

Max Paradox

**PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!**

A tongue-in-cheek guide series ;)

# Where Is the Fire Extinguisher, and Why Am I Only Asking Now?

How to Prepare Your Home for Emergencies,  
Power Outages, and Other Surprises Before  
You Actually Need Plan B



**We've got a problem. But relax.  
It can be solved—and we'll even have something to laugh about.**

# Where Is the Fire Extinguisher, and Why Am I Only Asking Now?

How to Prepare Your Home for  
Emergencies, Power Outages, and Other  
Surprises Before You Actually Need Plan B

Max Paradox

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

# CONTENTS

|                                                                |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| INTRO .....                                                    | 4   |
| Chapter 1 - Don't Prepare for the Apocalypse .....             | 10  |
| Chapter 2 - Your Home Needs an Owner's Manual .....            | 18  |
| Chapter 3 - One Failure Likes to Bring Friends .....           | 27  |
| Chapter 4 - Don't Fix the World in the First Minute .....      | 35  |
| Chapter 5 - Stock What You'll Actually Use .....               | 43  |
| Chapter 6 - Buying It Does Not Train You .....                 | 51  |
| Chapter 7 - Don't Be the Only Person Who Knows .....           | 60  |
| Chapter 8 - Sometimes the Safe Plan Is to Leave .....          | 68  |
| Chapter 9 - When the House Goes Quiet .....                    | 76  |
| Chapter 10 - When the Tap and the Heat Both Quit .....         | 84  |
| Chapter 11 - When the Alarm Means It .....                     | 92  |
| Chapter 12 - Weather Does Not Check Your Calendar .....        | 99  |
| Chapter 13 - When the Internet Goes Quiet.....                 | 107 |
| Chapter 14 - Switch to Minimum Mode .....                      | 115 |
| Chapter 15 - When Plan B Has a Bad Day .....                   | 123 |
| Chapter 16 - Your Home Does Not End at the Front<br>Door ..... | 131 |
| Chapter 17 - Don't Make Big Decisions on Empty .....           | 140 |
| Chapter 18 - Plans Age Quietly .....                           | 148 |
| Chapter 19 - Practice Before Life Does It for You .....        | 157 |
| Chapter 20 - Ready Enough .....                                | 164 |

# INTRO

It is 10:43 p.m. You are halfway through an episode you are only pretending to follow when the lights go out. Not flicker. Not dim. Out. The television disappears, the Wi-Fi router loses its tiny reassuring constellation of lights, and the refrigerator stops humming with the confidence of an appliance that has always assumed civilization would continue. For about three seconds, nobody says anything. Then someone asks, "Is it just us?" You look out the window, because apparently the first official diagnostic procedure for a power outage is checking whether the neighbors are suffering too. The building across the street is dark. Excellent. Shared inconvenience somehow feels more legitimate. You reach for your phone. Twenty-two percent. You reach for a flashlight. There is no flashlight where you thought the flashlight was. There is, however, a drawer containing seven charging cables for devices nobody owns anymore, a restaurant loyalty card from 2019, two mysterious keys, and a battery that may have been dead since the previous administration. The household emergency plan has officially begun.

The strange thing about home emergencies is that they spend most of their lives sounding slightly ridiculous. Where is the main water shutoff? When did you last test the smoke alarm? What happens to the garage door if the power fails? Where are the spare batteries? Does anyone except you know? These are not questions people normally raise over Saturday breakfast unless they are either extremely organized or trying to make everyone else leave the table. Most of us have more urgent matters. Laundry. Work. Dinner. A dripping faucet that has apparently entered a

stable long-term relationship with the sink. We assume that when something goes wrong, we will deal with it then, using the remarkable emergency expertise we expect to download directly into our brains at the exact moment water begins spreading across the floor. Future You will know what to do. Future You is incredibly capable. Current You, meanwhile, has been meaning to find the fire extinguisher since February.

