

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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## Preparing for Disaster, The New York Way

'Preppers in New York are very different from preppers in the suburbs or rural areas,' one expert says



Anna Bounds, an urban policy expert and professor of sociology at Queens College, next to her prepper cabinet at her Greenwich Village home on Oct. 19. PHOTO: KHOLOOD EID FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



By

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Anna Bounds knows she doesn't fit the doomsday prepper stereotype—or “living in the woods with 50 million guns,” as she puts it.

When she greeted me last week in her Greenwich Village apartment, she was sporting a stylish wrap dress and shampoo commercial hair. She doesn't own a rifle, an Upstate bunker, or even a cache of freeze-dried entrees. Her “bug-out bag”—packed for a fast break from the city—includes comforts like toilet paper, a headband, and a pouch of pad Thai.



Anna Bounds's prepper cabinet at her home. PHOTO: KHOLOOD EID FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

“Preppers in New York are very different from preppers in the suburbs or rural areas,” she says.

She would know. The associate professor of sociology at Queens College has been studying the local prepper scene and is publishing a book on the topic, “Bugging Out or Hunkering Down?: Prepping for New York’s Apocalypse.”

The main differences are obvious. Most New Yorkers don’t have space to store their skis, much less a year’s supply of canned goods. Only the super rich, meanwhile, can afford to create a bunker in the city.

Local preppers, for that reason, focus their efforts on planning their escape—often by foot, bicycle or inflatable raft. Most of us lack cars, after all, and even if we could drive, imagine the wait at the Holland Tunnel!

Like many local preppers, Ms. Bounds caught the bug after superstorm Sandy, when the power in her 15th-floor apartment went out for four days. She and her husband had little in the way of food, water or even flashlights at the ready.

In 2013, she attended her first meeting of the NYC Preppers Network, a band of 400-odd survivalists led by New York City firefighter Jason Charles. At her first meeting, she learned to make toothpaste and laundry detergent.

She’s since joined fellow members on rural weekends living out of a backpack, participated in bug-out bag contests, and attended lectures on cheerful topics such as “How to Prepare for a Nuclear Disaster.”

“It’s about taking responsibility for yourself and your family,” she says.

It was only after visiting Ms. Bounds that I started to consider prepping myself. Until now, my approach has been to do nothing. Which makes me super typical.

Aton Edwards, a Brooklyn-based prepping consultant and executive director of the International Preparedness Network, says most New Yorkers give little thought to readiness.

“It’s a stubbornness. We consider ourselves to be so tough that we don’t need to worry,” he says.

Which is crazy! If a big disaster hits the city, he notes, there’s no way the government can assist eight million residents speaking different languages.

In the event of an evacuation, New Yorkers should be prepared with a military backpack packed with a waterproof flashlight, multitool and first-aid kit along with food and supplies for outdoor living, he says.

In a pandemic or nuclear attack, meanwhile, the best bet is to hunker down. Mr. Edwards advises stocking a two-week supply of food and water.

Such preparations would free first responders to help folks who really need assistance—the children, the sick and the elderly.

“Get it over with!” he says. “Once you get it out of the way, you never need to think about it again.”

Of course, deciding what to buy is a confusing business. For advice, I tried prepper shopping site Ready To Go Survival. It’s one of many, many, many such stores online, but it’s founded by New York natives. Its consultants offer custom “survival packages” based on your ZIP Code, budget and darkest fears, ranging from riots and earthquakes to nuclear disaster.

And interest is peaking again. “We see huge spikes in sales during hurricane season and other natural disasters, but also news coverage like North Korea,” says co-founder Fabian Illanes.

For New Yorkers, Ready To Go always recommends a survival axe for opening fire hydrants, and a waterBOB, which turns your bathtub into a 100-gallon tank, says Mr. Illanes.

My personalized shopping list was created by Preparedness Specialist Brad “Bradzilla” Miller, a former New York City emergency medical technician. He suggested a 69-item bug-out bag complete with a radio, bolt cutters, food bars, survival knife, laminated local map and bear mace.

He added a gas mask kit and an every-day-carry kit for commuting emergencies, “As it’s the most likely scenario for someone living in NYC.”

He also recommended a dog survival kit for Minnie, my Border Collie mix, a month of emergency rations, plus a water filtration/storage system and sanitation kit.

Cost for the whole shebang, payable by credit card or Bitcoin: \$2,527.03.

I’m not ready to take the full prepper plunge, but am leaning toward the minimum recommended by Mr. Edwards. This would, he suggests, be a very New York thing to do.

“I don’t trust the system, I trust me,” he says. “And if there’s anything New Yorkers relate to, it’s that.”

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