

Preparing for Disasters

*Fire, flood, earthquake, civil unrest?
Pre-disaster preparation can mean the
difference between major traumatic
tragedy and a simple inconvenience.*

**A Guide for Parishes and Parishioners of the
Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin**

Fact: Every year over two million families suffer some sort of disaster that causes them to either be evacuated or be stranded at home without power or water for at least thirty-six hours. For some of those families the disaster is a tragedy, to others it is simply an irritating inconvenience.

Home fires, forest fires, snow storms, ice storms, wind storms, floods, tornados, hurricanes, tsunami, and man-caused disruptions all add to those two million life-challenging problems. In this book you will learn simple, practical ways to minimize the misery of all of those situations with less than an hour of planning and preparation.

We were at a football game not long ago when a light rain began and it turned colder. The game continued. Because we had checked the weather report we brought ponchos and stayed warm and dry. Within fifteen minutes almost half of the fans, those without rain gear, had left the stadium. The rest of us stayed, the rain stopped and we enjoyed the day and the game. A weather check and two ponchos made the difference.

Disaster situations are similar to that football game; to the unprepared they are tragedies, to the prepared they are inconvenient but tolerable disruptions to their lives.

On its surface disaster preparation is simple; list the potential disasters, plan for how you would handle each, then gather the materials you should have ready. Many guides make it sound so simple.

Our experience and observation shows that most disaster preparation guides are written from the perspective of basic survival... staying alive and remaining uninjured. This book goes well beyond those basic survival issues. This book will teach you techniques and tricks to get you through any disaster far more quickly, comfortably and with far less stress than ninety-five percent of your fellow sufferers.

Introduction

Watching the news we are frequently reminded of the many potential natural disasters that may befall us. Home fires, regional forest fires, floods, tornados, hurricanes, tsunami, earthquakes, snow and ice storms predominate the nightly news and our concerns.

Yet to a large extent it is the threat of smaller disasters, perhaps better characterized as serious disturbances, which are just as likely to affect our comfort and security. A home fire, a broken water pipe, a burglary, a large snow or wind storm blocking our travel routes, an extended regional power outage; any of these can be either a personal disaster or a minor disturbance, depending on how we have prepared beforehand.

Disasters and disturbances are going to happen. How seriously they affect us depends on our preparation. A handy fire extinguisher in the kitchen can make the difference between a smoky dinner mess and a home in ashes. An Emergency Packing Checklist can make the difference between comfort and crisis in the event of a forced evacuation.

In this booklet we hope to help guide you in finding your own best plan for disasters and disturbances. You will find here several model checklists and suggestions. They are meant as guides. Use them but modify them to best fit your personal situation. They are presented here in the order of importance as we see them.

Disaster preparation is worth the effort. You should be able to complete all of the initial steps in less than an hour and an annual update in fifteen minutes.

The extra security and peace of mind are well worth those few minutes of organization.

Preparing for Three Disaster Scenarios

Disasters come in three major forms. It is important to be prepared for each form.

1. An Instant Emergency Evacuation

You must leave instantly and may not be able to return. Typically a house fire.

2. A Civil Evacuation

You must get out of the home with no knowledge of when or whether you will be able to return. Typically a forest fire, flood, earthquake or atmospheric pollution crisis.

3. Being Stranded at Home

You become stranded at home with some essential services disrupted. Typically a snow storm, wind storm, flood or other blocked access. You may be stranded without power, water or gas for several days.

We cover each scenario separately.

An Instant Emergency Evacuation

Typical Scenario:

You awake with the smoke alarm screeching and the strong smell of smoke. (You do have a working smoke/CO alarm, don't you?)

The Goal

You want everyone, including pets, out immediately. You want to know everyone is safe.

Your Escape Plan

Take five minutes today to review home fire safety recommendations, to walk through your home and discuss escape routes with every family member. Look for two routes from every room, including windows. Confirm that any security windows and doors can be opened from inside. You all agree upon and establish a safe meeting point outside.

