



A Guide to Navigating a State of Martial Law

Quick Start (TL;DR)

- **Stay calm.** Don't argue with armed personnel. Keep hands visible.
- **Get facts, not rumors.** Confirm curfew hours, restricted zones, and evacuation routes from official sources (city/state sites, emergency alerts, NOAA/IPAWS, local radio).
- **Account for your people.** Execute your family/group plan: check-ins, rendezvous points, and roles.
- **Decide: shelter or leave.** If safe at home, lock down. If you must leave, do it before curfew and along approved routes.
- **Carry essentials + ID.** Have your go-bag with food, water, meds, cash, phone + battery, and government ID readily accessible.
- **Document, don't escalate.** If stopped: be respectful, answer basic questions, and note the time/place and badge numbers.

1. Understanding What Martial Law Means (Plain-English)

Martial law is the temporary imposition of **military rule over a civilian population**, typically during a major emergency, disaster, or civil unrest. It's an extraordinary measure where some or all civilian laws are suspended. Military or state forces temporarily take on public-order roles to restore stability when civilian authorities are overwhelmed.

You can expect:

- Curfews
- Checkpoints
- Movement restrictions
- Assembly limits
- Business closures
- Priority lanes for critical services

What does **not** change:

- Your obligation to follow lawful orders.
- Basic emergency services continue, though they will likely be strained.
- Courts often remain functioning, even if limited.

For the prepared individual, understanding martial law is not about fear; it's about knowledge and a commitment to personal safety. The core principles are simple: prioritize discretion, remain calm, and adapt to a new set of rules to ensure your well-being.



2. The Immediate Response: The First 24-48 Hours

The initial phase of any major event is the most chaotic. Your actions during this period will set the tone for your security and resilience.

Prioritize Calm and Assessment

The first and most critical step is to remain calm. Do not rush to a public area or attempt to flee without a clear, pre-planned destination and route. Instead, move to a secure indoor location and begin to gather information.

Information & Communications Plan

Your goals are to filter noise, get official updates, keep your group in sync, and save battery.

- **Trust these sources:** City/state emergency management pages, official social media pages with verification, Wireless Emergency Alerts, NOAA weather radio, and local AM/FM talk/news.
- **Practice info hygiene:** Screenshot key orders (curfews, maps, shelter locations). Note times/versions. Ignore "forwarded" posts and unconfirmed rumors.
- **Create a family communications rhythm:** Set check-in times (e.g., :15 past every hour). Use a primary channel (cell/text) with a backup (radio, neighbor runner). Pre-agree on rendezvous points (home, secondary location, outside-of-city contact).
- **Conserve battery:** Use low-power mode, dim the screen, disable non-essential notifications, and charge whenever possible. Always carry a power bank.

3. Decision: Shelter in Place vs. Relocate

This is a critical decision that should be made calmly and deliberately based on your situation.

- **Shelter in Place if:**
 - Your building is structurally sound.
 - You have at least 72 hours of supplies (food, water, medicine).
 - Medical needs are manageable at home.
 - Your area is **not** in a restricted or mandatory evacuation zone.
- **Relocate if:**
 - Your area is being cleared.
 - Utilities are unsafe (e.g., a gas leak or fire risk).
 - Medical needs exceed your home capacity.
 - You are in a mandatory evacuation zone.



Timing matters: Move before curfew and stick to designated routes. Avoid last-minute travel when tensions are highest.

4. What to Do at Home (Lockdown Checklist)

Secure Your Location

Immediately take steps to secure your home or dwelling.

- **Entry & Lighting:** Lock all doors and windows. Close blinds or curtains to obscure the interior. Keep a low light profile at night; use flashlights or headlamps instead of bright room lighting near windows.
- **Water & Food:** Store 1 gallon per person per day (minimum 3 days). Fill tubs and sinks if your supply is uncertain. Eat perishables first, then shelf-stable items. Avoid cooking smells that could attract attention.
- **Sanitation:** Have heavy-duty trash bags, wet wipes, hand sanitizer, and bleach or water purification tabs on hand.
- **Medical:** Use your first aid kit for minor injuries. Ensure you have a 7-14 day supply of prescriptions.
- **Safety:** Keep a fire extinguisher (know the PASS method: **P**ull, **A**im, **S**queeze, **S**weep) and designate a safe interior room with no exterior windows.
- **Pets:** Have crates, food, water, and vaccination papers ready. Leave a visible "pets inside" note for responders.

5. Navigating Security and Movement

In a state of martial law, the rules of public interaction and movement are fundamentally changed. A "low-profile" strategy is your most effective tool.

Interacting with Authorities (De-escalation Basics)

You may encounter military or law enforcement personnel. Your goal is to be seen as a non-threat and to avoid any conflict.

- **Be respectful and non-confrontational.** Maintain a calm and polite demeanor.
- **Speak slowly and don't interrupt.**
- **Follow all commands.** If you are told to stop, move, or put your hands up, do so immediately and without question.
- **Keep your hands visible.** This is a critical sign of compliance. Do not make sudden movements or reach into bags or pockets.



