

The Dystonaut

Issue #4 - September/October, 2011

Good night, Irene.

Hurricane Tropical Storm Irene came through late last month. All that happened here was a lot of rain and some moderate winds. The rest of the region, particularly the shoreline, was hit harder. A week later there are still places in this state without electrical grid power. As to be expected, those who were located on the shoreline or in a flood plain were hit the worst.

A lot of natural disaster preparedness is a matter of common sense. If you live on the seashore or at the bottom of a river valley, you can expect to get hit hard and you need to prepare accordingly. If you are responsible for critical communications infrastructure, make sure it is designed with disaster resiliency in mind and keep it properly maintained.

One local ham club's repeater down on the shoreline, used for ARES operations, had suffered a tower collapse during the storm, effectively taking the repeater off the area and putting a crimp in local ARES operations. That should be a lesson for those use other people's communications infrastructure (whether amateur radio or commercial systems). Unless you have first-hand knowledge of a system's resiliency, and are pretty certain that the system is rugged enough to make it through a serious disaster, don't rely on it for your communications needs. With that said, generally speaking amateur radio repeaters used for ARES/RACES operations are designed with disaster preparedness in mind and regularly maintained.

Lessons Learned Post-Storm

- Make sure your generator has a full fuel load before TSHTF.
- Make sure the batteries for all your equipment are fully charged.
- Test your communications equipment at least once a week if you are not using it regularly.
- The phone systems, both landline and wireless, are good for about a day, maybe two days max before their back-up batteries die. Unless the service provider gets another power source to the affected sites, expect these

communications systems to go dark.

- Plan to go for two weeks without commercial grid power, if yours goes down. Typically you can expect to get back on the electrical grid within a week so planning for two weeks gives you a good buffer.
- Amateur radio communications networks, particularly those participants who can run without the electrical grid will plug along. Your mileage may vary with repeaters depending on how conscientious the owner is with back-up power and whether or not the site becomes seriously damaged from the event. Think simplex.

On Radio Communications:

This is one of my favorite topics. I can, and often will, expound for hours on it. As many of you know, I am a ham radio operator. I was originally licensed as Novice class in 1984, and have kept up with the hobby ever since. One of my reasons for first getting licensed was the preparedness angle, and after getting the ticket I worked with my local ham club's ARES/RACES component for a few years.

Before I repeat the standard advice that all survivalists should get their ham license, let me use the FCC's own words as to what ham radio is all about. After you read them, you can then decide whether or not you want to go for the ticket.

§ 97.1 Basis and purpose.

The rules and regulations in this part are designed to provide an amateur radio service having a fundamental purpose as expressed in the following principles:

(a) Recognition and enhancement of the value of the amateur service to the public as a voluntary noncommercial communication service, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications.

(b) Continuation and extension of the amateur's proven ability to contribute to the advancement of the radio art.

(c) Encouragement and improvement of the amateur service through rules

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which provide for advancing skills in both the communication and technical phases of the art.

(d) Expansion of the existing reservoir within the amateur radio service of trained operators, technicians, and electronics experts.

(e) Continuation and extension of the amateur's unique ability to enhance international goodwill.

Now I've observed over the years that many survivalist types have serious issues with paragraphs "a" and "e". Paragraphs "b", "c", and "d" have to do with science and technology. Some survivalists have less issues with science and technology than they do with the international sociopolitical aspects of ham radio, except when their religion tells them that science is an atheist plot against their particular god. Regardless of all that, if you are not on board with what's said in § 97.1 of the FCC regs, then **don't bother with ham radio**. Instead of ham radio, go use CB, FRS, MURS, or even GMRS for your communications needs. Those services are designed specifically for short-to-medium range communications as stated in the FCC regulations.

(Mostly) License-Free Stuff

The FCC rules regarding Personal Radio Services are listed in § 95, and are as follows:

§ 95.1 The General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS).

(a) The GMRS is a land mobile radio service available to persons for short-distance two-way communications to facilitate the activities of licensees and their immediate family members. Each licensee manages a system consisting of one or more stations.

§ 95.401 (CB Rule 1) What are the Citizens Band Radio Services?

The Citizens Band Radio Services are:

(a) The Citizens Band (CB) Radio Service--a private, two-way, short-distance voice communications service for personal or business activities

of the general public. The CB Radio Service may also be used for voice paging.

