

# The Cabin Survival Checklist

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## Essential First Steps for Securing a Bug-Out Location

*By Sean Liscom*

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When civilization collapses and you make it to your bug-out cabin, the first 72 hours will determine whether you survive or become another statistic. This checklist is based on hard-won lessons from real-world survival scenarios and decades of experience as a firefighter and emergency responder. Follow these steps in order, and you'll give yourself the best chance of making it through whatever comes next.

## Phase One: Immediate Security (First 4 Hours)

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The moment you arrive at your cabin, your priority is establishing a secure perimeter and assessing immediate threats. Do not unpack. Do not get comfortable. Do not assume you're safe just because you made it this far.

### Perimeter Assessment

Walk the entire property boundary with a weapon at the ready. Look for signs of recent human activity: footprints, disturbed vegetation, trash, or makeshift camps. Check all entry points to your property—gates, breaks in fencing, natural access routes. If you find evidence that someone has been there recently, you need to decide immediately whether to stay or move on. A compromised location is worse than no location at all.

Mark your property boundaries clearly in your mind. Know where your defensible perimeter ends and the wilderness begins. Identify natural chokepoints where you can establish observation posts or defensive positions. Look for high ground that gives you visibility over approaches to the cabin. These vantage points will become critical if you need to defend your position.

### Cabin Inspection

Before entering the cabin, circle it completely. Check all windows and doors for signs of forced entry. Look for tracks near entrances. Listen for sounds from inside—voices,

movement, anything that suggests you're not alone. If the cabin has been breached, treat it as hostile territory until proven otherwise.

Once you've determined the cabin appears secure, enter with your weapon ready. Clear each room systematically, checking closets, under beds, and any space large enough to conceal a person. Check the attic and basement if you have them. Only after you've confirmed the cabin is empty can you begin the next phase.

### **Immediate Fortification**

Board up or secure any broken windows immediately. Even if they were broken before you arrived, they represent a vulnerability. Use whatever materials you have on hand—plywood, furniture, even mattresses in a pinch. The goal is to eliminate easy entry points and create barriers that will slow down any intruders, giving you time to respond.

Identify your primary defensive position inside the cabin. This should be a room with limited entry points, ideally with a window or secondary exit for escape if needed. Move essential supplies to this room: weapons, ammunition, first aid kit, water, and food for 24 hours. If you're forced to defend the cabin, this is where you'll make your stand.

## **Phase Two: Resource Assessment (Hours 4-12)**

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With immediate security established, you need to take stock of what you have and what you need. Survival is about managing resources, and you can't manage what you haven't inventoried.

### **Water Supply**

Water is your first priority. Locate all water sources on the property: wells, streams, ponds, or stored water. Test the well pump if you have one. If it's electric and the power is out, you'll need to know how to access water manually. Check stored water for contamination—look for algae, debris, or unusual odors. Even if the water looks clean, plan to purify it before drinking.

Calculate your water needs based on one gallon per person per day for drinking, plus additional water for cooking and hygiene. If your primary water source is compromised or insufficient, you need to know this now, not three days from now

when you're already dehydrated. Identify backup water sources and the routes to reach them safely.

## **Food Inventory**

Catalog all food supplies in the cabin. Separate items by category: canned goods, dry goods, perishables, and frozen items. If the power is out, anything frozen will spoil within 24-48 hours depending on outside temperature. Prioritize consuming these items first. Check expiration dates on canned goods, but remember that most canned food remains safe well beyond the printed date if the can isn't damaged or bulging.

Calculate your food supply in terms of person-days. If you have three people and enough food for 90 meals, you have 30 days of supply. Be conservative in your estimates. It's better to ration early than to run out with no resupply option. Identify potential food sources on the property: game trails, fishing spots, edible plants. These will become increasingly important as stored food dwindles.

## **Medical Supplies**

Inventory all medical supplies. Organize them by category: trauma supplies (bandages, tourniquets, pressure dressings), medications (antibiotics, pain relievers, prescription drugs), and basic first aid items. Check expiration dates on medications, but know that most remain effective well past their expiration date, just with reduced potency.

Identify the medical skills within your group. Who has first aid training? Who has experience with trauma care? If you're alone, honestly assess your own capabilities. A medical emergency in a survival situation can be fatal if you're not prepared to handle it. Set aside a dedicated medical kit that stays packed and ready at all times.

## **Fuel and Power**

Check all fuel supplies: gasoline, diesel, propane, kerosene, firewood. Gasoline degrades over time, especially if it wasn't treated with stabilizer. If you have stored gasoline, check it for water contamination or varnish buildup. Calculate how long your fuel will last based on essential uses only: running a generator for critical needs, heating, and cooking.

If you have solar panels or other renewable power sources, test them now. Identify which electrical systems are essential (well pump, refrigeration, communications) and

which are luxuries you can live without. Conserve fuel from day one. You don't know how long you'll need to make it last.

### **Weapons and Ammunition**

Inventory all weapons and ammunition. Clean and inspect each firearm, even if it was stored properly. Check ammunition for corrosion or damage. Organize ammunition by caliber and ensure you know exactly how many rounds you have for each weapon. This is not the time for optimism—count every round.

Establish a weapons protocol: where firearms are stored, who has access, how they're secured when not in use. In a survival situation, weapons are both your most valuable asset and your greatest liability if mishandled. Treat every weapon as if it's loaded, and never let your guard down.

## **Phase Three: Defensive Preparation (Hours 12-24)**

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With resources assessed, you can now focus on improving your defensive position and establishing routines that will keep you alive long-term.

