

ARE YOU READY?

How to prepare for an evacuation

In the event of a disaster, local officials may deem your community unsafe and tell you to evacuate. You may have a day or two to prepare, or you may have to leave immediately, depending on the situation. Planning ahead to know where you will go, how you will get there and what you will bring will help to evacuate safely and quickly — and possibly save your life.



Before an evacuation

Learn about your community's risk and create an emergency plan for each disaster. Be on the lookout for emergency alerts on the radio, TV and your cellphone. Locate places where you could stay, such as local shelters, hotels, motels or the home of a trusted family member or friend. If you have pets or a household member with special needs, identify a place where they can be accommodated. Get familiar with your local evacuation routes

and means of transportation, such as bus routes.

Make an emergency communication plan with your family to determine the best way to reach one other if you are split up while evacuating. Each family member should have a list of everyone's contact information, as well as the telephone numbers of your local police and fire stations. In your family plan, choose a meeting spot ahead of time in case you can't reach one another.

Pack a "go-bag" — an emergency bag you grab if you are ordered to evacuate — for each family member. It should include items like food, water, prescriptions and extra clothing to last a couple of days. Pack lightly, and keep one at home, work and school and in your car, just to be extra safe.

Don't forget about your pets! Pack food, water, non-spill bowls, medicine, leashes and pet carriers in a go-bag for when you need to quickly leave with your pets. It also helps to locate emergency veterinary hospitals and pet-friendly shelters along evacuation routes.

If you have a car, keep a full tank of gas. It may be harder to reach a gas station that is in-service during a disaster. Have a mechanic inspect your car ahead of time to ensure antifreeze levels, the battery and ignition system, brakes, oil, exhaust system and other car features are in check. Pack an emergency kit for your car, including items like jumper cables, flares or reflective triangles, an ice scraper, car cellphone charger and cat litter or sand for better tire traction.



During an evacuation

It is important to follow instructions given by local officials. As much as you may not want to leave home, don't ignore evacuation orders, as your safety is at risk. You can listen to a battery-powered radio to hear local evacuation instructions. When evacuating, try to contact those in your emergency family communication plan and safely go to the meeting spot if everyone isn't together.

If time allows and you are advised to do so, unplug any electrical equipment. Unless there is a risk of flooding, leave refrigerators and freezers plugged in so that you have food when you return. In some cases, you may be instructed to shut off all water, gas and electricity before leaving.

Locate the nearest shelter and follow the recommended evacuation routes to get there. Look out for hazards such as floodwaters, debris and downed power lines. don't drive through flooded areas and do not return home until local officials say it's safe to do so. As much as you may not want to be in a shelter, it's more important to be safe. When it's finally safe to go home, be prepared to face the chance of a power outage or damage to your home when you return.

Image credits

Filling up gas in the car: Photo by francisblack courtesy iStockphoto

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