(b) The Family Radio Service (FRS)--a private, two-way, very short-distance voice and data communications service for facilitating family and group activities. The rules for this service are contained in subpart B of this part.

(f) The Multi-Use Radio Service (MURS)--a private, two-way, short-distance voice or data communications service for personal or business activities of the general public. The rules for this service are contained in subpart J of this part.

Of these services, FRS, MURS, and CB require no FCC license. Actually to be specific they are "licensed by rule." GMRS requires a nominal fee for the 5-year license.

FRS and MURS are considered short-range portable radio services. FRS radios are pretty limited in range with their power and antenna limitations. MURS radios have a little more power and less antenna restrictions. Comparatively speaking, an MURS HT is in the same power, frequency, and range category as a 2-meter ham HT. With some elevation and a gain-type antenna, you'll get some real distance out of it.

CB is another short-range service, but is lower in frequency. With the right antennas, full-size ones for the frequency instead of shortened compromise ones, 20+ mile range is routine under most conditions. Many hams got their start in radio with CB and then graduated as they became more technical and wanted to expand their RF horizons.

GMRS is similar to the UHF ham and land-mobile bands. It shares some frequencies with FRS so there is interoperability with that service's users if needed, and allows for repeater operations. If you have a location with some elevation, "short-range" takes on a whole new meaning when you put up a repeater system.

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So of the four services, CB, MURS, and GMRS are the most viable of the non-ham radio services. GMRS requires nominal licensing, but is able to inter-communicate with FRS radios. In an urban or suburban environment, a GMRS repeater would be very useful if you could find a location with some height to install it. In rural and hilly areas, CB provides good range with a minimum of infrastructure. MURS radios generally provide the best range for portable communications in suburban and rural environments. In urban environments the choice would be GMRS.

Not to be left out of the mix are the Part 15 radios operating in the 900 MHz. frequency band. Examples are the Motorola DTR series of radios and the "Direct-Talk" feature on older Nextel phones. These have been proven to work very well in urban and indoor environments, and have the added bonus of not being able to be received by police scanners. They fall short in rural and hilly terrain, only offering about a quarter mile range. Reliability issues have also been reported with the cheaper brands of 900 Mhz. radios such as Tri-Square. Unless there was a particularly pressing reason to go this route, I'd recommend using something more common, although I think a new-model Motorola DTR650 with the removable antenna mated with a 900 MHz. Yagi antenna could prove to be a very interesting combination on a hilltop.

Amateur Radio

Amateur Radio is where it's at. All the license-free radio services combined don't equal the capability offered by the variety of frequencies and modes available to a ham radio operator. I consider a ham ticket to be one of those filters that separates the serious survivalists from the dilettantes and paranoid whiners.

There exist plenty of websites pertaining to amateur radio and getting your license. The first site you should visit is <http://www.arrl.org/>. This is the American Radio Relay League, aka ARRL. They are the national organization for amateur radio in the US. In Canada the organization would be the Radio Amateurs of Canada (RAC) at <http://www.rac.ca/>. Another popular ham site is <http://www.qrz.com/>.

Random Ham Radio Thoughts

Over the past couple years the US has been seeing a large number of inexpensive handheld rigs (HTs) coming in from China. Brand names include Weierwei, Woxun, Puxing, Tyt, and Baofeng. These HTs typically cost under \$100 and attract beginner-level hams looking for an inexpensive way to get on the air.

I bought one a couple years ago at a hamfest to try out. It's not built as ruggedly as one of the bigger name brands, but so far it has performed decently, and looked good when I checked it out on a service monitor. Looking at the internals I'd swear it was a knock-off of a certain Motorola HT. The battery packs are almost interchangeable. Since then it has been my everyday field & test radio. This is not due to being a superior unit in any sense, but because if it gets lost or broken I'm only out a cheap disposable \$60 radio. Would I recommend one as a first radio for a beginning ham with a long-term preparedness mindset? No, I wouldn't. A piece of equipment that is destined for the trash when it eventually breaks is not resilient nor long-term sustainable.

The existence of cheap new radios on the market has fortunately driven down the pieces of older late-model gear, especially stuff from the late 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, the new narrow-band requirements imposed on land mobile radio (LMR) users by the FCC has resulted in a large quantity of used commercial radio gear on the surplus market that is no longer certified for LMR use, but still usable for ham radio.

