

Evacuation Guide

If you think you are hearing more these days about hurricanes and tornadoes—or earthquakes and tsunamis, or landslides and volcanoes—you are right. In 2020 alone, there were 22 separate and record breaking, [billion-dollar weather and climate disasters across the United States](#). Even though those events caused tremendous damage, luckily they claimed fewer lives. Much of that credit goes to improved early-warning systems and overall crisis management. One strategy in particular has positively impacted safety: evacuation. And it only continues to grow more popular, as a recent Washington Post investigation revealed that [nearly one in three Americans live in a county hit by a weather disaster](#) during Summer 2021 alone.

Experts know that in matters of risk management, advanced preparation goes a long way to keeping you and your family safe. This holds especially true in situations that require you to flee your property. So, here are some best practices for evacuations, before or during a disaster.

Making a plan

Specifically, know where you can go—and how you are going to get there.

- *Determine your property's exposure, then establish an evacuation zone.*
Does your home stand in an area that is susceptible to floods or wildfires or built near a fault line? Similarly, are you in a potential path of an incoming hurricane or tornado? Where you are informs where you need to go should you have to evacuate.
- *Set yourself up to receive emergency warnings.*
You can sign up for [all relevant alerts from local, state and national authorities](#). You can also tune into [NOAA Weather Radio](#) when hazards are imminent; it broadcasts the latest information from the nearest National Weather Service station.
- *Identify possible places to shelter.*
Think first about homes of friends and family, or other properties you own, for that matter. Hotels, of course, are another viable option. Consider landing spots in different directions, in the event that a particular path is blocked. Remember that wherever you go, your pets need to be welcome too.
- *Develop an evacuation plan.*

Escape routes might well be dependent on the type of natural disaster, not to mention where family members may be at various times of the day. Pick a rendezvous location somewhere beyond the potential hazard area; a single meeting place makes it easy to determine that everyone has gotten out safely. Also, make sure that those without a car have another form of transportation lined up. And, again, don't forget to account for your pets.

- *Develop a communication plan, too.*
Some experts recommend designating an out-of-area friend or relative to be the point of contact among family members who may not be part of the rendezvous group. That is because cell phones and internet systems often fail in disaster-struck areas, so it might be easier to connect if one person is in an unaffected area.
- *Disseminate the plan, then organize a practice run.*
Everyone impacted by the plan needs to be familiar with it. Use feedback from the group to tweak the particulars as necessary.
- *Prepare an emergency supply kit.*
Include the following: medication and other first aid necessities, cash and credit cards, flashlights, portable power banks, a battery-operated radio, non-perishable food, water, and important documents as well as financial records. Keep it handy in your home or store it in the trunk of your car when a disaster is approaching.
- *Fuel up.*
Put a family member in charge of filling the gas tank of your getaway vehicle at the first sign of an encroaching event.

Evacuating safely

Take no chances, but take all official guidance.

- *Leave before it is too late.*
If the local authorities issue an evacuation order, it is for a good reason. Be safe, not sorry. Further, evacuating at first ask means emergency responders can direct their attention to the disaster itself rather than those who have stayed behind.
- *Prioritize people and pets over possessions.*
Objects are almost all replaceable. In the moment, though, it may be hard to make unemotional decisions, so have an idea of what you will take with you if you need to leave quickly. Photos and other meaningful memories should top the short list.
- *Dress appropriately.*
Think articles of clothing that protect you from the elements: layers, long pants, long-sleeved shirts, closed-toe shoes.
- *Secure your home—but only if time allows.*
Unplug electrical equipment. Shut off water and gas. Fasten windows and doors. Again, though, your safety comes first. Do not put yourself at risk to protect your property.
- *Stay connected to FEMA.*
Download [the organization's mobile app](#) for weather alerts, shelter information, and other disaster assistance.

- *Keep your eyes on the road.*

First, trust the professionals. Whoever instituted that roadblock you are thinking about ignoring, knows more about the possibility of flash floods, landslides, and the like than you do. Better to focus your attention on collapsed pavement, washed-out bridges, and debris that might be strewn along your path.

Sheltering in place

Only when leaving is impossible.

- *Get to the safest possible spot. This is disaster dependent. Specifically...*
 - For tornadoes: below-ground or interior space without windows.
 - For hurricanes, floods and landslides: the highest place is often the best one.
 - For tsunamis: get as far from the water as you can. (Note: If you are a tourist in a tsunami zone, take the time to learn the local evacuation protocols.)

Settling in back home

Only when returning is allowed.

- *Prepare for disruptions.*

Before you head back, charge devices and fill your gas tank, so you are powered up no matter what the situation is upon your return. Similarly, bring water and non-perishable foods.
- *Watch for danger.*

Avoid downed power lines; electricity may still be coursing through them. When possible, report the damage to the local utility company.
- *Stay connected.*

Let friends and family know that you have arrived back home safely and continue to heed all official statements until things are back to normal.

Visit FEMA's [National Risk Index for Natural Hazards](#) to learn more about major concerns in your area.

This material is provided for general information purposes only. No liability is assumed based on usage of information contained herein.

In any natural disaster, the most important thing to do is follow emergency guidelines and orders. Only after you and your family are out of harm's way should you call your account executive or our 24/7 claims line at **(800) 221-5830** to inform us of your circumstances. We guarantee a quick response and step-by-step guidance throughout the claims process.