simply means you use up the oldest foods first. And second, we store a full spectrum of multivitamins and supplements to replace those nutrients we are missing as a result of eating stored foods. A standard multivitamin a day is likely sufficient; some literature suggests you should also stock up on Vitamin C and D supplements as well.

In next month's installment, I will share with you the **Mother Of All Survival Spreadsheets** (MOASS) to demonstrate how I continue to prepare our larder on an ongoing basis. Stay tuned.

## Economy Watch

As I type this, our leaders in Washington continue to haggle over the best approach to deal with the (allegedly) upcoming debt ceiling date of August 2. (I say "allegedly" because it seems that date has moved a few times over the last few months.) Meanwhile, member nations of the EU continue to create bail out packages and implement austerity measures to save those highly indebted members from a massive default on their debts.

Regardless of what kind of package Washington creates to address the August 2 deadline, rest assured we will continue to see malaise in our respective local economies for some time to come. The result of these troubles can be seen in many ways, including increased reports of crime, fewer services provided by local governments, and Americans relying on credit cards in alarming numbers to make ends meet.

It's no surprise, then, that consumer and CEO sentiment continue to fall. Despite blowout earnings from Apple this quarter and a Dow index which regularly surges 100 points or more a day, consternation among the financial cognoscenti remains. Unemployment figures remain abysmal, and yet we remain thankful they are not as bad as many European and Middle East nations.

Such depressing news reminds me of an old saying among financial experts: *there's always a bull market somewhere*. When the stock market goes down, those who are shorting the market (i.e., selling shares today with the hopes of buying them back at a cheaper price and pocketing the difference) make money. Those who invest in emerging markets abroad and other foreign currencies make money. Those who invest in rental properties by taking advantage of lower real estate prices make money. In short, there's really no "bull" or "bear" market; the economy is what you make of it.

Preparing to profit in difficult economic times or after a disaster may seem distasteful for some, but I would submit those who do so provide needed capital, goods and services to the economy when they need it most. The Atlanta Journal Constitution recently ran a story detailing how two companies – Waffle House and Home Depot – use their disaster plans to not only help the community in a time of need but also to profit from it.<sup>10</sup>

From the article:

"Disaster management and risk management in global supply chains can actually be a competitive advantage," said Panos Kouvelis, a professor of operations and manufacturing management at Washington University in St. Louis. "You have to think of it as an opportunity to get ahead of the game by being better prepared."<sup>11</sup>

It's rare anyone cites "disaster management" as a competitive advantage for a business, but the good Professor Kouvelis is spot on in his analysis. Being prepared for a disaster, regardless of whether it's for your business or for your own personal life, will make you more competitive among within your industry or among your co-workers.

Imagine being the only employee in your company or department who has made thorough preparations for disaster at home. When a major weather event or other disruption occurs, you have the resources to deal with the problem – allowing you to return to work at the normal time the next day. Meanwhile, your co-workers are stuck at home or are otherwise incapable of making it into the office. Who's getting the game ball for being a super worker?

And speaking of game balls, when the FEMA Director gives one to your company, you only hope the agency is sending people to learn from you:

FEMA Administrator W. Craig Fugate has long been a fan of Waffle House's ability to prepare for emergencies and bounce back quickly from hurricanes and other harsh weather. It can operate on a limited menu and keeps managers out of the disaster zone but close enough to return immediately after an evacuation.<sup>12</sup>

When Waffle House's competitors are closed for business as a result of a disaster, Waffle House is the only game in town. Think about that. What can you do for *your* business, *your* employer, or *your* family to effectively be the only game in town?

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<sup>10</sup> Thanks to Atlanta Jeff for sharing the article.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ajc.com/business/waffle-house-home-depot-1012601.html>, July 12, 2011

<sup>12</sup> Id.

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In this economy, don't get down. Get ready. This is the time to shore up our finances, cut the expenses we don't need, and prepare to capitalize on opportunities which may be coming over the next several months.

*In the interest of full disclosure, the Suburban Dad Survivalist owns stock in Apple and holds a short position on General Electric and the Euro, among other investments, many of which have caused him to lose money and sleep.*

## **Project of the Month – Go Get Some Sun**



My parents built their current home in 1974. The energy crisis of the time was in full swing, and people were just beginning to experiment with solar power as a means to make their homes more energy efficient. Our home library contained a number of books on solar technology they had consulted in deciding how best to incorporate energy efficiencies into the house. And to this day, a solar panel has never once powered anything in their home.

That's in large part because the technology was so expensive and inefficient at the time. Recent gains in the technology, however, begin to give us some hope on reducing our dependence on foreign energy sources; they also provide preppers with the means to quietly generate electricity with no fuel storage needs.

Those two characteristics – quiet operation and no gas required – give solar panels significant advantages over gas or diesel generators in my opinion. There's no doubt generators are necessary (such as when you need a lot of power in the dark....when there is no sun to excite the electrons in your solar panels) in a power outage. But most people don't realize that a) despite the big-name generator television commercial's insinuations, you *cannot* run every electrical component in the typical American house on a 2500 watt generator, and b) when you do run a generator, *everyone* in your 'hood will know you have it.

I remember living in Miami immediately after Hurricane Andrew hit in 1992. There was no power in my neighborhood for over two weeks. And so it was quite easy to know who had a generator....all you had to do was look out the window and see whose lights were on or listen for music/televisions/small AC units running. For some thug looking to score a genny or some gasoline, it would not have been hard to find out whose house to jack.

To help me get started in learning more about solar power generation, I recently purchased the Sunforce Solar Power Kit via Northern Tool<sup>13</sup> back in June. Having it shipped directly to my local Northern Tool store saved me some money in shipping. I paid around \$280, including tax. This unit produces approximately 60 watts, allowing you to recharge batteries you are using to power various devices. In addition to the panels and the rack supporting them, the kit comes with a number of connectors and a 200 watt inverter as well.

In short, this is about as Fisher Price as you can get for a basic solar power system. The directions were easy to follow, and I had the system up and running in less than thirty minutes. I can get it set up now even quicker now that I've had some practice. Even my ham radio mentor who came by to check it out was rather impressed with it.

To assure myself these things would work as promised, I recently took the panels out on a sunny day here in Texas (which these days is essentially all of them). As you can see below, putting the meter on all three panels revealed they were putting out 22 volts DC power at 3 amps, effectively generating 66 watts of juice.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.northerntool.com/shop/tools/product\\_200466740\\_200466740](http://www.northerntool.com/shop/tools/product_200466740_200466740)





*The manufacturer claims you'll get up to 15 volts at 4 amps with this system. The panels were cranking out over 22 volts at 3 amps in the afternoon July sun. No sound, no gasoline. Just free flowing electrons ready to work for me.*

How would you use this system? The best way to use most solar power systems of this size is to use it to recharge batteries that you are using to energize various items such as lights, computers, radios, small refrigerators, and so forth. In the coming months, I will be doing more testing (and reporting) on the schematics of such a power system.

### **In Next Month's Issue.....**

- Part Two of the Food Storage Plan Discussion
- The Suburban Dad Survivalist Goes To Memphis to Shoot at Elvis' Place
- You Want Coronal Mass Ejections? We Got 'Em!

Until then,

Suburban Dad Survivalist