

# Emergency Preparedness



# Staying Informed

Emergency threats traditionally led to more devastation than they should have because we were too often caught unaware.

Thankfully, we have far more information now in advance of these potentially catastrophic events, giving people time to plan and prepare — and then, if needed, to move to a safer place. Here's how to stay informed.

## WEATHER RADIOS

Get real-time news about the threats around you with a weather radio. They connect to a nationwide network of stations that broadcast continuously updated information from the nearest office of the National Weather Service. You'll receive up-to-the-minute information on various hazards, as well as forecasts and more detailed watches and warnings.

These broadcasts are on every day, all day. And despite their name, NOAA Weather Radios aren't just for weather: They also share information about unrelated emergencies, including threats to national security, natural or environmental disasters and other public-safety warnings. Just remember to stock up on extra batteries, in case the power goes out.

## WIRELESS ALERTS

Get the latest information sent to any handheld device via Wireless Emergency Alerts from the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System. These WEAs may be sent by the National Weather Service, local and state officials, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children or the office of the U.S. president. The Department of Homeland Security has created four

categories for the alerts, which arrive as text messages: imminent threat, AMBER, public safety and presidential. Imminent threat alerts share details on active shooters, extreme weather, man-made and natural disasters, and other emergencies. Presidential alerts are only sent during times of national emergency. Public safety alerts share information about non-imminent threats or

information after a threat has passed. AMBER alerts are urgent messages regarding missing children.

## GET SOCIAL

Believe it or not, social media isn't just for cat photos and Wordle competitions. In fact, it's become an increasingly popular method to share information about emergencies and natural disas-

ters. Emergency management officials and first responders now use various online platforms to provide the latest updates and news when disaster strikes. So, be sure to follow area government agencies — as well your hometown news outlets — on Facebook, Twitter and other networks to get more local information about what's happening as it's happening.



# Should You Seek Shelter?

Knowing that an emergency is imminent is only half the battle. What you do next could mean the difference between being safe and a catastrophic loss of property — or even life.

Did you know there is actually more than one way to seek shelter? It's important to know the difference.

## STAY AT HOME

These measures ask that you remain inside as much as is possible, only leaving when it's absolutely necessary. Grocery shopping, trips to the pharmacy and buying gas were considered essential activity during recent coronavirus-related quarantines. The Red Cross recommends keep at least two weeks of supplies on hand. Any stay-at-home emergency kit should include enough water for a gallon-per-person for several days, to be used both for drinking and for sanitation. You should also have plenty of non-perishable food, a battery-powered radio, a NOAA weather radio, any needed medication, a flashlight and a first-aid kit.

## SHELTERING IN PLACE

Sometimes the best response to imminent danger



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is remaining right where you are, whether that's at home, at work, a public place — or even in your vehicle. Sheltering-in-place measures are typically short lived, as with a tornado warning, poor air quality or a live shooter, but may last longer. As with stay-at-home orders, it's smart to plan ahead by having an adequate supply of food and water to make

sure you can comfortably shelter in place, if needed. If it's safe, text or call your emergency contact, and stay connected with local authorities.

## MASS SHELTERING

Widespread emergency situations typically lead to mass sheltering, where many people seek refuge together. Mass shelters are also called evacua-

tion centers, emergency shelters, mass-care facilities or reception centers. They provide live-saving disaster response on a large scale, in cooperation with local emergency and public-health agencies, FEMA and the Red Cross, among others. They're designed to provide access to food and clean water, medical care and other stabilizing

resources like heat, but if you have special needs consider creating an emergency mass-sheltering bag with needed essentials. Stay informed about the specific kinds of emergencies that tend to impact your area, and become familiar with the channels used by your local officials to share information in an emergency.

# Earthquake Preparedness

Scientists have worked for decades to reliably predict when earthquakes might happen, but they still often occur without much warning.

We've learned a lot more about where an earthquake may occur, but not always when. That's why it's important to have a plan in place so that you can move toward safety at a moment's notice.

## KNOW THE PHASES

Earthquakes begin with foreshocks, small movements that serve as a kind of prequel to what will follow. The main shock is next, and often brings much more damage. These shocks usually last less than 60 seconds, but there can be more than one. Aftershocks are the final element in this sequence of events. These smaller shocks can last for days, or even weeks depending on the size of the main shock.