### **Observation and Early Warning**

Establish observation posts that give you visibility over all approaches to the cabin. These don't need to be elaborate—a simple position with good sightlines and cover is sufficient. If you have binoculars or a spotting scope, keep them at your primary observation post. Develop a rotation schedule if you have multiple people. Someone should always be watching.

Set up early warning systems. These can be as simple as tripwires attached to cans filled with rocks, or as sophisticated as motion sensors if you have them and the power to run them. The goal is to eliminate the possibility of someone approaching the cabin undetected. Place these systems far enough from the cabin that you'll have time to respond to a threat.

### **Defensive Improvements**

Improve your defensive positions based on what you learned during your initial assessment. Reinforce doors with additional locks or barricades. Create firing positions that allow you to cover approaches while remaining in cover yourself. If you have sandbags or can fill bags with dirt, use them to create hardened positions.

Clear fields of fire around the cabin. Remove brush or obstacles that could provide cover for someone approaching. This is a balance—you don't want to make the cabin obviously occupied, but you also don't want to give attackers easy concealment. Use your judgment based on the specific threat level in your area.

### **Waste Management**

Establish a waste disposal system immediately. Human waste, food scraps, and trash all create health hazards and can attract both animals and unwanted human attention. If you have a septic system, use it sparingly to conserve water. If not, establish a latrine away from the cabin and water sources, downwind if possible.

Bury or burn trash, don't let it accumulate. The smell of garbage can be detected from surprising distances, and it advertises your presence to anyone in the area. Maintain strict hygiene protocols. Disease kills more people in survival situations than violence does.

### **Communications**

If you have radio equipment, establish a communications schedule with any friendly contacts. Keep transmissions brief and use codes or vague language—assume someone hostile is listening. If you don't have radio equipment, establish protocols for signaling or meeting with nearby allies. Never assume you're completely isolated; information about threats and resources can be the difference between survival and disaster.

## **Phase Four: Long-Term Sustainability (Hours 24-72)**

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The final phase of your initial bug-out is establishing systems that will allow you to survive indefinitely. This is where you transition from emergency response to sustainable living.

### **Food Production**

Identify areas suitable for gardening. Even if it's not planting season, mark these areas and begin preparing them. Clear debris, test soil, and plan what you'll grow. In a long-term survival situation, stored food is a stopgap. Real survival means producing your own food. Start thinking about this from day one.

Scout hunting and fishing opportunities. Learn the game trails, identify where animals water, and note signs of wildlife activity. If you're not an experienced hunter, start learning now. The same goes for fishing, trapping, and foraging. These skills take time to develop, and you don't have time to waste.

### **Water Purification**

Establish a reliable water purification system. This might be boiling, filtration, chemical treatment, or a combination of methods. Have backup systems in place. If your primary filter breaks or you run out of purification tablets, you need to know you can still produce safe drinking water. Test your systems now, while you still have stored water as a backup.

### **Security Routines**

Develop and maintain security routines. This includes regular perimeter patrols, observation schedules, and protocols for responding to threats. Write these down and make sure everyone in your group understands them. In a crisis, people fall back on training and routine. Establish good routines now, and they'll become automatic.

Practice noise and light discipline, especially at night. Sound carries farther than you think, and a light visible at night can be seen for miles. Use blackout curtains or coverings on windows. Keep conversations quiet. Move deliberately, not frantically. The goal is to make your cabin as undetectable as possible to anyone passing through the area.

### **Mental Preparation**

Finally, prepare yourself mentally for what comes next. Survival is as much psychological as physical. Establish routines that give structure to your days. Maintain hygiene and appearance—it's easy to let yourself go, but maintaining standards helps maintain morale. If you're with others, have regular group meetings to discuss concerns, make decisions, and maintain cohesion.

Accept that the world has changed and isn't changing back anytime soon. Grief and denial are natural, but they're also luxuries you can't afford. Focus on what you can control: your immediate environment, your preparations, your responses to threats. Everything else is noise.

# Final Thoughts

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This checklist covers the essential first 72 hours at your bug-out location, but it's just the beginning. Real survival is measured in weeks, months, and years. The habits you establish in these first three days will determine whether you make it to week two, month two, and beyond.

Stay alert. Stay disciplined. Stay alive.

And remember: in a survival situation, hope is not a strategy. Preparation is.

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## Quick Reference Checklist

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### Hours 0-4: Immediate Security

- Walk property perimeter, assess threats
- Identify defensive positions and chokepoints
- Clear cabin room by room
- Secure all entry points
- Establish primary defensive position
- Move essential supplies to defensive position

### Hours 4-12: Resource Assessment

- Locate and test all water sources
- Calculate water supply duration
- Inventory all food supplies
- Calculate food supply duration
- Inventory medical supplies
- Check fuel and power systems
- Inventory weapons and ammunition
- Establish weapons protocols

### Hours 12-24: Defensive Preparation

- Establish observation posts
- Set up early warning systems
- Improve defensive positions
- Clear fields of fire
- Establish waste management system
- Set up communications protocols

### **Hours 24-72: Long-Term Sustainability**

- Identify areas for food production
- Scout hunting and fishing opportunities
- Establish water purification systems
- Develop security routines
- Practice noise and light discipline
- Establish daily routines and group protocols

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*Sean Liscom served as a firefighter and EMT for over 20 years, responding to countless emergencies and disaster scenarios. This checklist is based on real-world experience in crisis management and survival situations.*