

Natural Disasters, Financial Security and a Prayer for the Dying

March 11, 2011 - I hadn't planned on writing about natural disasters today, but the events of the day have changed that. An 8.9 magnitude earthquake in Japan and the ensuing tsunami that hit both Japan and the West Coast of the United States make this a good time to talk about economic survival in the wake of such a disaster. It is also a good time to take a moment to remember the poor people who died today, those who are trapped and awaiting rescue and those who are missing. My heart goes out to all of them. You don't have to think too long before you realize that what happened in Japan today could actually happen to any one of us, at any time. But surviving the actual disaster only gets you so far. You also need to have the ability to survive long term and that means having access to certain essentials. I know because I've gone through this sort of thing myself.

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Anyone who has been through a major natural disaster quickly learns some very hard lessons. The three biggest lessons that I learned were that you need to be prepared to fend for yourself, you can't count on help from anyone, and that those who haven't experienced the same level of loss that you have will be patient with you for only so long.

Over the years, ACCESS has done a series of articles and guides to surviving a natural disaster. Rather than rehashing all of this information here, I'm simply going to summarize them and provide links to the original stories.

In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina, we ran an article called Natural Disasters vs. Financial Security. The article walks through a number of issues such as how to deal with your credit card companies when you find yourself suddenly homeless. It also covers a variety of myths and facts so that you have an idea of what services will be made available and what kind of scam artists are likely to come out of the woodwork.

In 2007, we ran an article called Economic Survival in a Natural Disaster. This particular piece was written because of the bird flu scare at the time, but it has a lot of applicable information with regard to surviving the first few days after a disaster when there may be no government services available to you.

Also in 2007, we published Losing Your Home in a Natural Disaster - How to Protect Your Finances. That article dealt specifically with interactions with your insurance company after you become the victim of a natural disaster.

Finally, in 2008 Denise Richardson and I interviewed Glenn Nahmias, a public adjuster with Metropolitan Adjustment Bureau. That interview, titled Total Loss – Dealing with the Loss of a Home or Business in a Natural Disaster is available for your listening pleasure. It specifically addresses the reasons people may choose to hire a public adjuster as their representative after becoming a natural disaster victim. The fact of the matter is that you don't have to accept the first settlement offer made by your insurance company and public adjusters can often negotiate a much better settlement

than you can negotiate on your own.

The thing to remember is that those who plan for the worst are often in much better shape when a natural disaster strikes than those who just believe that the government will be there to help them. In large disasters, there is a very good chance that it will take several days for the government to get to you. The bottom line is that if you don't have a plan, you may not survive economically or physically. It is not a matter of "if" you will ever experience a natural disaster. In all likelihood it is just a matter of "when" and how bad it will be.

by Jim Malmberg

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