## WHAT TO DO BEFORE

Situational awareness is your biggest asset when dealing with something as unpredictable as an earthquake. Decide where you will go inside a building if there is an earthquake, near an interior wall. Make sure there is plenty of room for you and your loved ones or co-workers. Fasten down heavy pieces of

furniture like dressers and bookshelves, as well as mirrors and light fixtures.

Share your emergency plan with others, both at home and at work, so they know what to do.

## WHAT TO DO DURING

If you find yourself indoors as an earthquake hits, stay

put. Go to your previously designated earthquake safe zone, and wait there. If you have heavy furniture like an antique dining-room table, take advantage of the additional protection it may provide. If an earthquake hits while you are outside, move immediately to an open area. Stay away from any buildings,

power poles or streetlights. Get into a protective stance, covering your head, and be on the look out for flying debris.

## WHAT TO DO AFTER

Head outside once the tremor subsides, remaining aware of dangerous obstacles like downed electrical lines. Find a nearby open area

where you can wait out any aftershocks. Check yourself and others for injuries; sometimes we get hurt but are unaware of it during stressful times. Once you're back inside, be on guard for gas leaks and damaged wiring. Items in your home will have shifted, so be careful when opening cabinets.





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# Emergency Pet Planning

Some of the most devastating images to emerge from Hurricane Katrina were the abandoned pets.

A number of states have since moved to enact legislation aimed at protecting these innocent animals. It's now illegal in many places to leave a pet behind when you live in an evacuation zone. Many have passed laws to keep owners from chaining their animals outside. Others now require animal shelters to accept pets during times of emergency.

Ultimately, however, it's up to us as responsible owners to take care of emergency pet planning. Here are some ideas to get you started.

## **DON'T WAIT**

Too often, we procrastinate when it comes to disaster planning until the threat is upon us. Put together an emergency bag filled with needed items for yourself well before a storm approaches — then put one together for your pet, too. The FDA recommends including a one-week supply of food, and any pet-specific medications. Bring along copies of any medical or vaccination records, as well as their microchip information. Include a photo of your

pet, in case the two of you somehow become separated. Don't forget sanitation-related items like a doggy pad or litter. Designate a friend or family member to take care of your pet in case a storm or other emergency happens while you are away. Give them signed authorization for health care, too.

## **SAFELY EVACUATING**

Remember that your pet will need time to acclimate to their temporary new setting, so they may resort to uncharacteristic behaviors. Everyone is anxious in these situations — including your pet. Leash or kennel your pet at all times. A carrier can provide a sense of

safety for a nervous pet, while also protecting strangers from a reaction based on fear in an unknown situation. Stressed furry friends may also escape and become lost. Enroll your pet in a database, and consider microchipping them, in the event they were to get separated from you. Some hotels choose to waive pet restrictions, or lower their usual deposit fees, during a natural disaster — but that's not always the case. Call ahead to make sure you're headed to a pet-friendly destination. If you're likely to remain evacuated for a while, research well-regarded animals hospitals and vets near where you'll be evacuating.

# Think Fire Safety First

Thousands of Americans die, and tens of thousands are injured each year in home fires.

Property loss directly resulting from these fires totals billions annually, according to the U.S. Fire Administration. These emergency situations require quick action, the kind that only follows careful advance planning. Fires can spread through a home in a matter of minutes, making it difficult to develop a course of action on the fly.

Many fires also occur when families are sleeping at night, and those who haven't worked out a plan may find themselves too disoriented as they awake to make good decisions. The results can be catastrophic.

## CAUSES OF HOUSE FIRES

Use extra caution around your kitchen, where most house fires tend to start. Other common causes, according to the U.S. Fire Administration, are sparks from fireplaces, improperly discarded smoking materials, bad wiring and malfunctioning appliances, among other things.

## WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR

Burns are most people's principal concern. But that's not the real danger from a house fire. Instead, the U.S. Fire Administration says



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asphyxiation is the leading cause of death — by a ratio of three-to-one. Smoke and heat from a house fire typically reach places that the flames never do, and that can endanger people in every corner of the structure. The air can be so hot that it sears sensitive lung tissue, and it may also be carrying dangerous gases that

can cause drowsiness or disorientation.

## GUARDING AGAINST DANGER

No home can be fire proofed, but there are things you can do to make it more fire resistant.

