

Derecho charges across Iowa – Were We Prepared Enough?



(Published 8/19/2020 after one of the most devastating storms to hit Iowa)

One thing this past week has taught me is you need to be prepared – for anything.

Monday (August 10th, 2020) was a normal day until it wasn't. I wasn't prepared for [110 mph winds](#) whisking across the state, though we were given some warning, and I quickly brought in my tomato pots and battened down the hatches, taking everything that looked like a projectile into the garage.

I no more than ran upstairs to finish saving open files for the last time ([Channel 9 SAID I had 10 more minutes!](#)) when the power went out. The wind hadn't even started yet – but within an instant, all hell broke loose.

Winds totaling [90 to 112 mph](#) charged over the Iowa landscape, twisting trees, power lines, and buildings. My granddaughter and I decided to venture to the basement during the storm so if a tree did fall on the house, it'd have a couple of floors to go through before it got to us.

All we could do is sit and watch the wind blow and the trees twist.

The storm lasted at least 45 minutes and kept raging and charging – twisting and twisting. We could hear the trees snap as the wind tore into them.

And then it was gone – an eerie silence.

[10 million acres of Iowa crops leveled](#) to be left unharvested this fall. Hundreds of thousands of Iowans left without power. Buildings decimated. It now looks like it will take weeks - years to restore some areas. Gas and ice were very difficult to find because of no power or supply outages. Freezers melted leaving food uneatable after 48 hours of no power. No cell phone because the towers crumbled, no electricity, no VOIP phones, and no internet.

During this storm, I was finishing up on a counteroffer and trying to get it sent to the buyer's agent. There was no way I could even contact anyone from my house, so after the winds died down I ventured out to find some sort of cell signal. I got as far as our cross-street half a block away and saw a tree had fallen across the road, blocking anyway out of our division. But that wasn't the worst of it, trees, limbs, and lines all twisted on the ground. The leaves looked like a lawnmower chopped them and blanketed the ground – the streets were a carpet of shredded leaves and limbs.

I was able to get enough of a signal and found out the agent was in the same situation as I was, and we would just have to sit tight.

With no outside access, I had no idea to what extent the damage was to the area or how widespread.

Bits of news sprinkled through our AM radio, but even with that the powerful AM stations in Cedar Rapids were completely off the air until late evening.

The next morning, we heard the storm charged across several states, starting in Nebraska/South Dakota and ending in Illinois, lasting 1000 miles and 14 hours. Crops were lost, buildings damaged, and power out to hundreds of thousands in the area with a forecast of power to be restored within days – [5 days I heard someone say](#) – as I was writing this, it was day three. (update: power went on late on day 5)

Devastating ... I thought I wasn't prepared for what was to follow after the storm, but after years of storing water, installing a generator, and living my youth on a farm, I actually was more prepared than I had thought. It also helped to be married to a "Boy Scout".

We learned there were a few things we need to improve on, but what could you do now to be prepared for the next disaster?

- Have a large water supply. If you're living in an area with a well or in an Association with a private well, the well pump is powered by electricity. No electricity, no water. That means no flushing of toilets, no drinking water, no water to do dishes (if you're lucky enough to have a gas range), and no water to wipe off.
 - If you have stored water from your tap for any period of time, boil it before drinking. It may look clean, but you never know.
 - Have a plastic wash basin on hand. This comes in handy to wash dishes, hair, and take a sponge bath. After several days without air conditioning, it feels wonderful just to wash the hair and rinse off. (dry shampoo is not the same)
- Purchase a [generator](#) and make accommodations to have it hooked into your breaker box. If you can't do that, a generator has plug-ins to run extension cords. **[DO NOT RUN A GENERATOR INDOORS](#)** – including your garage!! It emits carbon monoxide and you can die.
 - Stock up on several empty gas cans and at least have 5 gallons on hand. You may want to switch this out with fresher gas periodically so you're not filling your generator with old gas.
- Have cash on hand. Not large bills, but several denominations under a twenty.
- If you do not have or cannot use a generator, have a supply of battery packs to charge your phone. Though without cell service, it's a moot point, but you never know when it'll get back up. Also, make sure you have a car charger for your phone – that is a godsend.
- **FLASHLIGHTS!! DO NOT USE CANDLES!!** I heard there were several fires in the [Cedar Rapids area](#) because the residents were using open flames to get light. Battery-operated lantern flashlights are very hands-free. There are also spotlight-like flashlights that sit on a counter. Some companies like [DeWalt](#) make some that have battery packs to power them. These do last a long time, but you do have to remember to keep the spare charged up. Headlamps are also very handy and inexpensive.
- Have a supply of canned food and a manual can opener. If you want to really get rugged, have some [k-rations](#) on hand. Just add a little water, and presto, you have lasagna.
- If you have a freezer and not enough coolers to put all the food in to keep frozen, get bags of ice and place the bags in the freezer to keep the food cold and hopefully frozen. It may take a lot of ice and diligent watching, but if you have hundreds of \$ of food in your freezer, it may be worth the extra diligence. **Tip:** Don't break the bags because you don't want to free the ice like you would a cooler. It'll get watery enough as it is.
- I don't work with a large company with an internet, but if you do you could go in to get any work done you can. I actually parked in our local REALTOR® Association parking lot and grabbed their Wi-Fi. I got enough taken care of at that time so I could get back home to take care of other things from the storm.
- I blog, so I write as I'm writing now. I will write several articles I can put on my blog when the internet service comes back up.
- **[Hire an OFF-SITE Virtual Expert!](#)**

How can a Virtual Expert Manager help when there is a disaster? Generally, if both the Expert and the agent are located in different areas of the country, they are not likely to be affected by the same disastrous event. Take, for instance, [Hurricane Sandy](#) back in 2012. I was working with several agents on the Outer Banks as well as Maryland. Hurricane Sandy did quite a number on the Outer

Banks and they were without service for quite some time. The agents may have been out of commission, but I kept their business going online. I was able to post community announcements on their social media pages to pass on the latest information to those who could receive it. I also was able to have everything up and still in place, so the agent didn't miss a beat when their systems were restored.

As important as it is to have [cloud storage](#) for your computer, it's good to have Expert Virtual Assistance when you need it.

If you're interested, use the form below or contact me at 319-331-0744. I'd love to discuss how I can ["Bild" a Better Business](#) for you.