That is why ordinary households often have a peculiar mix of advanced technology and primitive emergency planning. You can adjust the thermostat from another country, see who is at the front door while sitting in a restaurant, and ask a speaker to play rain sounds because actual silence has somehow become too demanding. Yet when the power fails, the entire domestic ecosystem may discover that it was built on one electrical outlet and optimism. The smart lights are dark, the smart speaker has become an expensive cylinder, the router is contemplating mortality, and the app that controls the blinds would love to help if only it could contact the blinds. Convenience is wonderful. It is also very good at hiding dependency. Things work so reliably that we stop noticing what they need in order to work, which is fine right up until several of those needs take the evening off together.

Preparation tends to fail in the opposite direction too. One mildly alarming news story later, a perfectly normal person can find themselves online at 1:15 a.m. comparing emergency radios, water filters, solar chargers, tactical flashlights, folding shovels, and a device whose exact purpose is unclear but whose product photographs strongly suggest that civilization has collapsed somewhere just outside the frame. A week later, a large box arrives. Half of it goes into a closet. Nobody reads the manuals. The batteries

are not installed. Three years pass. During an actual outage, someone opens that closet and discovers enough equipment to cross a mountain range, but no working light within easy reach. This is not preparedness. This is expensive clutter wearing cargo pants.

A useful Plan B is far less dramatic. It means that when something stops working, you do not have to invent your first five decisions while tired, scared, cold, wet, or standing in a hallway that smells suspiciously like burning plastic. You know where the important things are. You know which problems you can safely handle and which ones belong to qualified professionals or emergency services. You have enough basic supplies to avoid turning a short disruption into an immediate shopping expedition. The people you live with know at least the essentials instead of relying on one household wizard who understands every valve, breaker, password, key, warranty, and phone number. The goal is not independence from society. If anything, good preparation includes knowing when to stop improvising and use the people, services, systems, and expertise that exist precisely because some problems should not be solved by a determined amateur holding a screwdriver.

This matters because emergencies are rarely polite enough to arrive one at a time. A power outage can become a communication problem, a heating problem, a food-storage problem, a garage-door problem, and eventually a family problem involving the sentence, "Why did nobody charge the power bank?" A water outage affects drinking, cooking, hygiene, toilets, pets, and the sudden realization that every meal you planned requires three things to be washed afterward. A severe storm may interrupt electricity, block roads, damage property, and leave your phone full of

messages from people forwarding information that begins with "Apparently..." By the time you establish that "apparently" is not an emergency management agency, you may already have spent an hour reacting to rumors instead of facts. Good preparation does not eliminate complexity, but it stops every new complication from feeling like the first surprise humanity has ever encountered.

There is another reason to prepare before you need to. Stress makes people wonderfully strange. A calm person who knows perfectly well that possessions can be replaced may suddenly decide to go back into a risky area because the laptop is still inside. Someone who normally reads instructions carefully may start pressing buttons at random because a machine is making an unfamiliar noise. Two adults who have successfully managed jobs, mortgages, children, taxes, and international travel can spend seven minutes arguing over whether the flashlight was "always kept in the kitchen" while standing in complete darkness. None of this means people are foolish. It means emergency conditions remove time, information, comfort, and certainty all at once. A good system assumes that you will be less elegant under pressure, not more. It puts important decisions in place while you are still wearing normal clothes and nobody is shouting from another room.

This book is not going to turn your home into a bunker, and it is not going to treat every inconvenience as the opening scene of a disaster movie. Most home disruptions are exactly that - disruptions. Annoying, inconvenient, occasionally expensive, sometimes genuinely dangerous, but usually made easier by a handful of sensible preparations. We will focus on realistic problems: losing power, water, heating, communications, access, or normal

use of the home; dealing with alarms, smoke, leaks, severe weather, and situations where leaving is safer than staying; keeping useful supplies without becoming curator of the National Museum of Canned Beans; and making sure the plan still works when the one person who "knows all that stuff" is not available. Where there is real danger to life or health, the priority is safety and professional help, not heroic improvisation. A fire, electrical hazard, gas-related concern, medical emergency, or other serious threat is not improved by confidence unsupported by training.

