

ARE YOU READY?



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Ready**

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How to get ready for a volcanic eruption



Nowadays, scientists are usually able to predict when a volcano will erupt. It's good news for residents who live with a view of the majestic and temperamental mountains, but it's no substitute for planning ahead.

What's a volcano?

Volcanoes are mountains created via the accumulation of material from below the Earth's surface. Volcanic eruptions can be accompanied with hot lava flows, poisonous gases, and flying debris and ash.

In the United States, active volcanoes are mainly located in Alaska, Hawaii and in the Pacific Northwest areas of California, Oregon and Washington state. A volcano's danger zone reaches to at least a 20-mile radius and sometimes much farther. A volcanic eruption can result in additional disasters too, such as mudslides, floods, tsunamis and wildfires.

Volcanic eruptions pose a number of health hazards, with suffocation the most common cause of volcano-related death. Other health hazards include burns, drinking water contamination and fall-related injuries. Volcanic gases and ash can be particularly dangerous for people living with respiratory illnesses.



Mt. St. Helens, Wash., May 18, 1980. Photo courtesy NOAA News Photo

Prepare ahead of time

To prepare for a volcano-related emergency, become familiar with your community's warning systems, evacuation routes and shelter locations ahead of time. Also, be ready to listen and act on instructions from emergency officials. This means making sure your preparedness materials include a battery-operated radio so you can stay abreast of the latest updates.



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Next, create a household evacuation plan as well as a plan for sheltering in place. Make sure your preparedness plans include a communications component in case members of your household aren't together when an emergency happens. For example, designate an out-of-state friend or relative as an emergency contact, as it is sometimes easier to call long distance rather than locally in the wake of a disaster.

Put together a household emergency stockpile kit and make sure it includes batteries, bottled water, nonperishable food, a manual can opener, a first aid kit, a flashlight and needed medicines. Bottled water is especially important because volcanic ash can contaminate tap water. Also, make sure to add these items to your kit: goggles, disposable facemasks and sturdy shoes. When

creating your emergency stockpile kit, keep in mind that you'll want to bring it with you in case of evacuation, so either make sure your kit is portable or make two separate kits — one for staying in place and another for evacuating.

It's important to listen to and act on instructions from emergency officials. Leaving your home may be a difficult decision, but it's an important one to stay safe.

During and after an eruption

If caught indoors during an eruption or if officials have ordered residents to shelter in place, take these precautions: immediately close all windows, doors and ventilation sources, such as chimney vents or furnaces; turn off air conditioning and heating systems; and move to an interior, windowless room that is above ground level.

To protect yourself from falling volcanic ash, try to stay indoors and place damp towels in the spaces between the doors and the ground. If you go outside, wear long sleeves and pants, put on a disposable facemask and wear goggles (and switch to glasses instead of contact lenses). Volcanic ash is especially harmful to those with respiratory illness as well as very young and older people, so the best decision is to stay inside.

After an eruption, try to avoid driving in heavy ash fall. If necessary and with great caution, clear your roof of ashes, as heavy ash fall can cause a building to collapse. And lend a helping hand — reach out to friends and neighbors, especially those who might need special assistance.



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