

URBAN & SUBURBAN SURVIVAL



While survival publications devote most of their text to rural and wilderness survival, the fact is that the great majority of the population and the great majority of survivalists live in or near urban areas. Most of us have jobs and families that make it necessary to stay near populated areas. These jobs are what pays for our survival supplies and of course our daily survival. Articles written by professional writers and survival gurus living in the wilds of Oregon or Montana seldom relate to working families living in Chicago or Atlanta. When the crunch comes, these folks are not going to need to know how to start a fire with flint or build a log cabin. They are going to have a whole set of life and death challenges immediately and long-term that will require planning, preparation, determination and of course luck. Most will not have a fully stocked retreat to go to. They will

have only their own supplies, survival pack, weapons and perhaps a group of family members or neighbors to work with. Evacuation may not be practical or safe under many situations. Many have elderly parents or small children that will be difficult to move. Other may have physical conditions that make marching to the wilderness impossible. The surrounding areas and roads may be full of refugees and be more dangerous than the areas they left behind. In this article we will explore the challenges and options that face the majority of survivalists today.

Fire, Disease, Crime

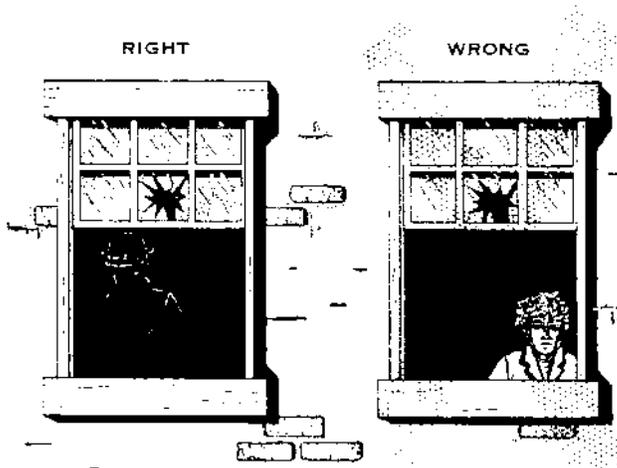
Fire, disease and crime are the three greatest threats to survival in the urban and suburban environment. Because of the concentration of buildings and population, all three can spread rapidly and all three are very difficult to stop by individual efforts. These are the three main reasons that may force evacuation. Apartment dwellers and those living in closely spaced homes will be more vulnerable to fire. Good fire extinguishers and water spray can put out small fires that are started by accidents (e.g. candles, heaters, etc.) or flying embers, but will not save you from big fires in close adjoining buildings. If your situation will require foraging for water and food outside the home, you will be more exposed to diseases. Being able to stay in place for several months may be your best defense. A well armed, well stocked home may be defensible against small groups of looters, but not against larger gangs. An organized block or street defense group could be effective here. Of course you are probably more exposed to diseases and crime as you evacuate through a populated area than if you stay at home. If these three threats are minimal and you are well stocked with food, water and other essentials, you may want to stay put as long as possible.

Security and Reconnaissance

You need to know more about your environment than your environment knows about you. Before bad things start to happen (that means now) start scouting the area around your home in all directions. You need to do this on foot. The walks will be good exercise. Look for routes, hiding places, shelter, alternate ways to cross streams and highways. Consider how these areas will be in a crisis situation. Will there be looters, gangs, and roadblocks? If you can, walk the same areas at night to see what the lighting and shadows are like. You should know every block, street and alley within a mile of your home. Drive out along your most likely routes of escape and explore alternate routes as well. Use binoculars and cameras as needed. You can be sure that the criminals have already scouted out your community and have plans.

Once the crunch comes you will need to keep a low profile while securing you base. No candles or lanterns visible at night. No smoke from the chimney during the day. No playing the radio, except low to monitor news, CB and shortwave broadcasts. You will need to set up a 24-hour security watch. This can be 6-hours on and 6-hours off for two people or 3 x 8-hour shifts for three or more.

Once security is established you can make short reconnaissance patrols on foot. First go just a block or two out and circle, then further out as safety permits. Use extreme caution. Do not approach people or houses! Do not get near stores where you may be mistaken for a looter. Stay near cover (stuff that stops bullets) and be ready to use it. Remember that there are a lot of bad folks out there and also a lot of scared folks with weapons. Use your binoculars to spot danger before you walk into it. You need to know how bad things are and what could be coming your way before it gets to you.



Safe and unsafe observation or shooting from a window

Enemy Tactics

While gangs may lack formal training, they are capable of organized assaults and a variety of tactics. They use them today in the commission of crimes and will no doubt build on them when law and order break down. Be alert for these tactics.

Shock: This is simply a massive guns blazing charge intended to paralyze and panic the victims. It depends on surprise. Fences, tripping hazards and a high volume of return fire will be the best defense.

