

Crisis Laundry Management

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Some days feel like crisis laundry management even without a big emergency. Every time our family experiences the flu or returns from a camping trip, my appreciation for a working washing machine is renewed.

What would you do if you did not have enough water to use your washing machine? What if water was available, but no electricity?

In this post, **we will review several alternative laundry solutions that you might want to consider using during a power outage or when your water supply is limited.**

Our children do not mind wearing the same clothes 24/7 and we can probably make it through a short-term crisis without worrying about laundry. But what if the crisis outlasts our clean wardrobe? How do we clean bedding? We would all smell horrible before too long.



The important consideration in a crisis is removing body fluids, sweat, odors and dirt, not stains. As with any preparedness options, there are inexpensive and expensive options. Explore your options and select the one that works best for you.

Old-Fashioned Tub Method

Grandma's method has been used successfully for hundreds of years. It is an old fashioned concept that still works. Use whatever containers are available and adapt her method to your circumstances.



- Sort clothes into lights and darks, similar fabrics, special handling, and level of dirt.
- Start with the cleanest clothes first, add one cup of bicarbonate of soda, or laundry ammonia. The water should feel slippery when you rub your fingers together.
- Use three large tubs. One for washing and two for rinsing. Place the tubs on a bench to save your back. This can be done with only one tub. Wash each load one by one, set them aside, then get fresh water and rinse each load one by one, then get more fresh water to rinse each load again. Three tubs is nicer because a wringer can be placed in between them.
- Initial wash is accomplished by pouring buckets of warm water into the first tub containing the washboard, Stand behind the board, lean over, and rub with an “up and down” motion working the dirtiest areas. The initial wash is a great time to use recycled water from hand washing or showering.
- Place the white clothes in a kettle of clean water for boiling. Pour soap over the clothes and fill with enough clean water to cover everything. Boil for 10-15 minutes, poking the clothes down in the soapy water from time to time.
- Fish out the clothes with a stick or tongs and put them into the first rinse water tub, then transfer into the second rinse tub and wring.
- Scrub colored clothes in the wash water heated by the soapy white load. Do not boil colored clothes as it will damage them.
- Hang clothes on the line to dry. Sun and wind may damage fabric.
- Remove clothes as soon as they are dry.



Non-Electric Washer Options

Portable non-electric hand washers are a nice solution for small loads of wash. These handy devices are great for use in recreational vehicles, while camping or even for apartment living, in addition to emergency preparedness.



Water for the washer can be heated in a solar shower bag or in a dark closed bucket placed in the sun.

Warm water will result in cleaner clothing. If water is scarce, consider using recycled water from hand washing or showers for the initial wash cycle.

Pressure Washers

[The Wonder Washer](#) or [Counter Top Washer](#) are types of pressure washers. They are about the size of a 20 pound propane tank. Maximum capacity is a little less than 5 pounds of laundry.

This method is much faster and easier than washing by hand. It uses only 2 quarts of water and 2 tablespoons of detergent. Use warm water when possible.

Once the water, soap and clothes are in the machine, tighten the gasket lid, and crank the handle for about 2 minutes. Pressure builds up in the machine which drives the soap and water into the clothing. Combine this with the agitation from hand spinning the machine and clean clothes result.

Dump out the dirty wash water and add clean water for the rinse. Crank the handle for about one minute, then wring and hang.

Plunger Washer

The plunger washer is a human powered portable clothes washing machine. The bucket and plunger method for clothes washing and is probably the most effective hand washing method after the pressure washer.

The design is simple. The bucket holds the water and a plunger is used to agitate the clothes. It uses very little water and requires no electricity.

A new, clean toilet plunger may be modified to work as a laundry plunger for doing laundry short term. Drill 8-12 large holes in the top of the rubber cup. The holes allow the water to flow freely and prevent the rubber cup on the plunger from buckling.

Any large container; bucket, bathtub, plastic tote or galvanized tub will do to hold the wash water. That is one of the things that makes this method so versatile. When using a bucket, you may want to cut a hole in the lid to accommodate the plunger. The lid will reduce splashing.

Dirty clothes, water and detergent are each placed in the container. To agitate the clothes, simply plunge up and down.

Commercial laundry washer plungers are designed with internal baffles to force water through the clothes to flush out dirt more effectively than the homemade version.

Spin Washer

The [Laundry POD](#) is a non-electric washing machine that resembles a salad spinner. The washer sells for a little less than a hundred dollars.

The spin washer cleans small loads and takes one gallon of water to wash a load. The water is drained out the bottom and clean water is added through the top to rinse.

This is a sweet device for underclothing and lighter clothes. It is not a good choice for larger heavy items such as adult sized jeans.

Sailor's Laundry Method

The Sailor's Washer uses a black garbage bag to wash the clothes. Apparently sailors would fill a black garbage bag with dirty clothes, water, and soap. The black bag took advantage of the sun to heat the water and the ship's movement agitated the wash.

We can see adapting this method a little by gently pressing on the bag to agitate the clothes. This might be a practical method for washing large items such as comforters, blankets or sleeping bags which will not fit in 5 gallon buckets to be washed.

