

Stockpiling emergency rations?

Don't forget those with special requirements

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One of the Internet lists on which I participate opened a discussion on "emergency food supplies."

My initial reaction was "Why?" How often will anyone be trapped at work? I was considering things such as earthquakes, volcanoes, and the like. If a quake hits, it is unlikely that a person trapped in the rubble will be able to get to the stash, even if it is in the remains of a desk within inches of the victim.

Then, as I started to put this down, I thought about flooding caused by a broken dam, a storm of much greater severity than anticipated, and a hazmat event that trapped people inside - events that could trap people at work.

Still, how long would people be trapped? 8 to 16 hours?

I'm still not convinced that recommending a food cache for non-emergency organizations should be Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in my plans, but I was forced to think about it.

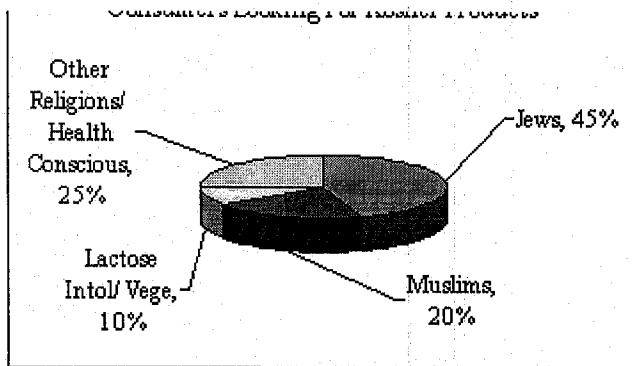
And, being an "off-the-wall" thinker with some interesting friends, I started thinking about the "got'cha's" that can pop up.

The most obvious are two:

- Special diets
- Freshness

Special diets

We have a friend who is allergic to gluten. Not just a "little" allergic, but literally deathly allergic. When she comes for dinner, her food has to be prepared on wax paper or foil - it can't touch the counter. If the food is cooked, it has to be cooked in a thoroughly scrubbed utensil before any other foods which may contain gluten are prepared.



Since we "keep kosher" anyway, the friend's requirements are fairly easily accommodated; but it is "kosher with a vengeance."

Compliments Kof-K

http://www.kof-k.com/the_kosher_market_industrial.htm

We have another pal who has a dog without which she never leaves home. She goes to work, the dog goes with her. She goes to dinner, the dog goes with her.

Still another person on our list is a vegetarian. She could eat other foods, but she won't.

The person who eats kosher food strictly for religious reasons is permitted to eat non-kosher food in order non-kosher food in order to survive. That doesn't mean that if I get a hunger pang 5 minutes after I leave the house I can stop at the local hamburger joint for a bacon cheeseburger and shake, but it does mean that if death is at the door, I may eat a minimum amount of whatever is available to sustain life. (*If you are Jewish, I will add the customary caveat: "Consult your local rabbi."*)

But our friend with the gluten allergy - different story.

What about the person with the guide dog? Who has responsibility to make certain the animal has more than table scraps - assuming there will be "table scraps."

The bottom line to all this is that if an organization is going to provision food for an emergency, it must consider all diets. Kosher is pretty common, and the nice thing about kosher is that everyone can eat it. They may start singing songs from *Fiddler on the Roof*, but as far as I know, there are no other side effects.

But what about the gluten-free diet? Are there long-storage any foods that are gluten-free? (I really don't know.) Veggies, perhaps, but the preservation method may defeat the purpose.

Actually, veggies and dried fruit might be the answer to most diet concerns, providing gluten and dairy and nut and egg and - what else - allergies are taken into consideration.

Freshness

Freshness is the other concern.

Granted, when you are thirsty - really thirsty - you will drink stale water. It may taste nasty, but it keeps you hydrated.

Foods requiring refrigeration are off the list; power - if there is any - will be rationed for critical functions such as emergency lighting. Likewise foods requiring stoves or microwaves to cook: no power and danger of explosion.

Even canned foods and military rations have shelf-lives, but in the end, they need to be retired. (Emergency exercise dinner?)

Part of every good Business Continuity plan includes "maintenance" and replacing the pantry's contents should be included. This might even work as a check to see that the plan is reviewed and that the larder is restocked.

A former rescue worker tells of having drills and meetings followed by post-event snacking that ate up the reserves and forced replenishment. Course the diet was saltines and peanut butter - healthy, but for anyone but a 6-year-old, boring. On the other hand, we are talking emergency rations, not dinner at the Savoy.

A casual survey of several rations vendors (the list of vendors is provided elsewhere with this article) turns up shelf-lives from two and three years to five years. I confess I have **no** experience eating meals that have been 5 years on any shelf.



One thing did become clear in my limited research: "MRE's" are a long way from the (in)famous C and K rations of yesteryear. In fact, some vendors - such as La Briute Meals - have expanded the emergency meal idea to almost complete dinners - the diner supplies the drink.

Heat 'n' eat

Some meals include a self-heating unit. But there are safety issues with these provisions. Three concerns about self-heating meals are put to rest by Abe Halberstam, of Labriute Meals.

Accidental activation

The meals are heated by a chemical reaction triggered by a water and sodium solution. The chemicals and the trigger solution are separately packaged in "a very strong poly" container. This container, in turn, is packed in a fairly robust box. Ordered in bulk, the box is shipped within a strong shipping container.

