

OPSEC Before and After a Major Emergency

by [John Rourke](#)

Sure, you're ready for the "big day" when everything goes to hell, and you have to fight to survive. You've stocked up on food, water, weapons and ammo...and you've got one or more places to go to if you have to bug out. But are you sure no one else is planning on using YOUR supplies? Has anyone taken notice to the location of your stockpiles...and how much you're stockpiling?

If you are practicing OPSEC, your chances of having someone else take your supplies, and maybe your life, is greatly reduced.

OPSEC – Operations Security is a very important part of protecting the safety of you and your family before and after a major emergency. The most important part of practicing OPSEC is blending in...don't draw attention to yourself.

In this article we will take a deep dive on OPSEC for preppers, providing both the 'how' and the 'why' for keeping your private dealings under wraps so that you won't be dealing with additional problems come the fateful day disaster strikes.

What is OPSEC Exactly?

Let's go through the OPSEC process before and after a major disaster.

1. Identify Critical Information – In this case, critical information is the fact that you're stocking up supplies, and where you're stocking up.
2. Analysis of Threats – The primary threat is that others will want your supplies, and they most likely won't be interested in a fair trade, possibly taking the supplies by force.
3. Analysis of Vulnerabilities – What could reveal critical information? How could someone find out what you're stocking up, and where?
4. Assessment of Risk – How likely is it that someone finds and takes your supplies?

5. Apply appropriate OPSEC Measures – Reduce or eliminate risk through careful planning by addressing known vulnerabilities

That all sounds great, but why is OPSEC important for us preppers?

The Importance of OPSEC to Preppers

OPSEC is vital for everyone, not just door-kicking, snake-eating military operators. Also, implementing OPSEC should not just be the province of mil-sim larpers. OPSEC is predominantly tightly controlling what information you allow out into the world about your activities, comings, goings and intentions, or at least controlling it as tightly as you can.

What you do is your business, no one else's, and especially not the business of strangers. As rough as it is to contemplate, strangers, and even some people you think you know, do not have your best interests at heart when the chips are down or when it is their backs up against a wall.

As it turns out, what these people know about you may hurt you. If you are able to remain an enigma to them, or even an entirely unknown quantity, you can head off a ton of potential trouble. And I'm talking about the kind of trouble that preppers can at least afford when things have already gone from bad to worse and heading for worst.

What kind of trouble? How about the kind of trouble that sees you become the victim of a smash-and-grab [home invasion](#)? How about the kind of trouble that has throngs of "acquaintances" and "buddies" show up when the sky is darkening, and all with wild eyes and outstretched, upturned palms?

How about the kind of trouble that sees you arrive at your [bug-out location](#) only to find it already settled by people waiting on you to get there with their supplies?

Or, even more chillingly, how about the kind of trouble that sees your location recorded on a map board as a red pin, a map board owned by another kind of

prepper, a prepper who is amoral, ruthless and entirely a devotee to the law of the jungle?

You and I have both heard these guys pop off before in life and in comment threads around the internet. The ones that joke, *"I don't have to be prepared, I know where I can get a whole bunch of stuff. I'm just going to take it from the previous owner, haha!"* I hate to break it to you, some of these people aren't joking, and many more are willing and able to do it, they just don't talk about it.

These people are out there, and they are just waiting for a delectable little morsel of information about you or others that they can turn to their advantage.

Loose Lips Sink Ships (and Bug Outs!)

Mark my words: The only secret is a self-keeping one. You have doubtlessly heard the old wartime admonishment that "loose lips sink ships". It is catchy, but it is also true. When one person with crucial information (or even information that they think is meaningless) talks about an operation it has a way of propagating.

One "trusted friend" tells their trusted friend who tells their trusted friend and pretty sure half the civilian population (consisting solely of trusted friends) knows about it... and that means your enemy knows about it!

Then, everybody wants to act shocked on the day when your ships get torpedoed and your trains bombed at the station. "Oh no, how could this have happened!?" Today, we would say it happened because someone tweeted! It sounds comedic, but it's true, and the outcome is anything but funny.

An offhand remark you make to a co-worker or associate could be the first thread in the rope woven to hang you.

Even discussing sensitive topics with people you nominally trust such as neighbors or distant relations could eventually find its way to the ears and intentions of people you would do best to avoid. Having an active online presence often compounds this issue.

It is no stretch to say that most folks today have some sort of online social media presence. Most mundane people are guilty of oversharing way, way too much about too many personal topics.

I like to think that the majority of preppers know better than to behave that way, and sharply curtail what they share on social media, but even seemingly innocent sharing of information can be turned against you. Posting pictures of an ongoing vacation, for instance, lets people know that you aren't at home.

Even folks who take pains to scrub and sanitize what information can be gleaned from their various posts can still get caught by persistent or intelligent threats who can put two and two together.

Posting regularly on prepper-centric disaster preparedness boards asking questions, giving feedback and so forth without any other personal information could still potentially be linked to you and a profile built around it and other posts when people start to connect the dots.

Preppers, like most good guys and good gals, commit a grave error by thinking that all bad guys are stupid dunderheads who can't do no right, even in their criminal enterprise.

