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Are you ready to evacuate?

By Cynthia Brian



Fires raging over the hills. Photo Cynthia Brian

In the last few weeks, we've experienced unprecedented weather conditions with temperatures in the triple digits, ferocious winds, low humidity, thunderstorms, and lightning strikes resulting in more perilous and damaging wildfires. Dry conditions will only worsen in the forthcoming months. Air quality is precariously unhealthy with dangerous concentrations of tiny PM 2.5 particles that penetrate deep into the lungs.

Natural disasters know no boundaries. One never knows if a fire, earthquake, flood, mudslide, or other calamity is on the horizon. It's imperative to be prepared for all emergencies.

Be Prepared!

Here are ways that you can be ready for the unexpected. Add your requirements to these tips and be ready to drive away at a moment's notice. Besides Go Bag essentials listed below, these are items that require your attention.

1. Sign up for emergency alerts via our County Community Warning System at <https://cwsalerts.com> where you can register your phones, emails, and text numbers to be notified. Add this phone number to your favorites for notifications from CCWS: (925) 655-0195?. Even if you are already registered with Nixle (<https://www.nixle.com>), our local CCWS is the alert system that will be used for location-specific information. Also, visit <https://www.lamorindacert.org> for more information. To check on air quality, visit <https://www.airnow.gov>?
2. Practice an evacuation plan with your family. Know the safest exits from your home and educate everyone in the family on the best route.
3. Install an analog landline phone if you don't already have one. These are the old-fashioned phones where the jack plugs into the wall. Electricity is not necessary for them to work. Although billing is more expensive than cell phones, when the power is out, these landlines work.
4. Designate someone out of state to report to. Everyone in the family must have their contact information in case of separation.
5. Make a rescue plan for your pets and animals and have a bag ready for them next to your Go Bag.
6. Know how to manually open automatic garage doors and gates.
7. Make copies of your passport, driver's license, credit cards, insurance information, and have small bills available. Put these in your Go Bag.
8. Backup your computers, scan your important documents, and keep files in the cloud or off-site.
9. Family mementos, jewelry, heirlooms, and any irreplaceable article that you can't live without must be stored with your Go Bag.
10. Know your neighbors and their contact numbers to keep in touch to make sure everyone is safe.
11. Make a list of a network of friends that you can call in an emergency.
12. Know where you will go in evacuations.
13. Have a sign already made with your name and phone number and the words "All Evacuated" sitting on top of your Go Bag along with a roll of blue painter's tape. Only if time permits, tape your sign to your door when you leave so that firefighters know the house is clear.
14. Listen to and obey the first responders. These trained men and women have your safety and that of your home as their priorities. Follow their orders.
15. When told to evacuate, go quickly and carefully. Take one vehicle only so as not to clog the escape routes. Do not attempt to evacuate on foot.
16. Stay calm.

Whatever the calamity, it will behoove you to have an emergency supply kit (AKA "Go Bag") in every vehicle and a larger one in your home in a closet or area near the door you will use to escape. These supplies need to last you for one or more days. You want duplicate Go Bags in your vehicles because when disaster strikes you may be in your vehicle and unable to return home. In an emergency at your dwelling, you may only have time to grab your keys, phone, wallet, pets, Go Bag, and what you can carry. There will not be time to "load your car" or to be searching or running from room to room to find what you need. Keep everything that is essential together in one place. Remember, you may be evacuated for hours, days, or weeks. Sometimes, as has been the case with our California wildfires and earthquakes, a matter of minutes means the difference between life and death.

Most of all, remember that saving your life and that of your family is the most important. Everything else can be replaced.

Go Bag Necessities

Fill a backpack or small case with the following and keep one of these in all of your vehicles and one in your home. Pack a small bag for each family member, or, if easier, pack a larger bag to include everyone. Remember you may only take one vehicle upon an evacuation. Include:

First Aid kit

- Duplicate chargers for phones, tablets, and computers
- Work gloves
- Warm gloves
- Towelettes
- Small towel
- Bottled water (1 gallon per person per day)
- Blanket
- Walking shoes
- Socks
- Warm jacket
- Peanut butter
- Honey
- Protein bars
- Personal hygiene kit with a toothbrush, soap, medications
- Matches
- Candle
- Flashlight and headlamp with extra batteries
- Eating utensils and plates
- Breathing masks Niosh-N95
- Clothing change
- Extra set of keys to home, office, etc.
- Cash
- Toilet Paper

Because of the pandemic, N95 grade masks are in short supply and reserved for medical professionals. Although better than nothing, unfortunately, surgical masks, cloth masks, and bandanas do not protect against smoke inhalation. The Air Resources Board advises everyone to stay indoors with windows and doors closed. Run recirculating fans or air conditioners and keep aware of changing conditions.

Hopefully, you will never have to use these emergency kits, but it's best to be prepared. It is natural to assume that a catastrophe will happen to someone else, but the reality is no one is immune. Across the country, natural disasters are becoming more prevalent and frequent.

It is becoming a common cliché to utter "stay safe." Instead, be proactive and be prepared. The life you save will be your own.



The ravaged hills are ash the morning after the blaze. Photo Cynthia Brian

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