A Civil Evacuation

Typical Scenario:

A fire, storm or flood forces you to leave quickly. You have about five minutes to gather your things. Five minutes is a very short time if you are panicked and rushing around. However five minutes is plenty of time if you have prepared beforehand.

Your Civil Evacuation Goal

You have prepared your Escape Bag(s) with a few essentials.

You have prepared your Emergency Packing Checklist.

You can get to them quickly.

Your Civil Evacuation Plan

It is seldom practical to keep a fully equipped Escape Bag, loaded with all of our necessities, ready to grab and go. This plan is a compromise. You should adjust it to meet your own comfort level.

Our premise is that:

- You will prepare a bag already designated as your Escape Bag containing a few necessities along with copies of certain important documents
- You will have a few minutes to add to it before you leave.
The second key component is your Emergency Packing List, the checklist of items to be added before you leave the house.

Should you leave?

If civic authorities are involved they will direct your evacuation. However if you are making the decision on your own to pack up the car and go you should think carefully. Do you know the route is clear? Could you be trapped in your car? In some disaster situations, i.e.: snowstorms and floods, you may be safer and more comfortable riding it out at home. Think before you drive.

Your Escape Bag

This can be any piece of luggage you are willing to dedicate to being your Escape Bag. A handy size is a wheel-on under-seat flight bag.

This bag should always be ready to go, though it is not fully filled yet. Clearly label it with your name, phone numbers and address.

Put a few extra clothing items in it and perhaps some quantity of personal gear and meds. Include your Emergency Document Packet. But leave plenty of room to add stuff from your Emergency Packing List.

Emergency Document Packet

Your Escape Bag should have in it a zip-lock bag containing copies of the documents you might need. Suggestions include copies of your driver's license, passport, Social Security card, medical and insurance cards, advanced care directives and a contact list of your insurance agents along with your policy numbers. This is also a good place to include a copy of the addresses and phone numbers of everyone in your personal phone book.

Make three copies. Zip one permanently in your Escape Bag. Seal another in an envelope and send it to someone close to you but out of the area. In a worst case they can become your communications point.

Keep the third copy at home to review for necessary changes.

Emergency Packing List

Your Emergency Packing List is crucial. Ninety percent of the discomfort of evacuated victims comes not from being away but from having panicked and, not thinking clearly, failing to bring along basic necessities and comforts.

Your Emergency Packing List is the list of items you want to grab at the last moment and stuff in your Escape Bag as you flee.

Most of the items you will want and need will not already be in your Escape Bag; you use them every day... cell phone, cell phone chargers, meds, personal grooming items, personal phone book and calendar, wallet, check book, credit cards and insurance cards, laptop and power cord, keys, flashlight, glasses, hearing aids and extra batteries, pet crate, pet food and meds, etc.

List all the things you would pack for a short trip.

By preparing an Emergency Packing List you can gather those items quickly and be confident you "have everything" as you go out the door. You don't have to think, just follow the list.

Start your Emergency Packing List now. Keep it in front of you for three or four days and add to it as you think of things. When you are satisfied make at least two copies. Put one in your Escape Bag and another where you will find it, perhaps tucked next to the fire extinguisher. Next, pack everything once in your Escape Bag to see what fits.

Think now about how you will pack it and how you will deal with the items that don't fit.

Stranded at Home

Typical Scenario:

You awake to discover the power is off and your escape routes are snowed in, flooded or otherwise blocked. You are stuck at home for an indefinite time, without utilities.

Preparation:

Your Stranded at Home Goal

You keep enough food and water on hand to live comfortably for at least five days without utilities. You keep on hand alternate sources of light and communications.

Your Stranded at Home Plan

Food

If the power is off your refrigerated items will begin to age and become unusable. Most will be good for a couple of days if they don't have to be cooked.

To be secure also keep on hand a five day supply of canned, dried or other nonperishable foods that do not require cooking or refrigeration.

These can be your regular rotating canned goods and supplies as long as you make it a habit to keep several extras of each on hand.

Don't forget the manual can opener; it would be embarrassing to have to survive on crackers and water while staring at a stack of cans and a powerless electric can opener.

