

Preparedness for Babies

By: ThePiedPiper

A perusal through the articles here in the Rubicon demonstrates the thought and care that most of us put into our preparations for the unexpected. We think long and hard about power sources and consider the advantages and disadvantages of generators and transfer switches, LP gas monsters versus small portables, solar versus wind. We evaluate various types of heating sources and compare wood stoves and debate whether pellets are worth the bags they come in. We compare cyalume light sticks and oil lamps, portable propane lamps and LED flashlights. So much detail. But if you have a baby in your home, are you giving as much thought to preparedness for your baby's needs should an emergency arise?

Two years ago, after Hurricane Isabel came a'visiting, I came face to face with this issue. I don't have any kids. I never had to deal with this issue. But some friends of mine did. And they were in a real bind.

Let's call them Jim and Joan. Jim and Joan were married a little over 2 years before Isabel. When the storm hit, they had a one-year-old and a 4-month-old. Both Jim and Joan are highly educated. Joan is a psychiatrist. Jim holds a master's degree with computer specialties. They live and work in the Virginia suburbs of the Washington, DC area. And Hurricane Isabel left them without power for about 5 days-with two babies. To make matters worse, in the Washington area, there was nothing left on the shelves in the stores in their area in the way of baby items. And Jim and Joan were rapidly running out of supplies.

As a note here, I want to say that I was really surprised. Jim is an old friend of mine-he's inventive and can make just about anything he needs. He's had to listen to me about preparedness for years so I had assumed I'd successfully drilled into his head an instinctive preparedness commitment. But he and his wife want the very best for their babies so they prepared their one-year-old's food daily from fresh vegetables. Food preparation wasn't an issue for the newborn when Isabel dropped in on us. Diapers, however, WERE an issue for little newborn. Those little essentials were disappearing fast, and there were none to be had in any of the stores in their area.

I talked to my friends after the storm, and got a list of their needs. They were overly modest in their requests-they asked for a package of diapers (40 to a package), 6 jars of baby food, and a bag of ice. They said they had sufficient emergency lights. I live an hour and a half southwest of my friends, in the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. We have a beautiful Wal-Mart superstore here and, though we had had a run on the store prior to the storm, and had several thousand homes without power in our area after the storm, the store was being restocked and most people did not have excessive emergency needs post-storm.

Off I went to the local Wal-Mart. I bought two 40-diaper packages, over 20 jars of food, and 5 bags of ice, along with two 5-day coolers. I brought this to my friends and lectured them on maintaining a two-month supply of baby food in the house at all times.

But most people won't do that. Why? I think there are several reasons. For one thing, many people have never gone through a serious emergency before. For those who have never lived through a disaster, they may not have bothered to give it much thought. Even had they given it some thought, would they have known where to start? Most people think of disaster preparedness in terms of bread, milk, batteries, flashlights, and a few extras.

Second, it's like many preparation-related things. People think it won't happen to them. During the power outage, Jim and Joan remained in denial, thinking the power would be restored imminently. Day after day, they expected the lights (and their blender) to come back on at any minute). No one realized that whole substations were being rebuilt in the aftermath of Isabel. And that was taking far more time than anyone ever dreamed-or dreaded-would be required. This insidious misplaced confidence in the "system" is what most of us here in the Rubicon have rejected. That's why we're here. We understand that the government and the utilities just can't provide for the needs of everyone in an emergency. It's impossible.

Third, some people just don't want to commit valuable space to storing items for an emergency. Space is at a premium and everyone wants it for immediate uses.

My response to all these is: if it's just you, knock yourself out. But when babies are involved, you don't have options. You have to have backup. You don't have the luxury of hoping and wishing and praying that it doesn't happen to you or that the government takes care of you or that the local utility company gets it right. And you can always find a corner somewhere to store some basics for the baby if you decided to bring that baby into the world. Because if you don't have backup power and can't make food for your baby, you can't feed that baby.

I took this problem to several friends of mine who have babies. We all discussed this and came up with the following rules of thumb.

First, get yourself enough jars of food to feed your baby for a month. Rotate the food on the shelves as you use it, to ensure that the food is fresh.

If you want to puree food, great. Do that. Also make extra, put it in ice cube trays and freeze it. Pop the ice cubes out and drop them into baggies. That way, you have frozen pureed food for your baby. You know exactly what's in it. You can control not only the contents but you can ensure that you have exactly what your baby likes to eat. You can control the texture too. In addition, you can store lots and lots of food, and whenever you need a meal, just pull a cube or two out of the freezer and put it in the microwave. Presto! It's convenient, healthy, and you're sticking to your agenda. It also affords you the additional advantage that, in the event of a power outage, it acts as additional ice in the freezer to help keep other items cold longer. A full freezer will keep things frozen longer, without power, than a half-full freezer.

Always be thinking about where your baby is in the food continuum. Is your baby about to transition to a new level? If so, you will want to start preparing (or adding to the jar stocks) the chunkier consistencies. If you have more than one baby, keep in mind that the shelf life on the baby food in jars is generally long enough that you can buy emergency supplies for a one-year-old but ultimately feed it, a year later, to the next baby when he turns one.

Keep lots of the baby/toddler type crackers on hand. They keep a long time. Babies love them. And the kids love them long after they've technically moved on to older things.

Babies are helpless. They count on their parents for everything. Preparing for the worst is particularly essential for babies, as they require certain items that you can't improvise. So think it through and prepare accordingly.