# Cyber-attack on Co-op exposes UK’s unpreparedness and rising call for personal resilience



I have seen the future. It unfolded last week in an unsettling scene at the Co-op supermarket, where shelves that once overflowed with goods stood strikingly empty. In the wake of a cyber-attack that severely disrupted its supply systems, the supermarket has struggled to restore normalcy. This incident left customers staring at bare aisles, drawn into a moment of reflection about the fragility of modern conveniences. With promises of recovery, the shelves still spoke volumes about vulnerability, leaving patrons feeling both anxious and deprived.

During my visit, I struck up a conversation with a fellow shopper who echoed a sentiment that many might share: “This is what it will be like when the bomb drops.” His quip, delivered with a sardonic smile, crystallised the unsettling truth that such disruptions—as mundane as they may seem—can provide a harbinger of larger crises to come. The stark reality is that a single cyber-attack can wreak havoc on essential services, cutting off access to the very basics of daily life.

The urgency for personal preparedness becomes even more pronounced when considering the guidance offered by various governments worldwide. The Swedish government has been particularly proactive, advising citizens to stockpile essentials such as water and non-perishable food, highlighting an overarching anxiety about geopolitical tensions and their possible ramifications. In an official communication last year, citizens were urged to keep at least three litres of water per person per day on hand. Meanwhile, diverse food options like dried meats and tinned goods were identified as staples for resilience during uncertain times.

In contrast, the UK government’s messaging around preparedness appears muted, lacking the resonance and clarity exhibited by its Scandinavian counterparts. While the Co-op and other retailers navigate the aftermath of recent cyber incidents, the call to action from British authorities seems hardly audible—a mere whisper advising the collection of tinned goods. Such disparities in messaging reflect broader societal attitudes towards crisis and preparedness.

The Co-op's recovery from this cyber incident is emblematic of a larger trend affecting UK retailers. The company's operational systems were disrupted due to an attempted hack that compromised system access as a precaution. Now, with announcements stating that their systems are fully operational again, the Co-op aims to restore not just stock but customer trust as well. However, this incident is part of a worrying pattern: another major retailer, Marks & Spencer, continues to struggle with a cyberattack that has cost the company substantial financial losses and damaged its reputation as it grapples with system recovery and customer frustration.

On a broader scale, these cyber incidents signal a profound vulnerability in the retail sector. The attack on the Co-op follows a series of breaches that have affected various sectors, underscoring a pressing need for enhanced cybersecurity measures. In light of these challenges, UK retailers are being urged to undertake a thorough reassessment of their security protocols, acknowledging that prevention is paramount as such threats become increasingly sophisticated.

Amid this backdrop of uncertainty, the issue of personal preparedness in the UK is emerging as a poignant subject of conversation. Anecdotal evidence from other regions impacted by natural disasters, such as the wildfires in Los Angeles, has illustrated the importance of being equipped with emergency supplies. Popular Science magazine has advised that everyone should adopt a degree of preparedness, highlighting the diverse array of individuals—from survivalists to suburban parents—who recognise the necessity of ‘go bags’ stocked with essentials.

What goes into these bags is often shaped by cultural backgrounds and personal circumstances. For some, the staples of survival may lack variety; while others can stockpile luxuries that nourish not just the body, but their spirit during challenging times. The question of what constitutes an essential supply in an apocalyptic scenario remains subjective and dependent on individual tastes and needs.

The disparity highlights a growing commercial opportunity within the prepping industry, which is gradually recognising the need to cater to diverse cultures and preferences. As awareness of potential threats rises, there is a pressing need for products that resonate with various communities and even reflect cultural cuisines—beyond the usual staples of tinned goods.

Despite the Co-op's claims that they are on the path to recovery, a lingering sense of unease permeates the air. The empty shelves serve as a sobering reminder that we live in a precarious world, where once-reliable just-in-time supply chains can falter unexpectedly. As the spectre of future disruptions looms large, it is increasingly clear that personal preparedness may no longer be an option but a necessary mindset in this rapidly evolving landscape.