One of my first choices in an HT for ham use would be older front panel programmable LMR radios such as the Icom U-16, hamflashed GE MPA, Motorola JT-1000, or Bendix King PRC-127. These rugged radios don't require the radio interface box, programming cable, and computer software that is used to program frequencies into commercial LMR gear.

Another good first choice would be solid-state amateur radio gear from the late 1970s and 1980s. These rigs were made with common discrete sold-state components and thru-hole PCB construction. Schematics and parts are readily available for this gear, and they are easily worked on by the

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proficient hobbyist with some basic tools and test equipment.

Many hams start operating with FM on the two meter ham band (144-148 MHz.) While equipment is inexpensive and the band good for local and maybe regional communications, reliable longer-distance communications will in many cases require the use of a lower frequency band. For those of you with Technician class licenses, I would look into "weak signal" operation which uses SSB, CW and PC soundcard modes with horizontally polarized antennas on the VHF (and higher) ham bands. The six meter (50-54 MHz.) band is especially interesting in this regard, to the point where it is referred to as the "Magic Band".

However for consistently reliable long-range communications, hams turn to the HF (below 30 MHz.) bands, also known as the shortwave bands. When I return in the next issue, I will continue with some thoughts about those ham bands...

High Tech Gadgets For Becoming Informed: Part 2

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Last time we talked about the hardware you'd likely need to turn your desktop into the new Library of Alexandria in the midst of a new Dark Ages. By now, you've been dumpster diving, yard sale hopping and saving green stamps for bargains. Well, skip the green stamps. I keep forgetting this is 2011. However you've been doing it, you've been collecting computers, monitors, keypads, scanners, printers, mice(?) and speakers. You've been hooking up your hardware and have all your ports and cables in order. Now what? What software do you need to become a beacon of light through the latest collapse?

There is a plethora of file formats out there to wade through. You'll need to be able to read files in PDF, LIT, TXT, DOC and view JPG, BMP, GIF, PIX and watch AVI, WMV, FLV, MOV, M4a as well as write Word Perfect, Open Office, Works Word, Works Database, TXT and read or write HTML, XHTML, HTM documents, listen to MP3, MP4, WAV, then download in a myriad more formats like RAR,

ZIP and 7ZIP. On top of all of this, you will need to convert files into other formats for others to read, view, watch or listen. You will need programs that will help you to create and read, watch, or listen to all of these file formats.

As we are entering the world of software, let's begin with the operating system. As mentioned in my last article, I am using Windows XP with Service Pack 3 for my OS. There are superior operating systems that are open source. Open source allows you to view and make changes to the software's source code. Linux is such a system and versions can be downloaded online. This is highly advantageous as it allows you to debug any mistakes in the software and correct incompatibility issues with other programs. If you are into programming or writing your own code, open source programs are the way to go for you. You will be able to customize your operating system and programs to suit your own purposes. I have gone with the more mundane solution as I juggle work, business and running a homestead in the current depression. (Yeah, I said depression.) As I am unlikely to modify my system greatly, the closed source XP works just as well for me. However, I am looking into learning about Linux and writing programs in C in case it works to my advantage.

All I really need my operating system to do is to run programs properly on my computer when the day comes that the internet and maybe civilization no longer exists. At this point chatting, texting, message boards and forums, e mail and social networks will be a thing of the past. As will any downloading of music, voice, videos, books and any other form of instruction. After the internet goes down, those files may still instruct the survivor in whatever is necessary. While it is up to the individual to decide what course to take in the way of operating systems, Linux and open source code OS is more versatile allowing one to customize and write their own routines and programs. Those like myself with a Windows OS still have a great choice with an older DOS operating disk. Such can be burned onto CD or DVD and one can write one's own programs in basic. Customized programs can cover security and automated issues.