Non-Electric Clothes Dryers

An old fashioned clothes line is an effective way to dry laundry. We like to refer to it as our "solar clothes dryer" to make it sound a little more exciting.

Stock a package of clothespins and a hundred feet or so of quality [clothesline](#) for your emergency stores. You can always create a temporary clothesline by stringing the line between a couple of trees or fence posts.



Be sure to include clothesline or [Paracord](#) in your survival kits for drying clothes in an evacuation scenario.

Clothesline (Solar Clothes Dryer)



All kinds of creative ideas for permanent clotheslines can be found online. They can be as beautiful and creative as your imagination and budget will allow.

As preppers, we prefer a solar clothes dryer that is a bit more sturdy than the versions available at the hardware store. We live in an area subject to a lot of wind. Cheap clotheslines are easily bent between the weight of the clothing and the stress caused by the wind.

We regularly hang sleeping bags to air out after camping, or large blankets to dry, so we built our own indestructible clothesline. It is quite convenient and gets used frequently. When our dryer goes out, it is only a slight inconvenience to step out the back door and hang the clothes on the line.

Strategically locate your clothesline near the door to your home to make it easier to haul laundry back and forth.

We designed our clothes line 5 1/2 feet tall to be the perfect height for me to hang the clothes. But alas, there was a flaw in our design. It is the perfect height for Jonathan to run into and an uncomfortable height for him to hang clothes on.



The supports for our clothesline are built from two pipes welded together, creating a T shape. The supports are spaced about 15 feet apart.

We welded rounded end caps to the exposed pipe ends to prevent wasps from nesting in them, and to make it less painful when my husband forgets it is there and walks into it.

We have attached 5 lines to optimize the space. Each line is attached to an eye bolt on one end and to a turn buckle on the other. The turn buckles are connected to the eye bolts also. The turn buckle allows easy snugging up of the lines as they stretch a bit over time.

A permanent clothes line is a great asset for everyday life as well as to handle life's laundry emergencies.

Retractable Clotheslines



If space is an issue, you may want to consider a [retractable clothes dryer](#) which can easily detached when not in use to save space and prevent clutter. Retractable clotheslines are designed specifically for indoors or outdoor use.

You can use an inexpensive single retractable clothesline, similar to the ones you see in hotels above the bathtub. You won't even notice that it is there until you need it. The one drawback is that it will not hold very many clothes.

Retractable clotheslines also come with multiple lines. The beauty is that you can stretch it across a room until the clothes are dry and then tuck it away.

Dryer Racks



Drying racks use a solid bar to hang the clothes on verses a clothesline. An accordion or retractable drying racks are just like they sound. The rack is a little collection of short bars that accordion out from the wall when in use. An article of clothing is hung over each bar until dry. Then the rack is pushed back against the wall to conserve space.

Free standing racks can dry a lot of clothes in one little spot. Many of them come with wheels to make moving them convenient.

Ceiling mount drying racks are similar to a closet rod that extends down from the ceiling. Clothes are placed on a hanger and hung on the rack until dry.

Tips for Drying Clothes Outdoors

Exposing the clothes to the Ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun may fade fabric, but it will also help disinfect the laundry. If you are drying cloth diapers, reusable toilet paper, kitchen rags, or anything which may have retained germs, leave them out on the line a little longer to allow the sun's disinfecting power to work.

Shake clothes and smooth wrinkles before hanging them out to dry. Turning dark clothes inside out will reduce the bleaching effect of the sun. Remove dry clothes from the line promptly.

Hang shirts from the bottom and pants from the waistband to reduce the evidence left by clothespins. Sheets and blankets work well hung over the line in half with just a few clothes pins to secure them.

Tips for Drying Clothes Indoors

Laundry can also be dried indoors. When drying clothes indoors be sure to increase the ventilation to promote drying and prevent moisture from building up.

Indoor drying racks come in a variety of shapes and sizes. They make drying convenient and take up little space. Clothes can be dried by simply hanging over the backs of chairs or doors in a pinch.

Ironing Out the Wrinkles



Clothes that are hung out to dry tend to be stiff and wrinkled. I am not a fan of ironing in everyday life, which means that there is no way that I am going to iron during a disaster. Clean clothes is the most that my family can hope for.

If perfectly pressed clothes are important to you, all you need is a wood stove and an

antique iron.

Conclusion

All things considered, I will take my working washer and dryer any day over the alternatives. I love throwing filthy clothes in the washer and taking them out an hour later smelling clean and fresh.

I recognize that I am spoiled and I am honored to be blessed with a washer and dryer that my great grandmother would have never imagined to be a possibility.

The fact is, the world we live in is unpredictable. Disaster strikes and you may find yourself living in an unfamiliar world where the rules have suddenly changed. No

power or running water changes everything. It is best to plan and prepare so you can enjoy the peace that comes with knowing you can survive any challenge that comes your way.

Take a moment to consider how you will clean laundry with a limited water supply or without power. A few simple tools tucked away now can simplify the process later and make it much more pleasant to be around each other.

Thanks for being part of the solution!