Diversion: They will send a small group to keep you focused on the threat while another group closes in from another direction. Another variation is to send one or two people posing as victims needing help. They may use women and children for this. When you let down your guard the others launch their assault.

Intimidation: They may use a show of force including a display of weapons and even random shooting, followed by threats to get you to lay down your arms. They may even promise you that they will let you all go if you comply. Yeah, right.

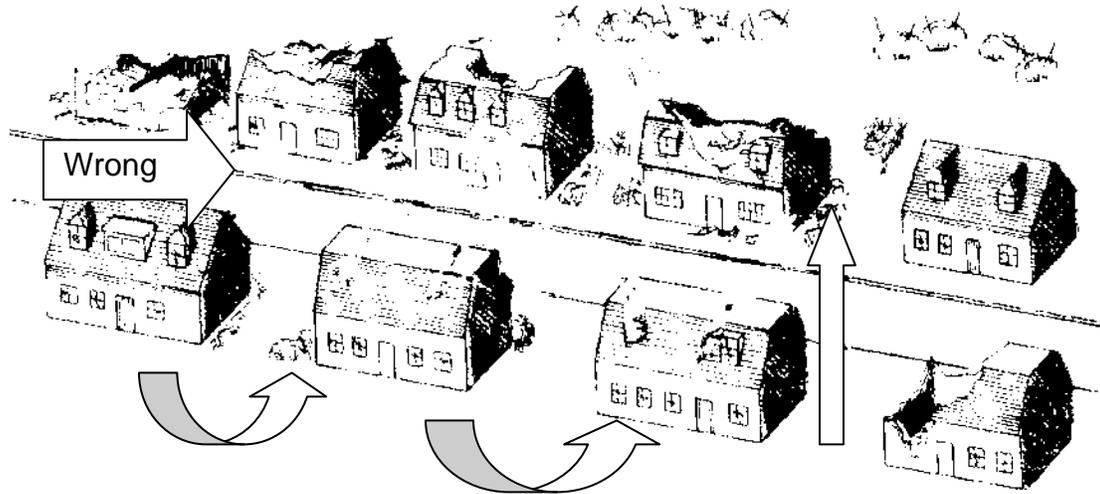
Infiltration: They may send a seemingly helpless person to your door asking to be let in. This person or persons may seem grateful and even be helpful until they have your confidence. Remember that criminals are expert liars and actors. Then, like the Trojan Horse they will take over and let their members in.

Ambush: Once out of your home you can get ambushed on every street. A sniper can lurk in every window. Alleys, utility easements, and cutting through yards is much safer than moving down streets. If caught in an ambush, move out of the kill zone to good cover fast. In an urban environment you probably will not be able to win a firefight against well protected shooters in buildings. Get out!

Evacuation and Escape

Traveling routes through urban and suburban areas under survival conditions is completely different from normal conditions. Streets and roads are where you are most likely to encounter gangs and be a target for snipers. If you are in a motor vehicle you should avoid main streets, commercial districts and routes through apartment and high rise buildings. Routes through industrial areas and single-family houses will be somewhat safer. There are often service roads alongside railroad tracks and power lines that may be usable. Use side streets and alleys when possible. Use binoculars to observe the route ahead for dangers. You should be using street maps and satellite images to establish routes now. If on foot or bicycle, you can abandon streets altogether. In built up areas you can move down alleys and cut through between buildings and rush across streets. In suburban areas there is usually a utility easement down the center of each block. You can use this and weave in and out of back yards. These back routes provide all kinds of cover and concealment from garages, sheds, trashcans and trees. The open streets put you in a shooting gallery. Railroad right-of-ways and drainage channels offer clear routes, but no cover. These should be avoided in most cases unless they are well clear of buildings. If the lights are out and you know your route, night evacuation is a good option. Trouble locations will usually be sources of noise and light that can be avoided. Strict light and noise discipline and staying together will be essential. Plan your movement so that you are out of the urban area or at least into a good hiding place before dawn.

Evacuating to the countryside may seem appealing, but it should be weighed against the risks. Everyone else will be doing the same thing. Once on the road you will be subject to the weather, bandits, government intervention, crowds of refugees and possible diseases. Your supplies will be limited to what you can carry and defend. So unless you have a reachable and secure cache or retreat location, evacuation should be a last resort. But, evacuation is an option you must have. So you must have your evacuation pack, routes and plans ready.



Wrong way to move going down the street

Right way to move from rear yard to rear yard and across between buildings using smoke or covering fire from friends if available.

