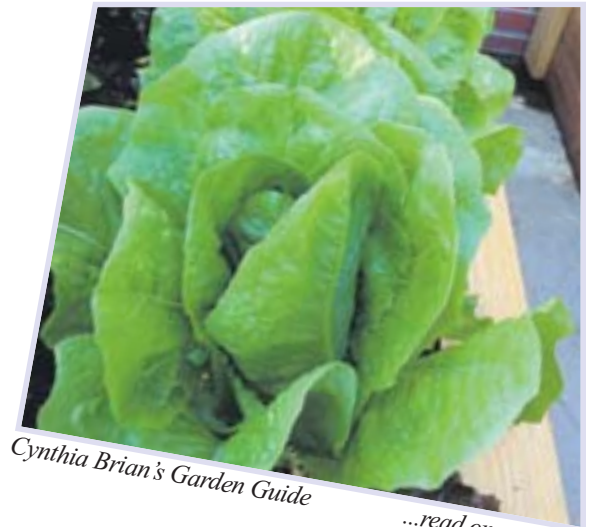


# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Cynthia Brian's Garden Guide

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## Disaster Preparedness Isn't Only About Storing Bottled Water

*Block by block, communities ready themselves*

By Chris Lavin

Nine-year-old Sean Swanson of Canyon has it down. What would he do if a wildfire was suddenly sweeping up the canyon?

"Take the important documents," he said firmly, "and go to the staging area." He is asked if he knows what important documents are, or where they are kept. His mother breaks into his detailed response regarding exactly what, exactly where.

"We've talked this. We have meeting spots," says Sonya Wilson, mother to Sean and Orion. "We've practiced it." But then Sean broke in: "And then I would get the pictures, and my fish, and my mealworms. And watch after my brother."

"No," 6-year-old Orion replies. "I will look after you."

We are all told repeatedly that it's coming. "The Big One." Maybe a nearby fire, instead of an earthquake. We're overdue for the quake, and the dry weather has the worried among us looking at tinder-like brush piles beneath bay trees on slopes. Residents are told to prepare an earthquake kit, order pharmaceuticals ahead, make sure to have a flashlight and shoes by your bed. We've heard it all. And we're tired. We're either prepared or we're not. Most of us fall into the latter category.

According to the California Emergency Management Agency, fewer than 20 percent of Californians are prepared to last relatively comfortably for three days without power and water, although Northern California is slightly more prepared. The



Sean Swanson, left, and his brother Orion hold up the disaster preparedness signs they have ready to post outside their house in the aftermath of an emergency. The signs are provided through the fire department with a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Photo Chris Lavin

agency names "citizen preparedness" as the weakest link in the chain of disaster readiness. In the Lamorinda area, with its narrow, winding roads and remote neighborhoods, a big disaster will likely leave hundreds, if not thousands, of pockets

inaccessible to emergency crews – and to public works crews able to clear felled trees, providing access to services and stores and hospitals.

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