You also do not need to solve everything in one weekend. That is how sensible preparation mutates into a lifestyle project involving storage bins, spreadsheets, labels, and a household that now fears the phrase "I had another idea." The useful question is smaller: if something important stopped working tonight, what would cause the most confusion in the first hour? Maybe nobody knows where the shutoff is. Maybe the flashlights are unreliable. Maybe every useful phone number lives online. Maybe there is no agreed plan for what happens if family members cannot reach one another. Maybe you have plenty of food but almost all of it expects an electric stove to participate. Find the first weak point. Fix that. Then another. Preparedness works much better as a series of boring improvements than as one glorious afternoon in which you attempt to become personally resistant to all known forms of misfortune.

The real promise here is not that nothing will catch you off guard. Something will. Houses are full of pipes, wires, appliances, people, animals, doors, weather, software, and occasionally a washing machine that chooses 2:00 a.m. to express itself creatively. The promise is that surprise does not have to become helplessness. You can know what

matters first, what can wait, what you should keep available, what you should never improvise, and when the correct response is simply to leave, call someone qualified, or change the plan. That is enough. More than enough, actually, compared with standing in the dark holding a nearly dead phone and discovering that the only candle in the house smells aggressively of cinnamon.

So before we get clever, start with one question. Not "Am I prepared for every emergency?" Nobody is. Ask instead: if Plan A stopped working five minutes from now, would I know my first sensible move? If the answer is "probably," "I think so," or "I'd Google it," you are exactly where this book begins. The fire extinguisher can stay wherever it is for another few minutes. But by the time you really need Plan B, the goal is that "Where is it?" will no longer be the opening line.

# Chapter 1 - Don't Prepare for the Apocalypse

You are standing in the emergency-preparedness aisle of a hardware store holding a flashlight powerful enough to signal passing aircraft. It has five brightness modes, a strobe setting, a metal body described as "tactical," and a price that suggests it may also know first aid. Beside it are water containers, emergency blankets, multitools, battery packs, radios, first-aid kits, and something called an emergency survival axe, which feels ambitious considering you live in a third-floor apartment and the last thing you chopped was a cucumber. Ten minutes earlier, you came in for batteries. Now your cart looks as though you have received confidential information about the collapse of civilization. This is one of the great traps of emergency preparation: buying serious-looking objects feels like action, while figuring out what can realistically go wrong in your actual home feels suspiciously like homework.

The imagination is terrible at sensible risk management because sensible risks are not very cinematic. A giant catastrophe is interesting. A failed washing-machine hose is not, right up until your hallway is becoming waterfront property. A major disaster makes us picture dramatic escapes, emergency broadcasts, and supplies stacked with military precision. A six-hour power outage sounds almost too ordinary to deserve preparation, even though it can affect lighting, charging, cooking, heating controls, garage access, refrigeration, and communication all at once. The boring problems are exactly the ones most likely to expose how little thought we have given to the house we use every

day. Nobody makes a thriller called *The Breaker Tripped Again*, yet an ordinary household can produce remarkable levels of confusion around one electrical panel and a label reading "KITCHEN?".

The first useful shift is to stop preparing for "everything." Everything is an infinite category. You can spend all weekend imagining earthquakes, floods, fires, blackouts, extreme weather, water failures, internet outages, broken heating systems, supply disruptions, and the possibility that a raccoon somehow gains administrative control of the garage. The result is not resilience. The result is a shopping list, a headache, and a growing suspicion that your spare room should contain a generator, twelve crates of supplies, and a person named Frank who knows radio communications. A better question is smaller: which disruptions are realistic for this home, in this location, with these people? Preparedness begins when the abstract word "emergency" becomes a short list of concrete interruptions you can actually do something about.

Look at your home as a collection of functions rather than rooms. You need safe shelter, water, food, lighting, communication, temperature control, access in and out, basic hygiene, necessary medication or medical equipment, and a way to get reliable information. Now ask what could interrupt each one. Maybe your apartment relies entirely on electricity for cooking and heating controls. Maybe your home has a well pump, which means a power outage can become a water problem. Maybe a household member uses equipment that cannot simply wait until tomorrow. Maybe you live somewhere where severe storms, wildfire smoke, flooding, extreme heat, or winter outages deserve special attention. Maybe the most likely emergency is much less