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Are You Ready Series: Emergency Evacuations

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Some disasters cause evacuation orders for people to leave their homes and communities. For some, a state of panic will set in due to lack of preparedness. The amount of time a person leaves their home solely depends on how prepared they are and if an initial plan was set. Having a predetermined plan in place a head of time will save time, money, energy and sometimes a life.

According to [FEMA](#) ^[1], evacuations are more common than many realize.

Hundreds of times each year, transportation and industrial accidents release harmful substances, forcing thousands of people to leave their homes. Fires and floods cause evacuations even more frequently. Almost every year, people along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts evacuate in the face of approaching hurricanes.

A decisive plan of action should take into account the pros and cons of any given situation. Be objective. The main priorities to keep in mind are shelter, fire, and water/food. Always have Plan A, B and C. And stay focused at the task at hand. Evacuating due to an unforeseen emergency has two parts:

Evacuating from a home due to a fire or flood - If a home evacuation is in order, there is little time to collect belongings. Some [experts](#) ^[2] say a person has 10 minutes or less to collect needed items. Prepare a list a head of time of the items that would need to be taken such as photo albums, identification (birth certificates, social security cards, financial documents, wills/deeds, and medical insurance information), proof of address, as well as items for a [72 hour bag](#) ^[3]. Dividing the duties between family members will make this situation more efficient as well as make better use of time.

Household Emergency Evacuation Plan

- Draw a blue print of the home and then draw an evacuation route and a meeting place.
- Make one drawing for each story of the home. Keep this in a area of the home where members of the family can see and review often.
- If the home is more than one story, have an emergency ladder or rope to use as a secondary evacuation method.
- Have maps ready for the closest evacuation centers, main and alternative route for leaving the city in North, South, East and West directions. Driving the routes a head of time can determine the best ways of arriving at the determined location.
- Meet up spots outside the affected areas if a family is separated and not traveling together.
- Designate person outside of the area as a primary contact for the family.
- If there is time, shut off main gas valves to the home.

[Source – www.nationalterroralert.com](http://www.nationalterroralert.com) ^[2]

Evacuating a community – Community evacuations normally provide a person with more time to prepare their homes and collect belongings, but this is not always the case. The

faster a person begins traveling to their destination the better chance of dodging traffic and any unnecessary stressful situations. If a person can evacuate before a mandatory evacuation has been announced, the better off they will be.

Community Evacuation Plan

- Plan the evacuation - Have maps on hand with the planned route already made.
- Have a Plan B – In the event that certain roads are closed, have an alternate evacuation route.
- Have a place to meet - If a family is not all together when an evacuation is ordered, having a predetermined meeting place will allow the members to reunite and travel to their primary location. Make sure each of the family members knows the meet up spot.
- Choose a location to stay – When evacuations are ordered, some go to hotels to wait the disaster out, some flee to family or friend's homes that are outside the affected area. Where ever that location is, make sure that if need be, staying there for a longer amount of time is alright. If a person goes to a hotel, bring extra money in case staying there longer is needed.

[Source – www.nationalterroralert.com](http://www.nationalterroralert.com) ^[2]

Considerations When Evacuating

- Is there reliable form of transportation?
- Are there properly mapped out routes?
- What is the emergency evacuation procedures for children's schools? Will they be taken someone else? Can you get them?
- Is there a full tank of gas (and extra gas if needed)?
- If there are possible dangers or bad weather elements, can a person stay safe and protected?
- Is there an alternate route or escape route?
- Leave early enough to avoid any traffic.
- Follow recommended evacuation routes.
- If possible, try and stay off of main highways feeding into the city.

If a person or family has no means of transportation and realize that walking is the only option:

- What is the route that will be taken?
- What is the distance walked each day?
- Where will each person sleep?
- Does the person have a method of signaling in case of emergency?
- Does the person walking realize that extra food and water will be needed to compensate for the extra needed energy from walking?
- Is the person properly [dressed](#) ^[4] for this type of traveling?
- If the person follows the main highway system out of town, there could be a lot of trouble that could occur. Can the person defend themselves?
- Does the person have an escape route?

Evacuating With Pets

The [Humane Society](#) ^[5] encourages all pet owners to take their pets along when a evacuation is ordered. According to the Humane Society, "many pets who are turned loose or left behind to fend for themselves are likely to become victims of starvation, predators, contaminated food or water, accidents or exposure to elements." Many evacuation shelters do not accept pets, so plan accordingly. Preparing a three day or 72 hour kit pet kit will keep the pets as safe as possible.

Evacuating a home or community is a stressful situation for many who are unprepared for this possibility. Following the correct protocols by having a [family emergency plan](#) ^[6], a decided meeting place, pre-established traveling routes and maps can help alleviate this tension high situation.

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URLs in this post:

[1] FEMA: <http://www.fema.gov/plan/prepare/evacuation.shtm>

[2] experts: <http://www.nationalterroralert.com/evacuation-plan/>

[3] 72 hour bag: http://readynutrition.com/resources/are-you-ready-series-72-hour-kits-part-5_04122009/

[4] dressed: http://readynutrition.com/resources/are-you-ready-series-emergency-clothing-part-3_27112009/

[5] Humane Society:

http://www.hsus.org/press_and_publications/press_releases/tips_for_evacuating_with.htr

[6] family emergency plan: <http://ready.adcouncil.org/beprepared/fep/fep.do>

[7] Are You Ready Series: Emergency Medical Supply:

http://readynutrition.com/resources/medical-emergency1_09112009/

[8] Are You Ready Series: Emergency Water Supply:

http://readynutrition.com/resources/are-you-ready-series-emergency-water-supply-part-2_16112009/

[9] Are You Ready Series: Essential Footwear: http://readynutrition.com/resources/are-you-ready-series-essential-footwear-part-4_28112009/

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