



SURVIVAL PAPER #SP84-21

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HOW TO SURVIVE A “BOLT OUT OF THE BLUE”

In the event of a nuclear confrontation, unless you are already located at a secure shelter or retreat site, you will probably be confronted with either a completely surprise attack (called a “bolt out of the blue” or BOOB), or a chaotic relocation within hours or days of an imminent attack. It is known that the U.S. would have approximately 5-12 minutes warning given a submarine launched ballistic missile attack and about 30 minutes given a land-based launch. However, it will take a few minutes to confirm the attack, another few minutes to notify the President, and then another few minutes to activate the Emergency Broadcasting System. During the crisis leading up to a confrontation, it is unlikely that the White House would keep the American public well informed or to activate Crisis Relocation, due to many problems associated with it, until the absolute last minute. Thus, it is highly unlikely that the average American will have much advance warning before nuclear explosions start to occur even if they happen to be near a radio or TV.

Under either condition, every second will count and all of your advance preparations should be aimed at allowing you to move quickly and decisively. The tips in this paper are designed to give you critical minutes when seconds count by making you aware of the preparations you can make with moderate cost and time.

ADVANCE PREPARATIONS

If you currently live near a defense-related installation, factory area, energy-producing facility or city of over 50,000 in population, you are close to a probable target area. Your degree of survivability increases as you move farther away from them. Generally, your survivability increases as you move south (for climate) and west (for open space) and away from populated areas.

The best option would be to move permanently out of a potential target area. If you are planning to relocate anyway, say for retirement or a job change, then choose your new home site in an area of greatest safety from the initial and after effects of a nuclear war. In your evaluation of an area be sure to look at how close you are to the probable targets mentioned above and the potential path of heavy fallout from surface blasts. Also, evaluate your probability of survival without electricity or fuel.

The next best option would be to have a vacation cottage or cabin or to be able to go to the home of friends or relatives in a safe area in advance of, or soon after, the attack. If you own a vacation cottage or cabin, look at what can be done to turn it into a year-round residence, particularly during remodeling. You may be able to install insulation and a wood-burning stove or fireplace and enjoy them until they are really needed. Some wood-burning stoves will allow you to cook, bake and to heat water. You could also build in hidden cache areas for weapons, food and other material.

If you have friends or relatives in a safe area, make arrangements with them beforehand. However, having a place to go does not in any way relieve you of a responsibility to be prepared beforehand. Should a nuclear war (or any other national crisis) occur, don't show up with just the spouse and kids. Your host is no doubt already worrying about their own survival.

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Assuming that none of the above options are available, you can still buy undeveloped or abandoned rural property in a pre-selected retreat area. Abandoned farms would be a good choice. In this respect, there are still a few advance preparations which should be made:

SITE PREPARATION

Consider buying a set of the “star plates” now sold by a number of distributors, pre-cut and pre-drill the 2x4s, pre-cut the wall material and cache it nearby (wrapped in plastic and buried, etc., with tools to erect it). If need be, have a pile of dirt under plastic (to prevent weeds or brush growing on it) to be used to pile up around the dome to create a fallout shelter. Make sure that you have extra bracing for the dome if you intend to put much weight on it. These star plates will allow you to erect a sizeable building (about 1,200 cubic feet) by using 8 ft. long 2x4s.

If you have a camper or trailer, and the property has a hillside on it, you can dig into the hillside in advance. When you arrive at the site, you would then back into the hole, cover the vehicle with support bracing and plastic and then bury it with the dirt dug out of the hole. If you have this hole dug for you, you can come up with some excuse to give those doing the work (e.g., tell them that it will be a basement for a house or cabin to be built later). There have been reports of some people buying old school buses and burying them in hillsides in this manner for a ready-made, roomy shelter.

A more expensive alternative would be to have a concrete garage built which can be covered with earth and into which you can drive your camper or vehicle.

Having a retreat in the boonies without a watchman is inviting rip-off or pre-habitation (imagine having to dislodge an armed camper from your retreat site when you arrived). Thus, obvious structures or caches are going to have to be well secured or well hidden.

CACHES

You may want to establish caches of both short-term survival supplies and long-term survival supplies (e.g., weapons, ammo, fishing gear, garden seeds or traps) at your predetermined retreat site. This can double, triple, etc. your available supplies and make you less dependent on going home to pick up your short-term supplies or to need to obtain long-term supplies from others. Naturally, protect your supplies against the elements. A sealed trash can or a 55-gallon drum with lid could be the ideal answer to that. At a summer cabin or cottage, supplies could be cached under the floor or nearby.

Another alternative is to rent a small “U-Lock-It” storage locker on the route and store your cache there. However, theft security at these places leaves much to be desired.

