

# **IAEM Bulletin, Disaster Zone Column**

## **Preppers: What is your approach?**

### **By**

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As an emergency manager I'm always interested in meeting people who take an interest in disasters and disaster preparedness. National surveys say that 40% of the United States population is prepared for disasters. Personally, I don't think 40% of emergency managers and their families are personally prepared for disasters!

Getting prepared and staying prepared is not that easy. You must have the economic wherewithal to put together a disaster kit. You need the desire and ability to plan for a disaster and all the ramifications that come with being personally impacted. Ideally, these same people will seek out training in disaster response skills like first aid. Earlier this year I was inventorying the backpack I keep in my car for what I had for food, water, clothing, etc. At one point I was going "Yikes" for the age and status of some of the canned food that I had on the bottom of the backpack. I was personally embarrassed with my lack of attention to my car kit.

Nationally the preparedness message is to be prepared to be on your own for 3-days or 72 hours. On the West Coast, the States of Oregon and Washington are advising citizens to be prepared to be on their own for two weeks/14 days. This is because of the threat of catastrophic earthquakes and the inability to get government or other aid into disaster zones within the normal three-day standard.

Depending on the jurisdiction and make-up of a community, it is not unusual to see government assisting their communities to take collective action towards disaster preparedness by promoting neighborhood coalitions of people who team together. Another form of this teaming is Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) that get some basic disaster response skills and are equipped to help as a more cohesive team with first aid, light search and rescue, communications or other similar disaster skills. Much effort has gone into organizing these teams, with the challenge of keeping them trained and active when you are not having an annual disaster for them to respond to.

The next group of people who take disaster preparedness to an entirely different level are what is popularly called "Preppers." In another era they might have been called survivalists. These individuals and families are ones who are not thinking three days, not two weeks or two months—they are thinking a year or even more.

One element, that is not 100% consistent across the board with Preppers is their interest in owning and maintaining weapons, that include pistols, shotguns, hunting rifles and even assault rifles. My favorite quote from a book on "Prepper Guns" is, "You

can never have too much ammunition.” This one element of weapons is perhaps a piece of what separates many Preppers from those who are interested more in what would be the purist view of disaster preparedness. For people who are hunters, having a rifle and shotgun to harvest wild game to feed your family is certainly an option.

Conceptually, we as emergency managers should embrace anyone who is so dedicated to becoming prepared and maintaining that level of disaster preparedness. So, what has your approach been to engaging with Preppers?

For me, what I look for is the motivation for becoming prepared. Generally, there is the disaster theme, but that can quickly evolve into thinking about “have nots” coming to get “what I have” and needing weapons to protect my family, property and possessions. This type of thinking is fed by our modern movie culture extending back decades that has a breakdown of civil order occurring. Mad Max or Escape from New York movies epitomize this type of thinking.

Another element that can come to the fore and feed people’s thinking about the need for a higher level of preparedness, and the need for weapons, are those people who anticipate a government takeover of personal property or a race/cultural war occurring. They feel driven to arm themselves to become prepared to survive that type of national calamity.

There certainly is a gun culture within the United States and I have many personal friends who own weapons for self-protection, hunting or just target shooting. These are not wild-eyed extremists.

Personally, I’m OK with Preppers and their goal of taking their preparedness beyond what governments may recommend. It is the individuals and groups that espouse the more extreme views who I choose not to embrace. Which brings me back to the title of this column and “What is your approach to Preppers?”

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