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Continuing with Windows OS, you will need to make use of the internet as long as it is still functioning. This is a no-brainer for me. My home is very remote and has no cable service for DSL, no WiFi, and not even cell phone service. That leaves me with dial up or satellite connection. Since initial costs for satellite connection runs approximately \$350, then \$50 per month (That's about 500 rounds of .308 ammo) I've opted to go with dial-up connection. That's much easier on the wallet. Simply hit up your local Wally-Mart for a free Netscape Connect disk, sign up on line and pay \$9.94 per month. Put the money you would have spent on high bandwidth and speedier connection into your food and ammo supply. As I mentioned in part 1, Dial-up serves my purposes just fine for the money. It is only deficient if you are video conferencing or downloading large files like movies and watching videos online.

Why make use of the internet? The information of course. Communication with others of like mind as well as friends and family can also be enhanced through the internet. I have downloaded literally hundreds of books in various formats on all manner of subjects related to survival from the internet. I have also ordered videos on like matters at very reasonable costs. Did I mention that most of what I download can be had for free? Beats a trip to the bookstore. Even used books will add to the cost of a survival library. If you take advantage of the internet now, you can enhance your library considerably without increasing your expenditure.

As long as you're on the internet, you may as well have a better and more private browser than the one Netscape provides. Mozilla Firefox works very well for me and there is a version of Firefox available for Linux. Mozilla Firefox can be downloaded for free and is easy to set to block cookies and delete browsing history. Overall, it is much more secure than Explorer.

Speaking of security, you will need protection while on the net. Unfortunately, there are always bad guys either looking to ruin someone's day or hack into someone's bank account and steal what is theirs. Anti-virus programs are key tools in helping to deter this problem from reaching you. Grisoft's AVI has been an excellent anti-

virus program in the past, but as more users have found this little gem it is becoming slower to get updates at a time of your own choosing and the company is not putting up any more mirror sites to handle the traffic. Grisoft AVI has a free version on the web and except for a couple of convenient features is on par with its premium version. You can download AVI's free version on the internet. As Grisoft began experiencing traffic problems, another company stood up in the gap to compete. Avast is an anti-virus program that will handle everything AVI will and updates more conveniently. Avast also has a free version that does just as well as the premium version. Download this free from the internet.

Spyware Blaster and Spyware Terminator are also two programs that can be downloaded freely on the web. Spyware Terminator is an efficient program which will block infected subroutines and programs from running on your computer saving your computer from a complete and total crash. Spyware Terminator also scans your computer and removes tracking programs and malicious spyware. Spyware blaster will block spyware and tracking programs from being loaded into your registry. These can be essential programs if you do a lot of searching and downloading on the net. As always scan your system with all of these programs weekly at the least.

Now that you have security, an operating system and browsers, you can search the web for pertinent information and download web pages. To edit those pages and link the documents together or even create web pages of your own an HTML editor will come in handy. Fortunately, this is incredibly easy. Merely use the Notepad program that comes with your operating system and save as an HTML file. HTML tutors are available on the web and as downloads. Notepad will allow you to create text (TXT) files and HTML files making Notepad too handy to be without.

Downloading or saving from your browser will get you all the web pages you could possibly want, but there are other documents and files that will convey much more information. As long as we have started by downloading and saving, let's continue with tools that will help us to download files and documents that will be helpful to

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us. A large help to us is torrents. The ability to download torrents will bring all kinds of files and documents to your fingertips and all for free. You will need another software program to download torrents. BitLord is the program I use for this. Yes, once again, BitLord can be downloaded for free on the web. Once installed, BitLord will download any torrent that interests you. To find torrents, you can google search a file you want or look on a site like isohunt.com. Files can be documents, music, voice or anything you might want to save. I will have to confess that BitLord has saved me a pretty penny in stocking stuffers at Christmas. I have downloaded albums and songs that I have burned onto CD disks and given them out as presents at Christmas, birthdays and other holidays. Many of these have been broadcasts and recordings from the freedom movement, serving a dual purpose.

Other programs to help you download will be available from your Mozilla Firefox browser's website. Orbit and Download Them All are excellent programs that will enhance your ability to download through the ability to pause and accelerate your downloads. These programs will handle all of your downloads with the exception of torrents. Many programs that you will download have been compressed to make the files smaller. You will need the appropriate programs to extract such files. Such programs will be 7ZIP and WINRAR. With these programs, both available for free by downloading online, you will be able to extract 7ZIP and RAR format files. Even though such files will be extracted into formats like PDF, LIT or TXT, you will not be able to read them without the program to extract them, so add 7ZIP and WINRAR or the open source equivalent to your computer.