MAKING FRIENDS

Visit your retreat site often enough (e.g., summer vacations) to make friends in the area. If you are a total stranger, the local residents may consider you a hostile.

BOOB WARNING WHILE AT HOME

Now that you have a survival or retreat site prepared and pre-stocked, the next problem is surviving the attack and then getting to your site. In this case everything depends on the shelter availability within a short distance of your home and the distance your home is from Ground Zero. With luck, your area will not be part of or within a few miles of Ground Zero or it won't matter much what you do. Otherwise, here are some suggestions:

CIVIL DEFENSE – Check with your local Civil Defense Office (probably called something like the Emergency Response Office) for a map or list of designated blast/fallout shelters in your immediate area (within a 5-minute walking distance). Use a wristwatch and actually time your walk to them. A 5-minute walking distance is recommended because you can easily run to it in 3 minutes. Choose one made of reinforced concrete if possible with a basement. Study the entrances and how you can get in even at 3:30 am if need be. A pry bar, bolt cutters or sledgehammer may be needed. Go inside and evaluate blast worthiness – choose wisely. Hotel basements are good potential shelter sites in that they are open 24 hours a day, year-round.

NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCES – If your Civil Defense Office doesn't have an up-to-date list or map, or none of the facilities are nearby, determine for yourself what is available. Look for the following places and evaluate them according to this simple criteria: Will this site withstand reasonable blast and heat long enough for protection during the initial attack and during the immediate, heaviest fallout time?

REINFORCED CONCRETE BUILDINGS – Check for basements, sheltered areas, etc. Look at them and evaluate for possible entrances/exits and overall strength. Pack your evacuation kit to suit your shelter.

DRAIN PIPES – These may be suitable for short-term emergency use. Check where they lead to. Measure the opening(s) and make a cover (e.g., sheet metal over plywood) and a way to fasten it to the pipe end(s) to keep out heat, blast and fallout. You might also make a portable floor to make the pipe more habitable. Beware of flooding during rainstorms.

OLD MINES AND CAVES – If on your property, reinforce the entrance and make a secure door. If large enough to drive your car into, do so and use the car as a shield or door reinforcement from inside. Doors should open inward to avoid being trapped by possible outside debris.

BASEMENTS – If you live near a target area, the upper part of the house may be blasted away. You will need some sort of shelter within the basement such as an extremely heavy table to protect you against falling debris. Consider building a reinforced room in advance (e.g., root cellar). Such a room may not be necessary in outlying areas. According to one U.S. Government analysis, the radiation dose rate inside a standard brick residence without a basement is likely to be no more than 20% of the rate encountered on the outside, and the dose rate which will prevail in a residential basement would be about 34% of that encountered outside the building. Thus, it would seem that limited exposure can be obtained even without a fallout shelter. Beware of fire in the structure which might trap you in the basement.

SEPTIC TANK SHELTER – If you live in an older house which was later put on the city sewage system, chances are the original septic tank was left in the ground. These tanks have almost every requirement for a blast/fallout shelter; they are roomy, watertight, underground, have a reinforced top, top entrance and holes already in the sides (entrance pipe and drain field lines). It may be possible to locate the opening and have the tank drained and sterilized by a portable steam cleaner. Air pipes could be put in the old side holes and an improved entrance added. With only a modest investment, you could have a good, readily available shelter. A note of warning, when in use, any shelter must have a steady supply of fresh air circulating through it. A solar-charged, battery-operated fan may be the answer here. This shelter could be hidden by building a storage building on top of it and hiding the air intake and exhaust pipes in the walls of that building.

SUBWAYS AND UNDERGROUND GARAGES – These may be useful if you can get to extreme parts away from entrances, but still accessible to escape when the emergency is over. However, these are likely to be in target areas and thus should be avoided. Also, they are liable to be very, very crowded.

SEWER AND STORM DRAIN SYSTEMS AND UTILITY AREAS – These systems or areas often contain fairly large, dry rooms. Make sure you have some sort of hook to remove storm drain/manhole covers and ropes to quickly lower your emergency kit and yourself in case of no ladder. Check them out

before using. See how far they go, make a map in advance, and stay away from entrances because of blast heat and fallout. Beware of flooding.

HOW LONG TO STAY IN AN INTERIM SHELTER

The intensity of external radiation residue is greatest for the first 24 to 48 hours after the blast and decreases rapidly. At the end of two weeks, the intensity of the radiation residue will be greatly reduced. If you are not near or downwind from the surface blast site, you may receive little or no radioactive fallout. Air blasts generate almost no fallout. Look for the sand-like particles on flat outside surfaces.