Water

Gallon jugs of water are the easiest to handle. Keep at least five gallons on hand, more if there are several living there.

If you have sufficient warning, fill the bathtub. It can be scooped to flush toilets, etc.

Power and Light

Candles work well for basic light. For safety, do not carry them around lit. Secure them on good solid fireproof bases away from flammables before lighting. The big, round candles work well, last a long time and are most stable. The thin tapers are most dangerous and should be avoided.

Don't forget matches, preferably some of them kept in waterproof cases.

Flashlights

Keep several LED flashlights with extra batteries; at least one flashlight for each person plus a couple of extras.

Add a camp lantern. Not the old gas type but one of the modern LED types.

Generator

Generators range from small suitcase size gasoline models to large whole-house propane or diesel. A generator is nice if you can afford it but not a necessity. A generator requires periodic maintenance to keep the gas fresh and the internal parts lubed.

Generators require fuel. If you are really planning on a generator in a potential crisis it is necessary to consider how much fuel you keep on hand vs. the burn rate per hour.

Communication

A standard phone: Have one standard phone in the house. A regular plug-it-into-the-wall phone will usually continue to work with the power off. The wireless portable phones won't work

. A cell phone: Cell service may be available even if the regular phone service is out; they are completely separate systems. The issue of having the cell phone battery die can be solved by recharging in your car. Be sure you have a car charger

. An AM-FM radio: It can be very disconcerting to be in the dark literally and figuratively, not knowing what's going on. Keep at least one battery operated radio in the house. Better yet are the crank operated radios. They are inexpensive and can extend your listening beyond the battery life.

A CB or FRS radio. These inexpensive two way radios may be your connection to the world if both your phones are out.

Batteries

And a final reminder: Stock fresh batteries for all the above devices. Someone once defined a flashlight as a device for storing dead batteries." Don't let that be you.

Appendix A

Emergency Packing List Suggestions

This list is intended to assist you in making your own Emergency Packing List, the items you probably do not already have in your Escape Bag. Use this list to jog your memory. As you develop your custom list don't list the items in the order we use here. List them in the order in which it is fastest to gather them. A good system is to go room-by-room, working your way closer to the exit.

Your Emergency Document Packet and a few other items should already be in the Escape Bag . Once you have your packing list organized, gather all the items and test putting them in your Escape Bag to be sure they will fit.

- Medicines: Prescriptions
- Over-the-Counter Medicines.
- Personal Hygiene Items
- Personal Phone Book
- Personal Calendar
- Keys
- Wallet
- Cash and Change
- Checkbook
- Credit Cards
- Medical Insurance Cards
- Glasses
- Hearing Aids with Extra Batteries
- Flashlight
- Cane or Walker
- Pets
- Pet Meds
- Pet Crate
- Pet Leash
- Pet Leash
- Laptop Computer or Tablet
- Power Cord s
- Cell Phone
- Wall Chargers
- 12 Volt Automobile Charger
- Small Bottle of Water
- A Few Snacks
- Jacket and Hat
- Children's Security Toys or Blankets

Appendix B

Emergency Document Packet Suggestions

This list is intended to assist you in making your own Emergency Document Packet, copies of documents you may need if you are away for an extended time. These should be copied now, placed in a waterproof zip-lock bag and put in your Escape Bag. We also suggest sending copies of some of the items to someone close to you but out of the area.

- Drivers License
- Passport
- Social Security Card
- Medical and Insurance Cards
- Prescription List
- Advanced Care Directives
- Contact List of Doctors
- Contact List of Insurance Agents
- Policy Numbers
- Personal Address Book
- Personal Phone Book

Appendix C

Emergency Contact Information Suggestions

This list is not for you. It is intended to let others know how to contact you or where to look for you in the event you are separated or injured. Send copies to at least two close family or friends out of your area. They can act as a communication center for the rest of your friends and family.

- Real Name(s) as on driver's license or other ID.
- Home address
- Home and Cell Numbers
- Designated family meeting place.
- Two places you might go if you are evacuated.
- Family member contact numbers
- Physical disabilities
- Medical needs and prescriptions

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