In order to read, listen to or view your downloaded files some programs are necessary. You will most likely be downloading books on several subjects including survival, technology and your personal hobbies. There are several programs that you will need to read books in their various formats. For PDF format documents you will need Adobe Reader or Adobe Acrobat. If you are not creating or editing PDF documents you will not need Acrobat. Reader can be downloaded on the web for free. Since

I have created and edit PDF documents I work with Acrobat 6 a lot. As you can guess, I have found sources where I have obtained Acrobat for free. Acrobat usually costs in the \$500 range for the newest versions. If you have high speed connection or several days to download, you can employ this tool for no cost. If you do not have the time or connection you can download PDF995 for free and it's a smaller program. PDF documents are extremely prolific. As you are downloading documents you will find most of them are in PDF format, so make certain you at least have the free Adobe Reader.

Text formats also frequently turn up. Notepad will allow you to read these. Already covered, Notepad handles a couple of tasks quite well. Text files are small and easily uploaded and downloaded on the net, so you will find some great information in this format. On the subject of creating, editing and uploading/downloading formats, you will also find some very interesting information in formats created by individuals and shared online through torrents, shareware and on websites. You may opt to become one of those individuals yourself. Such formats will include Microsoft programs such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Works Word Processor, Corel documents and Open Office.

Open Office is a very handy program that offers versions for Microsoft OS and Linux OS. Open Office's group of programs offers every feature that Microsoft Works and Word do. In fact both the Microsoft groups and Open Office are excellent programs that will help you to easily create and edit documents, even in HTML, though I prefer Notepad to create HTML as Notepad allows me to directly use HTML command lines in order to place text and photos exactly where I want them. The Corel programs are excellent. I started creating documents with Corel Office and have not been disappointed. Corel is easy to use and gives you what you see. The problem with Corel is that it is not at all popular and you will find few documents in Corel's (SWX) format. Microsoft Word, however, is found everywhere. If you are going to load your computer with only one word processing and database management series of programs Microsoft Word would be the way to go as it is most popular. Bear in mind that no matter which series of programs

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you use for word processing and database, you can always use PDF995 or Adobe Acrobat to convert your documents into PDF format. This will allow you to share your documents with far more people.

Another format that has been catching on due to some very neat features is the LIT format. You will need Microsoft Reader for this. Again, Microsoft Reader can be downloaded for free on the web. Some really neat features of this program are its bookmarking and page turning abilities similar to Adobe Reader. Its look is very sharp, but its neatest feature is its talking book feature. The Microsoft Reader program uses an electronic voice reminiscent of Stephan Hawking. It reads the text and converts it to sound making the program extremely useful for those with impaired sight. It's also useful for the tired workingman at the end of the day. A lot of books and documents are available in the LIT format. Combine this with the program's features and you will see the advantage of installing Microsoft Reader on your computer.

The next medium you may want to focus on will be sound. Sound conveys a lot of information. When you speak, you are using sound to create language to either convey information or ask for information. Sound files store this information and allow you to access it whenever the need arises. The most prolific sound files today are MP3 format, though WAV and CDA formats are common as well. You will need a program to play these files on your computer. Most computers are loaded with Real Player and Windows Media Player. These two programs will actually take care of most of what you want to do with sound files. They will play MP3, WAV, M4a and play sound files from your CD or DVD drive. They also play video files in AVI, RM, RAM, SMI and WMV. More on videos later. Most of what you'll find in sound files will overwhelmingly be in MP3 format.

You will want the option of manipulating, recording and converting your sound files. You can accomplish this best with Audacity and Nero. Audacity uses the Lame plugin to convert file formats, while Nero converts some files and burns audio and video disks. These two programs should be all you need to handle sound files and create audio disks.

To create sound files, you will need a mic and its driver plus program. Audacity is an easy program to use for this purpose. Audacity and its plugins may be downloaded for free on the web. The price is right and the program offers great versatility allowing the user to create and edit sound files. After installing the program, attach your mic to a USB port. Your computer may find your mic's driver on the device or may download it from the internet. You might be required to install the driver via CD or DVD disk. Once you have the program, mic and driver, you can adjust the program's recording parameters to your liking and make your own sound files from lectures to bird calls to voice instructions.

