Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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Texans, Get Ready!

Be Prepared to Survive and Recover from a Disaster

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You can help protect yourself and your household during and immediately after a catastrophe by making a disaster plan and a disaster kit. You and all members of your household need to be able to take care of yourselves without outside help for at least 3 days.

Special considerations include keeping food safe to eat, sheltering-in-place, and discussing a disaster with children.

Make a disaster plan

Create a disaster plan that fits your household's needs. Make sure that everyone knows how to respond to severe weather or any disaster that could occur in your area.

The plan should address escape routes, communications, utility shutoff and safety, important records, people with special needs, safety skills, and pet care.

Escape routes: Map out escape routes from each room in your house or apartment. Each room should have at least two exit points.

Conduct a practice session with all members of the household to make sure they know the escape routes. Choose a site outside the home for everyone to meet.

For neighborhood escape routes, keep a map on hand that shows the local streets. You can use it when the authorities provide evacuation instructions.

Communications: Designate a person for everyone to contact if the group is separated during a disaster. Each person should have the names and phone numbers for the designated person as well as all other household members. Have everyone carry this information in a cell phone, wallet, purse, or backpack at all times.

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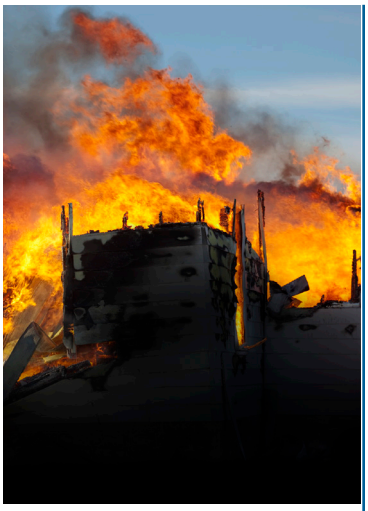


Communicating with emergency personnel: If you are injured in an accident or disaster, you may be unable to speak with emergency medical technicians. To help them determine your identity and contact your loved ones, add an emergency contact entry in your cell phones using instructions for iPhone or Android phones. Enter the name and phone number of the person whom the emergency services should call on your behalf.

Utility shutoff and safety: Teach all responsible household members how to turn off the gas, electricity, and water supplies. Ask the local utility company for proper shutoff procedures.

Caution: Never turn gas service back on by yourself. Service should be restored only by a trained professional.

Important records: Make copies of or scan your important documents and keep them in a safe place away from home. Such documents could include:

- List of medications
- Insurance policies
- Driver's license or other photo ID
- Bank account information
- Credit card information
- Financial records
- Inventory of home possessions

People with special needs: Take additional steps to help people who are disabled, elderly, or chronically ill (such as those who are on dialysis), as well as those who do not speak English. Determine how to overcome the challenges of those who are hearing or visually impaired.

Well before any disaster, call 211 to ask about services that are available for people with special needs and to register for evacuation and transportation assistance.

Safety skills: Family members should know how to administer first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and how to use a fire extinguisher.

Pet care: Because emergency shelters may not accept pets, designate a safe place to take yours. Most animal control shelters accommodate lost and stray pets first. They will probably be unable to take your pets.

When creating a disaster plan for pets, consider these tips:

- Ask hotels about their policies concerning pets and whether they would waive a "no pets" policy in an emergency.
- Make a list of pet-friendly places.
- Make a list of phone numbers and addresses of veterinarians and pet-boarding facilities.
- Ask friends outside the area if they would be willing to care for your pets.

Create a disaster supplies kit

A disaster supplies kit contains the basic items that members of a household will need during and immediately after a disaster. Every household should assemble a kit and keep it up to date. The kit should contain enough supplies to enable you and your family to take care of yourselves without outside help for at least 3 days.

Individual disaster kits can be packaged in backpacks. Larger kits can be stored in a portable trunk, old suitcase, or sealable plastic trash can.

Store the kits in a portable, airtight plastic container or rubber trash can, and make sure they are easy to reach.

A basic disaster supplies kit will contain:

- **Water:** Pack enough bottled water to last for at least 3 days. Each person will need 1 gallon of water each day.

- Food: Choose foods that you know your family will eat; that need no refrigeration, preparation, or cooking; and that can be eaten cold or heated on an outdoor grill. Examples are crackers, canned juices, dried fruit, nuts, peanut butter, canned chicken or tuna, and protein or fruit bars. Also pack a hand-operated can opener and disposable eating utensils and plates.
- Clean air items: If there is an explosion, you may need to create a barrier between yourself and the airborne contaminants. Pack nose and mouth protection masks (N-95 rating), plastic sheeting, and duct tape.
- Extra clothes: Pack one complete change of clothes, a pair of shoes, and a blanket for each person.
- First aid kit: Include antibiotic ointment, antibiotic towelettes, adhesive bandages, burn ointment, over-the-counter medications, prescribed medications and medical supplies, soap, sterile gauze, two pairs of sterile gloves, and a thermometer.
- Emergency items: Pack a battery-powered radio, flashlights, extra batteries, a whistle, shovel, basic tools, baby wipes, garbage bags, toilet paper and a state map.
- For infants: Pack bottles, baby wipes, diapers, formula, medications, powdered milk, and diaper rash ointment.
- For adults with special needs: Ask the doctor about storing prescription medications such as heart and high blood pressure medicines, insulin and other prescription drugs. Include supplies for dentures and contact lenses.
- Important documents: In addition to the set of important document kept offsite, you may also want to keep an extra set of copies in your disaster supply kit.
- Cash and change in a waterproof container: Cash can come in handy if ATMs or credit card machines aren't working in the days immediately after the disaster.
- *After a Disaster: How to Recover:* This publication (E-300 in English or E-300S in Spanish) offers advice on disaster recovery, including keeping safe, living without power, disinfecting water, clearing debris, and obtaining assistance. It is available free to download from https://agrilifebookstore.org.

