

What to do in case of Fire - or other natural disaster!

by Joanne Austin

With the terrible fires raging down south, it made me think, are we prepared for disaster here at home? Maybe you are prepared and would be ready to leave at a moments notice, but perhaps you need to update your plan of action. I found these on the Internet and thought I would share them with you.

In case of Fire or other Emergency

Once you are told to evacuate, that is the time to leave immediately so that fire officials can do their jobs and not worry about your safety. But, there are things you can do before being evacuated that will assure that you leave your home with the things you care about most. Create for your family, and for each member individually, a check-list of all the things that you will need for at least a few days away from home.

In addition, add the things that are absolutely irreplaceable. Think carefully about this, and don't make any assumptions about the seriousness of evacuation. Once you're asked to leave your home, you often are not allowed back until the fire has been fully contained, days later.

Family Matters

Your family members, including pets, are obviously the most cherished in your lives. Make sure to have ready all that children, elderly residents and pets will need to be away from home for at least a few days. For your pets, bring any food or medicine they might need over a few day period, as well.

Also, designate a relative or friend outside of your community who can be someone that other family members and friends can call to get updates on your situation, so that you're not worrying about making multiple calls to your contacts.

Prescriptions & Medicines

Again, you will need to assume that you will be away from home for at least several days. So bring with you any prescription information, and enough medicine to keep you covered. It's also a good idea to have a first-aid kit with you as well, in case you are sent to an evacuation center where sometimes those supplies run out.

Identification, Insurance & Important Papers

Gather up birth certificates, social security cards, banking information and your last year and current year's tax information. These are things that you will not be able to do without, in the event that your home is destroyed and you need to request federal assistance. Also collect all your homeowners or rental insurance and have it ready to go. This should include any photo/video documentation you've made of your valuables and receipts and proof of purchases.

The Irreplaceable

Items such as family photos and videos or important heirlooms can never be replaced. Rather than worrying about expensive pieces of technology, consider that your family memories are precious. Make sure that you can easily access your photo albums, videotapes, backup hard drives, etc., so that you won't forget them.

Make copies of documents

Here we're talking about birth certificates, social security cards, marriage licenses, passports, bank statements, insurance policies, wills, etc. It's even a good idea, after making the copies, to give them to another family member or friend, just in case your copies are destroyed. For the copies that you keep, make sure you put them in a waterproof container. This can be something as simple as a Ziploc bag. And if people are concerned about losing paper copies, or having too many papers floating around the house, try an electronic copy. Save your documents on hard drives, disks, or even in an e-mail. Electronic backup copies will save you in the end.

Get your insurance information in order

First off, if you don't have homeowner's insurance, or fire or flood insurance, get it now, especially if you live in an area that's prone to that type of damage. If you are insured, make sure you put that policy in a safe place. This goes back to the first point. And make sure you know the terms of that insurance policy. For example, once something happens (for instance, devastating wildfires), make your claim right away. And don't forget to take pictures or video of the damage.

Buy a fireproof safe

Depending on the size of the safe, it could run you anywhere from \$50 to \$200 ... on average. But this is certainly worth the investment. Another

important point to make: Don't think that you're safe with putting your valuables in a safe-deposit box at a bank or other institution. If a natural disaster like a fire, hurricane or earthquake hits, and destroys the bank, your valuables are no good in a safe-deposit box.

Prepare an emergency kit

It's important to gather things like a battery-operated radio, a flashlight, bottled water, food, a blanket, a first-aid kit, etc. — anything that you'll need. And pack it now. You won't have time or be able to think when you're rushing you and your family to safety. Do it now to save time later.

A family plan

Again, something to do right now. Let your family know where the important documents are, or, if you made copies, who has them. Come up with a meeting point in case you get separated. The same things we hear all the time, but so many people aren't doing them. Make a plan now.