If pictures are worth a thousand words, videos are worth an entire instruction booklet. Videos can not only explain instruction, they actually *show* the viewer how to create a project. The viewer sees the process as it happens, aiding his or her learning ability immensely.

As mentioned, Wndows Media Player and Real Player will allow you to view most video files. Files that these programs will play, (mp4, wmv, mpeg, etc.), may be stored by burning onto a disk without changing their formats. When it comes to creating DVD playable movies and video, however, you'll want to go a step further with Nero Burning Rom. Nero can also play audio and video files on your computer as well as burn them to disk in Compact Disk player format for audio files or DVD player formats for DVD and movie video disks. As long as you are building a library containing the soon to be forgotten knowledge of our time, you may as well include some video files and Real Player, Windows Media Player and Nero will help with that.

You might also consider producing your own video files. Certainly, you have some skills or hobbies others will find of value. These can be captured in video and stored on disk to share or uploaded to the internet. All you need is a camera and the appropriate software. There are very inexpensive video cameras on the market. Jazz video cameras cost in the 20 FRN range. They run on AAA batteries and come with software on a CD. It is easily loadable onto your computer and is highly popular with users making the Jazz most useful. Video files are quite large and

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uploading them to the internet on dial up all but impossible. Such files can always be shared via disk, however.

Networking with your computer need not be a thing of the past just because its the end of the world and the internet has been fried. There are a few methods of networking during TEOTWAWKI of which your community and maybe a few others could take advantage.

Of course there is the simplest form of data sharing. That is to print out files and hand deliver them yourself. Similarly, burning files to disk or, better yet, transferring to a thumb drive for an ally to utilize may fill your needs quite nicely.

A nifty little piece of equipment for your community network might be FM transmitters. These are basically 100 watt, micro-transmitters. They can be plugged into your computer and used to transmit data. They are especially useful for broadcasting audio transmissions. There are many available for 50 FRNs or under. Their broadcast range is about half a mile radius. I can cover my entire hometown with just one of these.

CB radio is another option for transmitting audio file. Superb for broadcasting your local bear report and getting the :20 on road closures, a CB's mic can be keyed down to transmit any file being played over your computer's speakers. This gives you greater range than that of FM microtransmitters.

Ham radio is where your computer will really become the next hub of a new world wide web. Through a very neat little technology known as packet radio your computer can transmit or receive data world wide in brief bursts easily replacing the internet during any crisis or should the kill switch option be put into play. Check out Green Bay Professional Packet Radio <http://www.gbppr.org/> for information on such a system.

Web sites useful to aquire documents, files, pages and/or videos and audios follows:

<http://www.library.nu/> contains books of all kinds, many of which are college text books.

<http://www.anvilfire.com/> is a site that is perused quite frequently by myself. It is

all things blacksmithing. It includes how-to instructionals and links to buy tools and supplies. For my homestead, this has been a wonderful resource.

<http://squall.sfsu.edu/crws/jetstream.html>

is a superb weather resource with many maps showing current and forecasted conditions.

<http://ramseyelectronics.com/> is a great place for electronic components.

<http://www.heirloomseeds.com/> is very important to survivalists everywhere. Even if you aren't gardening yet, buy some heirloom seeds for the future!

<http://www.booksshouldbefree.com/> has free audio book downloads.

<http://www.vnwg.com/> is Van Ness Water Gardens. This is an important source for aquaponics and/or aquaculture plants. Great for ordering aquaplants for the indoors or ponds. An extra boon for my homestead.

<http://jimsfish.webs.com/> has fish of many kinds for sale. Many of such are suitable for homestead aquaponics.

<http://radiationnetwork.com/> keeps tabs on background and any accumulating radiation around the country.

There are many more resources of course and you are sure to find them.

There you have it. These are the building blocks of your own, personal library of Alexandria when the collapse throws the rest of the world into a new dark age. Use this knowledge well. The civilization you rebuild may be your own.

Digital Version Available.

For those of you who've subscribed to the print version of **The Dystonaut**, there is also a digital version available for download. It is available in encrypted PDF format at the following website:

<http://www.sinister.com/ticom/dysto/>

The password for the files is "rhodes". Please feel free to download and share the PDFs on a limited basis with friends whom may be interested in the material. Please don't post them up to any public websites.