If you do not intend to stay in your present location, probably the best time to move to your alternate area is as soon after the initial blast as practical. The sooner you leave, the better your chances may be since you may avoid highway congestion. Look at the traffic jams which occur under normal highway conditions. You may have to decide on the trade-off between possible radioactivity exposure and not being able to get to your preferred survival location. If you intend to stay where you are and have received noticeable fallout, continue to stay in the safest part of your shelter. You may start to move about somewhat after the first 48 hours. Follow the instructions of your local Civil Defense Office if they are still operating.

EVACUATION KIT

The use of a heavy-duty trash can on wheels to hold your emergency evacuation supplies is recommended for several reasons; you can run with it to your preselected BOOB shelter, it will store easily in your house, it will go into your car easily, and it will hold approximately eight cu.ft. of material. Sears has excellent heavy-duty plastic cans with wheels. The wheels may need to be reinforced with an axle shaft.

USE – In case of evacuation by car, and there is a massive traffic jam, you can get out and move with your supplies on foot. If you reinforce it, it can be used to hide behind. Once in the shelter, it can be used for sewage and trash. It can be stored easily in the garage until needed without drawing undue attention.

LOADING THE CAN: -

LID – Use the lid to hold shelter clothing including goggles, respirator, hat (preferably hard) and boots (or good shoes). You will need the goggles and respirator to keep smoke, dust and gases out of your lungs and eyes. The hard hat will protect your head against falling debris. Good footwear will help you over rough terrain. Having suitable clothing in the evacuation kit means that you can run with anything which you happen to be wearing. Dress in the shelter. Bungee cords from eyelets will hold these items in the lid.

FIRST LAYER- The top layer should contain supplies and water to last 24 hours. You can put two roomy shoulder bags (nylon, also from Sears), and a couple of canteens in that layer. The bags should contain a first aid kit, food, vitamins or minerals to flush radioactivity from the body, replacement respirator filters, and weapons (if you prefer).

SECOND LAYER AND UNDER – One change of clothing, ponchos, food and supplies for two weeks and maybe a small, lightweight tent. If you are in a large shelter, having a small self-supporting tent for privacy may be comforting. Be sure to pack a number of straw type water filters as the water at the site may be bad.

SUPPLEMENTAL WATER CANS – There are inexpensive 5-gallon plastic cans for holding water or evacuation supplies. You can have a couple of these filled and sitting next to your evacuation kit. If there is enough manpower, a person can run a short distance carrying two of these, or a woman carrying

one or two with only partial contents. Sears also sells wheeled racks for carrying multiple loads, which might be suitable given your situation. Another alternative is 1-gallon plastic milk jugs with the handles tied together with a carrying handle.

GENERAL EVACUATION CONSIDERATIONS\

Make sure that your car is large enough to quickly pack the trash can(s) if necessary. Measure the door and then see if the dimensions of the can you want will fit. A roof rack would be extremely handy here as it could carry several of these cans.

Make sure that the number of people you are going to carry in the car will fit with the evacuation kit. You don't want to leave anyone or any critical supplies behind.

Rotate the supplies to match the climate (e.g., change winter and summer clothing).

Make sure that you have enough for your family plus two others for insurance.

Test the system by loading it into the car quickly and evacuating to your pre-selected site. See if you can load and leave in under 3 minutes.

If you have plenty of room in the car, and there is sufficient time, you should have at least two trash cans – one filled and ready to go, and the other standing clean and empty. When the time comes, you can wheel the empty can around the house, emptying out the pantry and the medicine cabinets and putting in your precious treasures.

Low-cost radiation monitors are readily available. Recommended source is CL-EM Enterprises, 4109 Graf Dr., Louisville, KY 40220.

The optimal contents of an evacuation kit will depend on too many factors for a specific list to be given in this paper. You will have to determine this for yourself. However, it is recommended that both wilderness survival and nuclear war survival books be included.

BOOB WARNING WHILE AT WORK OR SCHOOL

You probably won't have time to go home. Check potential shelters out as in the "at home" section and pre-select your shelter site. Pack a small emergency kit, say in a 5-gallon plastic bucket, with clothing, respirator (with extra filters), hard hat, goggles, water filters and small volume, high energy food in the trunk of your car. In case you are at home, this will give you extra of these things. Basically what you need is enough to cover yourself until the fallout levels will let you return home to your family.

Children should be shown emergency shelter sites in case the attack comes while they are at school (and you know that you cannot make it in time to pick them up). Pre-arrange to meet them after the initial crisis, taking their emergency clothing to them. They might be able to make it home during the period between the blast and the arrival of the first heavy fallout. Agree in advance how long those at home should wait for those away before heading to the retreat. If they arrive later, they can start for the retreat themselves.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET ADVANCE WARNING

Assuming you get several hours or more of advance warning, you must move quickly before the roads are completely jammed. Each road can clear a certain number of cars per hour at a given rate. Once this rate is exceeded, traffic jams occur. Imagine 5:00 pm traffic times a factor of three or four or

more. You should be on the road before most others have even started to react. Don't forget any extra water containers.