Though many criminals are fools and pay the price, we aren't worried about the riff raff. You might be surprised to learn just how smart many of them are, and how good they are at their jobs. Any worth their salt will tell you that the worst sin you can commit is underestimating your opponent you have to avoid this mistake.

Examples of OPSEC in Action

So, how do we actually take these measures as part of our prepping plans? Let's start by analyzing before a major disaster.

Before a Major Disaster: Three example vulnerabilities

Threat: Someone else will want your supplies. This threat is applicable to all of the following vulnerabilities.

Vulnerability: A neighbor sees you carrying large amounts of canned goods/water/ammo into your house.

Assessment of Risk: Compromise of the fact that you are stockpiling supplies at home could lead to others seeking to take those supplies.

OPSEC Measures: Build your stockpile gradually...don't show up two days in a row with a pickup filled with canned goods/water/etc, this will draw attention.

Vulnerability: You mention to a storage rental employee that you are storing food and other supplies in your storage unit.

Assessment of Risk: Compromise of the fact that you are stockpiling supplies could lead to others seeking to take those supplies.

OPSEC Measures: "Loose lips sink ships". The military follows a concept called "Need to know"...if someone doesn't need to know what you're doing, don't tell them.

Vulnerability: You have a 4×4 hooked up to a camper at all times in your back yard. Neighbors have noticed that you seem to keep this camper well stocked with food and water.

Assessment of Risk: Compromise of your bug out vehicle could result in that vehicle being stolen in an emergency before you are able to get to it.

OPSEC Measures: Don't be obvious about your bug out vehicle. Keep your supplies hidden inside, only transfer what's necessary to your vehicle when the time comes.

Look at your current preparedness actions; are you drawing attention to yourself? What can you do to reduce or eliminate others noticing your preparedness?

After a Major Disaster: Three example vulnerabilities

Threat: Someone else will want your supplies, vehicle, or shelter. This threat is applicable to all of the following vulnerabilities.

Vulnerability: Your location is the only one in the neighborhood with electricity (battery backup).

Assessment of Risk: Like moths to a candle, anyone who sees your lights are on when no one else has power will flock to your location, and try to take your supplies and/or shelter.

OPSEC Measures: If no one else has power and you do, turn off all the lights, the TV, everything...make it look like you have no power. Keep yourself from being a target of those who didn't prepare.

Vulnerability: Your generator creates a LOT of noise.

Assessment of Risk: Anyone who hears your generator will come to investigate. They may decide to try to take your supplies and/or your shelter.

OPSEC Measures: It may be a good idea not to run your generator unless you know others aren't in the area anymore. An even better idea is build an enclosure around your generator (don't attach it to your house, carbon monoxide can kill) to muffle the sound, so others don't know you still have power.

Vulnerability: Your bug out vehicle appears well maintained, well equipped, and is a desirable target for thieves.

Assessment of Risk: Your bug out vehicle may be your lifeline, and if anyone takes it from you, you may be stranded, possibly without supplies.

OPSEC Measures: Don't use a brand new F-350 with a brand new deluxe camper for your bug-out vehicle. Smaller is better. Consider an older vehicle with visible rust on the body, as well as possibly an older camper, if you must have a

camper. An excellent alternative may be an older mid-size van. But don't pick a vehicle that looks like it's been through hell and back, as that too will cause you to stand out in a crowd.

Best Practices for Maintaining OPSEC

Maintaining OPSEC can be tricky, even frustrating. When you are enthusiastic about prepping, spreading the good word and setting an example for other people to follow it is only natural that you would want to talk all about what you have going on.

But sadly, in these trying times **you can drastically improve your security situation all the way around by just shutting up about what you've got going on on the prepping front**, in every sector. ***Just stop talking about it.***

There are exceptions, of course, but it is exceptions that only serve to prove the rule. You should only discuss your plans, purchases, itinerary and inventory, along with your strengths and weaknesses, with people you trust- people you really, really trust.

It is easy to say you trust someone but an entirely different matter to determine if they are worthy of that level of trust. It is time to audit the people you have in your innermost circle.

Should you trust your nephew just because he is the child of one of your siblings, and blood kin to you? What if he has a known propensity for being a criminal turd, and hangs out with equally criminal friends?

Yeah, advertising the fact that you have tons of guns stashed in your home to him is probably a bad idea, as is blabbing about it to his parents, even though one of them is your brother or sister.

Unless, of course, you have a level of trust with your sibling that is ironclad and you know they will neither betray your trust or make a mistake that will see it slip accidentally.

And as sad as it is to contemplate, the same goes for your neighbors. Having good neighbors, genuinely good neighbors, that you can rely on and trust is a blessing, but because it is a blessing, that means it's rare. Letting all of your business out to a neighbor whom you trust based solely on proximity is a pretty lunatic idea in my book.

It doesn't make you shifty and it doesn't mean you don't care just because you keep your private dealings completely private. It might rankle, but sometimes you are completely justified to lie about it.

You only need to worry about being answerable and being your "true self" with people who both rate and deserve it. Doing so with strangers, especially strangers who are likely to hurt you, is insane.

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Conclusion

In summary, preparedness is about a lot more than how much supplies you can stock up, or even having a bug out plan. It's great to have a small stockpile of weapons to defend yourself with. It's even better if you never have to use them, thanks to good OPSEC practices.