Install smoke alarms in every room to provide an early

warning. Invest in a handy fire extinguisher; they might make the difference between quickly containing a small fire and suffering a huge loss. Consider using fire doors, which can keep flames and smoke contained long enough for you and your loved ones to escape. If you have a wood-burning stove or fireplace, keep up

with regularly scheduled maintenance. Use a screen that's heavy enough to stop a rolling log, and wide enough to catch any flying sparks. Be sure all fires are completely out before leaving. New fire-resistant carpets can also protect your home far more than wool or synthetics, which actually accelerate a fire.

# Preparing Your Vehicle

When faced with an emergency, we tend to think of family and home first.

Don't forget, however, to include your vehicle in any master plan.

## THINKING AHEAD

Map out your evacuation route in advance. Cell-phone chargers are particularly important, since they'll keep a lifeline open to the wider world. Make sure your car or truck is in good working order. Check your fluid and oil levels, as well as your tire pressure. Breaking down in an emergency could be life threatening. Avoid driving through deep water, since even six inches can impact traction on your vehicle. Experts also recommend collecting at least 24 hours worth of food supplies into an emergency kit. Switch out these items every six months. Write dates on all non-perishable items, so you'll know when to replace them. Expired food puts you at risk of becoming sick, making a stressful situation far worse. Don't forget blankets and a rain poncho. Pack plenty of water, too.

## WHEN YOU EVACUATE

Don't try to outrun nearby tornadoes or hurricanes; instead have a plan to shelter in place, and follow it. Closely monitor news reports, however, and heed all official advice. They may ask you to evacuate,



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so keep your fuel tank at least half full when emergencies loom. Some situations lead to long lines at gas stations, or their closure. Trees and power lines may fall during storms, so drive carefully. Remember to brake early in adverse weather, since it takes more time to come to a complete

stop in wet or icy conditions.

## ROADSIDE EMERGENCIES

If you begin to have car trouble during a storm or other emergency, chances are you'll have to attend to the problem yourself. Prepare for any roadside issues with a vehicle-focused toolkit. You'll

need wrenches, a tire gauge, flashlight and batteries, kitty litter for traction, a multi-purpose tool, duct tape, socket-wrench set, water for cooling parts, and jumper cables. Make sure your spare tire is properly inflated. If possible, purchase a reflective triangle or flare, so that you can alert

other drivers to your presence. Depending on the season, you may need an ice scraper. Keep a fully stocked first-aid kit on hand, in case someone becomes injured. You'll need antibiotic ointment, tape, gauze, bandages, rubbing alcohol or similar sanitizer, scissors and aspirin.

# Know the Warnings

Forecasters can begin issuing important-sounding bulletins days before hazardous conditions arrive, bolstered by information from the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center.

But what if you're unfamiliar with all of this jargon? Here's a glossary of commonly used terms and their meanings.

## WATCH

At this point, you should be closely monitoring the situation while reviewing emergency plans. A watch means conditions are favorable for a storm, tornado, flash floods or excessive heat in and around a selected area. When under a watch, take time to go over emergency plans once again, and check your food and other supplies. Unfortunately, severe thunderstorms, flash flooding and tornadoes can happen so quickly that forecasters aren't able to share watches or warnings in time. So prepare to act quickly if conditions change.

## ADVISORY

Advisories are issued for hazardous but less threatening weather events. (A heat advisory, for instance, alerts people that they may be impacted if precautions aren't taken.) Storms may be likely, arriving



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soon or already underway. In any case, they are not associated with the kind of serious conditions that trigger a warning. Proceed with caution, and stay connected with trusted news and weather experts.

## WARNING

Far more serious in the case of tornadoes, this indicates

that those in the warning area are in immediate danger since a funnel cloud has been sighted on the ground. Head immediately to an interior room, basement or storm cellar because there is a threat to life and property. During winter storms or thunderstorms, a warning indicates that the system has arrived or will soon.

Excessive heat warnings are issued when a 105-degree heat index or higher is forecast to last at least two hours.

## FIND OUT MORE

One of the best ways to find out more about the threat of dangerous weather is by using a weather radio. Broadcasts include watches, warnings,

forecasts and other weather information, and they're available 24 hours a day. Some have a feature that will automatically turn the radio on when a watch or warning is issued. NOAA All-Hazards Radios also come available with vibrating alarm features and text readouts for the deaf community.