In embracing this ethos, one cannot help but take heed: the future glimpsed in those desolate aisles may well be a clarion call to be prepared—for oneself and for the community.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/19/cyber-attacks-empty-shelves-co-op-prepping)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/19/cyber-attacks-empty-shelves-co-op-prepping)
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4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/19/cyber-attacks-empty-shelves-co-op-prepping), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-co-op-says-systems-now-running-normally-after-cyber-incident-2025-05-14/)
5. Paragraph 5: [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-co-op-says-systems-now-running-normally-after-cyber-incident-2025-05-14/), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/ms-slow-recovery-cyberattack-puts-it-risk-lasting-damage-2025-05-19/)
6. Paragraph 6: [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-co-op-says-systems-now-running-normally-after-cyber-incident-2025-05-14/), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/personal-data-taken-uk-legal-aid-cyber-attack-govt-says-2025-05-19/)
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9. Paragraph 9: [[6]](https://www.msb.se/en/advice-for-individuals/the-brochure-in-case-of-crisis-or-war/download-and-order-the-brochure-in-case-of-crisis-or-war/), [[7]](https://www.msb.se/en/advice-for-individuals/home-preparedness--prepping-for-at-least-a-week/basics-of-home-emergency-preparedness/)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/19/cyber-attacks-empty-shelves-co-op-prepping> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-co-op-says-systems-now-running-normally-after-cyber-incident-2025-05-14/> - The Co-op Group announced that its systems are now fully operational following a recent cyber incident. The company reported that payment systems are functioning, and stock availability—both in stores and online—is expected to improve by the weekend. The breach, disclosed last month, involved an attempted hack that prompted Co-op to restrict system access as a protective measure. The company, which operates over 2,300 stores and also provides funeral care, legal, and insurance services, is currently in a recovery phase, restoring systems in a controlled manner. This incident comes amid a broader trend of cyberattacks targeting UK retailers. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/uks-co-op-says-systems-now-running-normally-after-cyber-incident-2025-05-14/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/ms-slow-recovery-cyberattack-puts-it-risk-lasting-damage-2025-05-19/> - A month after a cyberattack crippled Marks & Spencer's (M&S) online operations, the UK retailer is still struggling to fully recover, prioritizing cybersecurity over rapid system restoration. The attack, attributed to the ransomware group Scattered Spider and DragonForce, has already cost M&S an estimated £60 million in lost profits and over £1 billion in market value. Online clothing and home orders remain suspended, and some in-store products have also been affected due to disrupted supply operations. The company is gradually bringing systems back online and has resumed food stock forecasting. M&S refused to pay the ransom in line with government guidance, opting to rebuild its systems, a move that may prolong disruptions and potentially lead to reputational harm. Analysts warn continued delays risk customer frustration, rising operational costs, and reduced morale among staff. The breach reportedly involved credentials of Tata Consulting Services employees, though TCS has not commented. With online sales typically comprising a third of M&S’s clothing and home revenue, the disruption could result in substantial losses. Meanwhile, other UK retailers are urgently reassessing cybersecurity to avoid a similar fate, acknowledging the widespread vulnerability in the retail sector. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/ms-slow-recovery-cyberattack-puts-it-risk-lasting-damage-2025-05-19/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/personal-data-taken-uk-legal-aid-cyber-attack-govt-says-2025-05-19/> - A substantial cyber attack on Britain's Legal Aid Agency resulted in the theft of personal data from individuals who had applied for legal aid since 2010. The compromised data includes sensitive information such as criminal records, addresses, dates of birth, national ID numbers, and financial details like debts and payments. The agency first detected the breach on April 23 and has since collaborated with the National Crime Agency and the National Cyber Security Centre to investigate and strengthen system defenses. On May 16, they discovered the breach was more severe than initially believed, prompting the shutdown of the agency’s online services. Chief Executive Jane Harbottle stated that despite the disruption, contingency plans are in place to ensure legal support remains accessible. This incident follows other notable attacks in April targeting British retailers Marks & Spencer and Co-op, with hackers impersonating employees to access IT systems and steal customer data. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/personal-data-taken-uk-legal-aid-cyber-attack-govt-says-2025-05-19/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://apnews.com/article/9ebe1ca0d714cacd8ec279945598d6c1> - Sweden and Finland, both recent NATO members, have updated their civil preparedness guides with instructions on surviving wartime conditions, mirroring those of Denmark and Norway. These guides offer detailed responses to nuclear, chemical, or biological attacks, emphasizing the importance of taking shelter. Sweden's updated guide follows a statement by former military leader Gen. Micael Bydén, urging Swedes to mentally prepare for war. The security landscape has worsened since the previous guide's release in 2018, noted Civil Defense Minister Carl-Oskar Bohlin. Finland's guide, given its extensive border with Russia, underscores preparedness as a key civic skill. Both nations advise citizens to stockpile essentials like water, food, medicine, fuel, iodine tablets, and other supplies. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/9ebe1ca0d714cacd8ec279945598d6c1?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.msb.se/en/advice-for-individuals/the-brochure-in-case-of-crisis-or-war/download-and-order-the-brochure-in-case-of-crisis-or-war/> - The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) has produced the brochure 'In case of crisis or war' to help individuals prepare for various emergencies, including cyberattacks, extreme weather, and military conflicts. The brochure provides practical advice on how to act during a national crisis, emphasizing the importance of individual responsibility in ensuring personal safety and societal resilience. It includes guidance on maintaining access to essentials like water, food, communication, and heating for at least a week. The brochure is available for download or order in English on the MSB's website. ([msb.se](https://www.msb.se/en/advice-for-individuals/the-brochure-in-case-of-crisis-or-war/download-and-order-the-brochure-in-case-of-crisis-or-war/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.msb.se/en/advice-for-individuals/home-preparedness--prepping-for-at-least-a-week/basics-of-home-emergency-preparedness/> - The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) offers guidance on home emergency preparedness, advising individuals to devise a plan detailing how to maintain access to water, food, communication, and heating in their homes for at least a week. The agency emphasizes the importance of individual responsibility in contributing to Sweden's resilience during crises or war. The advice includes creating a checklist of essential items to have at home, such as a battery-powered radio, clean water, non-perishable food, and a first aid kit. The MSB also highlights the role of community cooperation and the importance of being informed and prepared to assist others during emergencies. ([msb.se](https://www.msb.se/en/advice-for-individuals/home-preparedness--prepping-for-at-least-a-week/basics-of-home-emergency-preparedness/?utm_source=openai))