Preselect your evacuation route, have alternate routes (particularly around cities) and know what you are going to do when you get there. Have detailed state maps. Travel the route in advance and know where to take detours if necessary. Plan on your retreat site being not more than half a gas tank distance away, unless you have extra gas stored in advance.

The emergency clothing kept in the evacuation kit can be changed into while on the road. Keep your other clothing even if they receive fallout particles because the material can be washed and use for bandages, filters, small fish nets, etc., and even for redressing into as the need arises.

You might pre-cut metal-reinforced plywood inserts for the windows of your car in case you are caught in the fringes of a blast. That way, you will be protected against shards of safety glass. Of course, include plexiglass viewports to see out of for driving.

You may encounter roadblocks in traveling to your destination. These would probably be local citizens worried about their area receiving more people than it can handle. You may be able to pass if you explain your destination is elsewhere. These roadblocks may also be criminals looking for transportation or supplies. Be extremely cautious of rough-looking men with clothes which do not seem to fit correctly. Stop well away from the roadblock and have one person walk forward to assess the situation. If it seems okay, and you can pass, they can return to the vehicle and proceed. Be prepared to accelerate in case of trouble. If the situation doesn't seem okay, then you have a choice of crashing the roadblock, finding another route, abandoning the vehicle and bypassing on foot, or waiting for other vehicles to safely pass the roadblock. A good pair of binoculars might prove to be very useful.

Enroute you would undoubtedly pass people needing assistance, particularly those out of gas. Your attitude must be that your own survival is of paramount importance. This may sound inhumane but a good Samaritan in this situation would, most likely, not make it to his destination. You cannot save them all.

Once at your permanent location, check it first for radioactive residue. If you see or monitor a noticeable amount, then use the procedures recommended by Civil Defense for shelter living. Your vehicle may have become very radioactive if you drove through a highly contaminated area. Don't take chances. Park the vehicle well away from the residence as soon as it is unloaded. Don't drive with windows or vents open.

Once at your destination, you may be inundated with strangers. They would range from the innocent seeking help to the scum of society. You are going to have to be prepared to deal with any of them. The first couple of weeks would be critical. A residence which cannot be seen from public roads will also help to reduce the number of intruders. The more inaccessible your survival location, the better.

Don't advertise if, through your advance planning, you are better off than the majority of the other people as it would be asking for trouble. Keep the lowest possible profile.

READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Naturally, two weeks to one month's warning would allow us all to evacuate Ground Zero and to dig into hardened shelters. However, this is assumed to be a luxury. Since every second of advance warning can be valuable, keep on the alert for precursory events which can give you additional days of advance warning. At that time, that vacation leave (or call in sick) and pack up and go. Don't wait! Your fellow workers may think you're slightly daffy, but it is better to be considered foolish than to be dead.

Advance warning may consist of nuclear exchanges between Third World countries such as India and Pakistan, a conflict between Russia and China, a Warsaw Pact attack on NATO, or impossible ultimatums between super powers. The enormity of the situation should be unmistakable if you are alert, even though the events leading to the confrontation may be a series of second or third-rate incidents. Consider buying a good portable shortwave set (with multiple bands and batteries) and tune in to the BBC, Radio Netherlands, etc., as they will give you a different news viewpoint from the American networks. If things are nebulous, it might be better to send the family to the preselected relocation site to set up housekeeping while the breadwinner continues working. It's far easier to take care of one person on the move than a tribe. Furthermore, it's easier to shelter one person during the initial blast, heat and shock waves than a family.

CONCLUSION

There are ways to greatly increase your chances of surviving a Bolt Out of the Blue or extremely short notice nuclear attack. Summarized, these are:

- Preselect, prepare and prestock an emergency shelter or retreat site well away from a target area.
- Practice and refine your evacuation plan from first warning through going to your survival or retreat site. Know what you are going to do when you get there.
- Keep cool and prepare for unanticipated difficulties by building as many alternatives as possible into your plan. This includes having to abandon your car and then getting to your retreat by whatever transportation method is available.

Admittedly, long-term survival of a nuclear war is going to heavily depend on pure luck. However, like a riverboat gambler, advance preparation can change the odds significantly in your favor.

SUGGESTED READING

In Time of Emergency: A Citizen's Handbook on Nuclear Attack and Natural Disasters (H-14). Available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Washington D.C. 20472.

Nuclear War Survival Skills by C. Kearny. Available from CL-EM Enterprises, 4109 Graf Dr., Louisville, KY 40220 and many others. (Includes detailed information on constructing expedited fallout shelters and how to build a radiation detection meter out of readily available material.)