Apartments

If you live in an apartment building your survival options are limited. Your escape routes are down the halls. Your supplies are limited to a closet and everyone else in the building endangers you. You could be trapped by criminals or a fire started by another tenant. Have an escape ladder or rope to get down to the ground in an emergency. Have an axe or other tool capable of chopping through walls into adjoining apartments to escape. Have a handgun with a high capacity magazine and plenty of extra magazines to lay down suppressive fire during an escape or defense. You are much more likely to have to evacuate and your route will most likely be longer and through more urban areas. Your pack will have to be lighter and you will need more short range firepower such as a shotgun, carbine or handgun. Smoke grenades may also be helpful for crossing open areas. You will definitely need to scout out several routes ahead of time. Since you will not be able to stay put and you will have to travel light, a cache of survival supplies (e.g. food, medical, shelter, water, ammo, etc.) will be critical. Consider storing things in an outlying rental storage unit or with a friend who lives in a safer area.

Urban House or Townhouse

If you live in an urban house or townhouse, fires in adjoining buildings will spread and burn you out. You only have the front and back to defend, but they are also your only escape routes. You may be able to move across the roofs to escape, but so can the bad guys. You probably have limited space for storing water, fuel and supplies. If the house next door is set on fire or occupied by criminals you

are going to have to evacuate fast. Your needs are much the same as the apartment dweller above.

Single Family Homes

If you live in a single family house in a suburban environment you have some advantages. You have storage space for everything you need and enough privacy to make preparations without attracting attention. Houses are spaced far enough apart to be at least somewhat defensible and safer from spreading fires. If you are well away from main roads and commercial districts, looters and gangs may bypass you. Your local police and fire department, together with volunteer groups may be able to maintain some level of security. Fortifying your home before things get bad will attract unwanted attention and may violate town regulations, but you can put up fences and hedges, reinforce doors, and stock up on wire. You will need to have sufficient chicken wire to cover windows against rocks and firebombs. Pre-cut plywood with observation ports is even better. You can mount the hangers for these without attracting attention. You will need to have several hundred gallons of water available for fire suppression. While you may not be able to fight a full blown fire, you can put out firebombs, and fires started from adjoining structures. You will need enough pump power to wet down your roof and exposed walls. Have your evacuation packs near the exits just in case the fire wins. During World War Two the residents of European cities buried their valuables in the yard so they could recover them if the house was bombed. You may want to prepare a similar secure place for such items. In the first few weeks looters will generally stick to areas where there are stores, but then they will start exploring the residential areas. They may be armed, but should be deterred by gunfire since there are plenty of easy sources of loot. Criminal gangs will be looking for loot and people to use. They will be well armed and organized. They will use stealth, lies and flanking tactics to kill or capture you and your family. Usually they will hit others in your community before they get to you. If these folks are coming your way, you have to make a decision fast. If they are in great numbers you may need to evacuate and take your chances on the road. If your position is strong, you may elect to hold and hope they will pass you by or you can fight them off. A third option would be to ambush them before they get to you. This is risky, but it could eliminate or reroute them and let you stay in your home. Desperate neighbors are another problem. After a few weeks the unprepared will become a threat. They may be armed and start looting and shooting. If you have extra weapons and food you may want to consider taking a few close, trustworthy neighbors into your survival perimeter. This would increase your security and capacity to fight off attacks. Help those who you can, but be ready to stop those who endanger you and your family. The first 4 to 8 weeks of the crisis will be the most dangerous. The looters and criminals and unprepared will die or move on by then. If you made it through this period, you are now faced with living in a sparsely populated town with no power, water or sanitation system. Rats, feral dogs and insects will abound. Your stored water and food will start to run short, but you will have a roof over your head and all of your tools and equipment. Foraging patrols and gardening may help supply food.

Water can be gathered from the roof and rain. Trash and human waste can be burned or buried well away from your house.

The Preemptive Option

All of the above scenarios assume that you are hunkered-down in a low profile, defensive posture. In many cases this may be the only option you have, but if you have a number of family members, neighbors or friends organized in the immediate area that are well armed and equipped with radios you may have the capacity to stop trouble outside your area. Gangs come down streets. Streets can be blocked and covered by armed citizens. Fire spreads from house to house, but can be stopped from jumping streets so if you can prevent gangs and looters from crossing the next street in each direction your block is relatively safe.

This would require a 24-hour watch covering all directions and a ready-response group to quickly stop any intruders before they get close enough to penetrate your block. Getting to know your neighbors, becoming a crime watch leader or other volunteer work may prepare you for this option. Military manuals such as FM 90-10 Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT) offer little help for civilians defending against mobs and gangs. Civilians will not have fire support, heavy weapons or barbed wire and sandbags. Basic use of cover and concealment, bounding overwatch, and fire discipline will be of use.

Conclusions

Anyone caught in an urban or suburban environment when water, heat, electricity and public services collapse is going to face immediate hazards that will be greater than those faced in rural areas. Evacuation may not be practical and may be even more dangerous than staying put. While the evacuation option must be kept open through planning and equipment, it is essential to consider holding in place at least for the first few weeks of a crisis. Regardless of your situation, you must be prepared to hold out for many weeks without outside help. You must also be prepared to evacuate with enough food, water, arms and essential supplies to get clear of populated areas if you must.