

Preparing for Disaster



I am writing this article in the wake of Hurricane Irma and with another Hurricane – Maria, just about to strike Puerto Rico. News has also just broken about a 7.1 magnitude earthquake that has hit Mexico claiming over two hundred lives whilst Typhoon Talim recently battered Japan, so as you can see, disaster can happen anywhere and at any time. Airsoft is a global activity and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that players could find themselves caught up in such events whether they are visiting or living in other countries more susceptible to such devastation.

One of the most devastating storms to hit the UK in recent times occurred back in October 1987. During this storm, winds reached hurricane strength which caused damage to buildings and felled millions of trees. Severe disruption was caused to power and transportation networks and tragically, eighteen people lost their lives. The Met Office describes this severity of storm as a one in two hundred year event, but there have been many less severe extreme weather events to affect the UK since then – including flooding and heavy snowfall that have caused major problems and even further loss of life. So, what can be done to prepare for such events and what equipment would you need should a natural disaster strike? I am going to go through some items that you might carry as part of your airsoft kit that could be use in a ‘S**t hits the fan’ situation.

‘Forewarned is Forearmed’



Hurricane Katrina

Nowadays, in the UK most severe weather events are well forecasted allowing people enough time to prepare, so keeping up to date with the weather report is a good starting point for not being caught out. Once a weather warning has been issued by the Met Office, you can follow developments by using the app from the BBC Weather service or the Met Office. These will give a prediction on the areas to be affected, the type of weather to be experienced and the time window for the expected bad weather. Follow any advice that has been issued by the local authorities and check the Environment Agency website for information about local flood warnings.



Heavy snowfall can bring everything to a standstill

If The Worst Should Happen



Flooding in York

Should you become caught up in a situation such as a severe weather event, it will make things easier to deal with if you have some kind of plan to follow. This could just be as simple as battening down the hatches to ride out a storm whilst remaining inside your home. But what if the power supply is cut off and communications fail, or rising flood water breaches the building leaving you and the other occupants stranded on the first floor or roof tops. This very situation was witnessed in the Cornish village of Boscastle back in 2004 when a flash flood devastated the village – destroying buildings and washing cars out to sea. Thankfully, nobody was killed, but many people had to be winched from their first floor windows and building rooftops by Royal Navy and RAF search and rescue Sea King helicopters.

This situation at Boscastle, just like many others turned into a fight for survival with the initial priority being to get away from the source of danger – take shelter or find higher ground, with the stranded people then signalling their distress at the earliest opportunity to the rescue services.

Any rescue or forced evacuation from a disaster area can happen reasonably quickly, but that also means you probably wouldn't have had any time to collect personal belongings and you could find yourself fleeing with nothing apart from the clothes that you stand up in. This is where your airsoft kit can be used. By keeping your loadout in a kit bag or ruck sack you will effectively have a prepping style 'bug out bag' that you can grab in an emergency. The size and weight of your kit bag is important – keep things small and light. There isn't going to be enough room for you, complete equipment marching order (CEMO) plus other people in a rescue boat if your street is being evacuated because of flooding. However, if you are sitting things out at home – even if needing to move up to the higher floors of your house to escape rising flood water, your entire load out will still be at your disposal.

How Your Airsoft Kit Can Be Used



Your airsoft loadout can have a use off the skirmish field

Power Cut



A candle could be your only source of light

In the case of a power cut, the following could be used from your kit:

- Headlamp
- Weapon Tac-light
- Cyalume
- Candle from survival kit

Emergency Signalling for Rescue



Smoke grenades can be used for signalling

Just like the flooding at Boscastle or the tragic fire in the Grenfell Tower in London, people need to signal to the rescue teams to let them know where to look. Here are a few ideas on what to use for attracting attention.

- Whistle from survival kit
- Torch
- Strobe light
- Heliograph / Mirror (in sunlight)
- Survival bag (because it is bright orange in colour)

- Hi vis tabard
- Smoke grenade (if in daylight and as a last resort). Use outdoors because of fire risk

Shelter and Warmth

- Basha / tarp – but you will probably already be under cover inside a building. The basha could be used to cover broken windows to keep the wind and rain out
- Warm and dry clothing including hat and gloves
- Sleeping bag and foam roll mat
- Waterproof jacket and trousers
- Survival bag / space blanket

Medical and Personal Admin

Health and personal hygiene will still need to be maintained to reduce the risk of disease and infection. Water contaminated with sewage can cause diarrhoea and vomiting.

- First aid kit – include any prescribed medications just in case you are evacuated to a rest centre
- Small wash kit
- Wet wipes (cam cream removal wipes)
- Hand sanitiser

Water



Fill up large containers with clean water before the water supply is lost

It is possible that the water supply could be disrupted. Having a safe supply of drinking water is vital to avoid becoming dehydrated.

- Fill up the water bottles that you carry in your webbing before the mains water supply is cut off or contaminated
- Use large clean containers to store extra water for extended periods (boil this water before use)
- Keep a supply of bottled water available with your kit and spare rations
- Water filter / purification tablets – but do not drink flood water as it will be heavily contaminated with chemicals and sewage

Food and Cooking



Field rations will keep you going whilst waiting for normal life to resume

Panic buying could break out in the local supermarkets causing a depletion of stock, so keeping some rations stock piled with your kit should see you through the first few days. If the transportation network is disrupted because of the event, resupply of food to the supermarkets will take longer than usual – so allow for this when stocking up on field rations. Useful items that you may have in your load out could include;

- Ration packs
- Mess tin and mug
- Gas stove – Only use in well ventilated areas. Be aware of the fire risk and don't use camping stoves in confined spaces due to the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning
- Fire lighting items from a survival kit – for making a fire in houses that have a usable open fire place



A portable stove is a must, but don't use inside confined spaces

General Advice



Keep a small FM radio to hand pre-tuned in to a local radio station

Keep a small portable radio handy that is tuned in to the local BBC radio station for your area. Important information will be broadcast in times of severe weather or disaster to keep the public updated.

Keep all important documents such as home insurance, passports and birth certificates in a waterproof container and upstairs away from the risk of flooding. Turn off the gas, electric and

water supplies before your home becomes flooded – Do not touch electrical objects if you are standing in flood water. Avoid walking through flood water due to hidden dangers and health risks as the water will contain sewage. Because of this don't risk eating any food that has come into contact with it. There is also a risk of injury and drowning as you will not be able to see hazards that are underneath the water. Structures such as road bridges can be weakened by flood water which could result in the bridge becoming unsafe and in risk of collapse, so be warned.

Stay away from windows during storms and make sure any outside objects such as garden furniture are packed away before high winds arrive. Shelter inside a room that offers the most protection and have plans for a secondary place of safety should yours become structurally damaged and unsafe. It can be dangerous to venture outside in high winds so stay indoors until the storm has completely passed. When safe to go outside, be aware of any live power lines that have been brought down by the storm as there is a risk of electrocution. With any severe weather event, life in general can be disrupted – often for several days, so be prepared for this.

As winter looms here in the UK, there is always a chance of experiencing some form of severe weather – be it floods, gales or snow. But whatever the scenario your airsoft kit can be put to good use as an emergency grab bag with all of the essentials for getting you through it.