Halberstam said that under normal circumstances, there was very little chance that the chemical reaction would be set off by things falling on the shipping container.

But even if a chemical reaction was started, the heat generated by the package would not injure anyone. "There would be some steam and users are expected to use reasonable care when handling" the food packages, but the potential for injury due to an accidental chemical reaction is almost nit.

Hazardous environment

The heating process is so safe, Habersham said, that it "can be used in an explosive environment." There is no open flame to set off and explosion.

Danger to people, furniture while "cooking"

Although a person might be slightly burned if common sense precautions are ignored, danger is minimal.

The meal, according to Halberstam, is packaged in a foam tray which allows it to be handled and at the same time protects any furniture on which the meat is place while being heated.

On the other hand

Mary Ann Jackson, of My Own Meals, a purveyor of MREs to the U.S. military and of vendor of emergency meals to the commercial market, thinks there still are risks. The risks Ms. Jackson sees significant are enough that her company sells its self-contained heater product only to the military and then only with warnings and proper use instructions. My Own Meals' commercial product must be heated in a microwave, boiling water, or a vertical steamer.

Ms. Jackson said that due to a heater design change, the Labriute Meals product will not "spontaneously combust into flames, like MRE heaters do when there is moisture in the air and it gets into the bag." On the other hand, she contends that the competitor's product "gives off hydrogen gas when the salt water packet is added to the (heater) pad." That would preclude the product from use in a closed environment.

Eat it cold

Both My Own Meals and Labriute Meals are pre-cooked and can be eaten cold. Both vendors agree that the meals are more satisfying hot than cold, but when there is no option . . .

At home on the road

Although I have yet to include emergency supplies in a Business Continuity plan, I regularly consider them for myself - at the house and on the road. Notice the word is "supplies," not "rations." This opens a larger shopping bag.

At the house emergency supplies include about a week's supply of canned goods, most of which can be eaten without additional preparation. I have a small propane stove and several mini-bottles of fuel for it. Dry cereal - various flakes mostly - and dry fruit - led by individual packages of raisins - are well represented on the shelves. Cans of tuna, sardines, and salmon line the shelves, all of which open with a "pop top" or with a hand-crank can opener.

Candles we buy in bulk; the only thing I need to remember is to keep matches or lighter handy. (One of the disadvantages of being a non-smoker.) I don't store extra water unless a severe storm is anticipated.

On the road, I schlep along the afore-mentioned goodies in appropriate quantities, but I also include a bottle or two of water, a can of Sterno (heat and cooking fuel), blankets, pillows, and first aid supplies.

Given the roads I normally travel (Interstates and major "U.S." highways) there is minimal chance that I ever will be trapped for more than a few hours in the Explorer.

Final thought

One last thought, a topic for another day, is waste disposal.

Not only the wrappers and one-time cutlery, but human waste as well.

We are, after, simple "I/O" devices - what goes in must come out.

If we are planning on being trapped in a building for an extended period when we may not have working "facilities," it seems reasonable to consider alternative disposal methods.

But this is a subject for another article and another time.

Emergency rations (MRE) vendors - a sampling

The following were found on the Internet using either <http://dogpile.com/> or <http://www.google.com/> are listed alphabetically. Appearance here does not constitute an endorsement.

21st Century Food Storage - <http://www.storablefoods.com/>

B&A Products - <http://www.baproducts.com/emerprenp.htm>

BePrepared.com -

http://eeivdnew.securesites.com/store/merchant.mv?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=BP&Category_Code=FO

Chef2Chef - <http://chef2chef.com/cool/data/vmre.htm> (*Vegetarian*)

Emergency Preparedness Center - http://www.areyouprepared.com/camping_food.html

First-Aid Product.com - <http://www.first-aid-product.com/industrial/emergency-food-rations.htm>

Happy Hovel - <http://www.happyhovel.com/>

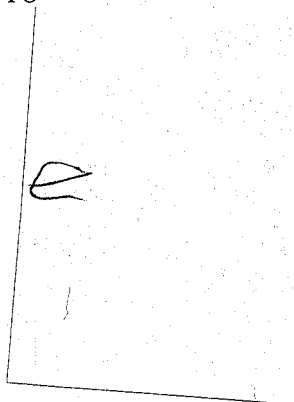
La Briute Meals - <http://www.labriutemeals.com/> (*Kof-K certified kosher*)

Long Life Food Depot - <http://www.longlifefood.com/>

My Own Meals - <http://www.myownmeals.com/> (*Orthodox Kashruth Supervision-certified kosher*)

ReadyFoods - http://readyfoods.com/food_products/foodproducts.php (*Organic, Vegetarian*)

Sam Andy - <http://www.samandy.com/products.html>



SCS Limited - <http://www.scs-mall.com/store/default.asp?showdept=43>

StrikeForce - <http://www.strikeforcesupplies.co.uk/20.shtml> (*MREs, Vegetarian MREs - UK*)

Survivor Industries, Inc. - <http://www.survivorind.com/> (*Kof-K certified kosher*)

General information

Defense Logistics Agency - <http://www.dscp.dla.mil/subs/rations/meals/vmres.htm>

FEMA - <http://www.fema.gov/library/emfdwtr.shtm>

Soille, San Diego Hebrew Day School - <http://www.hebrewday.org/earthquake.html>

University of Georgia - <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/pubs/current/FDNS-E-34-CS.html>

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