- **Keep movements deliberate.** Narrate your actions ("I'm reaching for my wallet in my right pocket.").
- **If detained, don't resist.** Request clarification politely. You can note the time, place, and badge numbers after the interaction.

Movement Restrictions and Checkpoints

Assume that major roads and bridges will have checkpoints or be closed. Plan any necessary movements in advance.

- **Avoid travel** unless absolutely necessary.
- **Before you go:** Check official guidance for route status, curfews, and checkpoints.
- **Vehicle prep:** Keep your vehicle's fuel tank at least half full. Have a paper map, a jack/tire kit, water, and your go-bag accessible.
- **At checkpoints:** Slow down, turn on your interior lights at night, roll your windows down enough to speak, and keep your hands visible on the steering wheel. Be polite and concise; have your ID ready. Follow instructions for searches if directed.
- **On foot:** Wear bright clothing by day and reflective clothing at night. Keep hands visible. Avoid large gatherings or restricted areas. Move with purpose; do not film personnel up close or interfere with their duties.

6. Sustaining Yourself: The Basics of Resilience

Your pre-existing preparations will be your greatest asset during this time.

Personal & Group Readiness (Your 72-Hour "Go Kit")

Pack once, adapt always. Your go-bag should be packed and ready to go at a moment's notice.

- **ID & Docs:** Government ID, insurance cards, a list of prescriptions, proof of residence, and emergency contacts.
- **Water & Food:** Water or a purifier, high-calorie food bars, canned meals, utensils, and a can opener.
- **Medical:** A first-aid kit, prescriptions, over-the-counter pain relievers, masks, and gloves.
- **Power & Light:** A headlamp + spare batteries, a power bank, and cables.
- **Clothing:** Sturdy footwear, a weather layer, a hat, and work gloves.
- **Hygiene:** A toothbrush, wet wipes, hand sanitizer, and personal menstrual products.
- **Comms & Nav:** Your phone, a whistle, a paper map with highlighted routes, and a notepad with a pen.
- **Cash:** Carry small bills; ATMs may be down.
- **Comfort:** Small items for morale like copies of kids' routines or a small toy/book.



Money, Work, and Daily Life Under Restrictions

- **Cash is king** when digital payment networks are down. Track your expenses.
- **Document property status** with photos of your home or business for later insurance claims.
- **Employment:** Save communications from employers about closures or essential-worker status.
- **Supply discipline:** Rotate your food and water, label dates, and stick to a budgeted daily consumption plan.

7. Legal and Civil Considerations

While some rights may be suspended, others may remain. It is important to know the difference and act accordingly.

Understanding the Suspension of Rights

The specific laws that are suspended under martial law can vary depending on the declaration. Generally, it may include the right to assembly, freedom of speech, and the right to privacy from searches. However, these suspensions are temporary and subject to legal challenge once the crisis passes.

Community & Mutual Aid (Safely)

Your relationships with trusted neighbors can be a vital resource.

- **Establish a communication plan.** If cell service goes down, a plan for how to signal or contact close neighbors is crucial.
- **Provide mutual support.** A trusted community can share information, resources, and provide mutual support. Check on neighbors (elderly, disabled, single parents).
- **Set up a floor captain model:** One person per floor or building section to relay verified updates and urgent needs.
- **Be cautious** about whom you trust and do not share your plans with those you do not know well.

8. Special Considerations & Family Care

Mental Health & Family Care

The psychological impact of a crisis is real.

- **Maintain routines** for mealtimes and sleep.



- **Limit news consumption.** Schedule short "update windows" to avoid "doom-scrolling."
- **Reassure kids** with age-appropriate facts and give them a role ("Your job is to pack your comfort item").
- **Prioritize** hydration, nutrition, and sleep.

Special Considerations

- **Medical devices:** Plan for charging and backup power. Register with local utilities' medical priority lists if available.
- **Pregnancy/Infants:** Have extra water, formula, and diapers. Identify the nearest open clinic.
- **Mobility or sensory needs:** Pre-pack adaptive supplies and print visual instruction cards.
- **Service animals:** Have their harness, ID, and a written description of their tasks.

9. After Restrictions Ease

Once the immediate threat has passed and martial law is lifted, a new set of priorities emerges.

- **Reassess Hazards:** Before resuming normal life, check for gas or electrical leaks, structural damage, and water safety.
- **Insurance & Aid:** File claims promptly, using your photo or video documentation and receipts.
- **Debrief:** What worked? What didn't? Update your plan, supply lists, and contact cards.
- **Community Follow-through:** Share lessons learned with your trusted network and restock supplies together.

A Philosophy of Discretion and Self-Reliance

A declaration of martial law is a serious event. While the situation may be unnerving, a calm and prepared mindset is your most powerful tool. By prioritizing discretion, maintaining a low profile, and relying on your existing preparations, you can significantly increase your personal safety. The ultimate goal is to navigate the situation without incident, remaining self-reliant while respecting the new temporary order. Your ability to adapt and think critically in a high-stress environment will be your ultimate measure of preparedness.