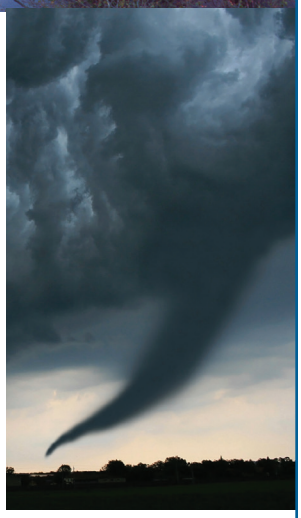
Pet care

A pet emergency kit can include:

- Medical and current vaccination records
- Pet medications
- First aid kit
- Leash and carrier/crate
- At least a 3-day supply of food and water
- Current photos of your pet in case you are separated
- Pet beds and toys
- Hand-operated can opener
- Cat litter and box
- Paper towels, plastic bags and disinfectant to clean up pet waste.

Maintain your kit!

Replace flashlight and radio batteries every 6 months and replace foods according to their expiration dates. Store the kit indoors in an easily accessible spot, such as a closet or pantry. Don't store it in the garage because hot summer weather can ruin food and medicines.



Food safety

Food can become unsafe after a flood, fire, disaster, or an extended loss of power. Here's how to save as much food as possible and reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

Keep meat, poultry, fish, and eggs refrigerated at or below 40°F and frozen food at or below 0°F. Keep thermometers in the refrigerator and freezer at all times to indicate whether the food is at safe temperatures.

Keep coolers and frozen gel packs on hand to help keep food cold if the power is out for more than 4 hours. If you live in a flood-prone area, store your food on shelves that will be safely away from contaminated water.

Deciding to stay or go

You may have to decide whether to evacuate or shelter-in-place. Evacuation means moving from an unsafe place to a safe place in a hurry. Sheltering-in-place is staying exactly where you are during a disaster; it may be at home, school, work, or a friend's house.

Evacuation: The authorities will not ask you to leave unless they determine that lives may be in danger. If local officials ask you to evacuate, do so immediately.

If you do not own or drive a car, make arrangements for transportation. Call 2-1-1 to register for transportation assistance during an evacuation as part of your family disaster plan.

Follow these guidelines during an evacuation:

- Listen to a local radio or TV station for news.
- Obey the instructions of local emergency officials.
- Wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and sturdy shoes.
- Take your pets with you.
- Grab your disaster supplies kit.
- Use the travel routes specified by local authorities.

Sheltering-in-place

Some conditions may require that you shelter-in-place. Listen to local officials on how to shelter-in-place, and remain there until they tell you that it is safe to leave.

The directions for sheltering-in-place depend on the type of emergency situation:

- Tornado warning: Go to an interior, underground, or wind-safe room without windows.
- Chemical attack: If possible, take shelter on an upper floor in an interior space without windows, and seal the space using plastic sheeting and duct tape. If you do not have a second floor, choose a room with few or no windows and few doors. Arrange for access to a bathroom if possible.
- Nuclear attack: Take shelter below ground in an interior space without windows. If you do not have such a shelter, listen to local authorities for the next best option.

Discussing a disaster with children

During emergencies, children often feel afraid, confused, and worried. To help them feel more secure, discuss the disaster with them.

Assume that the children know about the disaster. Children know more than you think. They are often exposed to the events as soon as they are able to watch television and interact with others.

Reassure them. Help your children feel safe by giving them reassurance. Be realistic—although you try to support and protect them, you cannot prevent all bad things from happening. Tell them that you love them, no matter what happens.

Be available. Stay in close contact with your children and let them know that it's OK to talk about unpleasant events.

Talk about how you feel. Sharing your feelings can let children know that others also are upset by the events.

Recognize their fears. Support your children's concern for people they do not know. Children often are afraid not only for themselves, their families, and their friends, but also for people they do not know.

Be aware of other emotions. Look for feelings beyond fear, such as anxiety or confusion. Let the children express all of their emotions.

Find emotional outlets. Help your children use creative outlets such as art and music to express their feelings.

Help them take action. Children may want to take action. The action can be very simple, such as writing a letter or getting involved with a disaster preparedness organization.

For more information

Preparing Your Evacuation Grab and Go Box, located on the Texas EDEN website at http://texashelp.tamu.edu, gives tips on creating a financial documents kit.

Personal and Family Financial Records Inventory (EFCS-005) is a checklist of documents that can be downloaded from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Bookstore at http://agrilifebookstore.org.

Get Prepared at www.ready.gov offers information on family disaster plans.

For local training courses on how to administer first aid and CPR or how to use a fire extinguisher, visit www.redcross.org.

For advice on when to save food and when to throw it out, see *After a Disaster* at Agrilifebookstore.org and *A Consumer's Guide to Food Safety* at http://texashelp.tamu.edu.

Acknowledgments

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