

Basic information for Evacuating and Returning Home

The following American Red Cross preparedness information is from the Advisory Council on First Aid and Safety and Preparedness (ACFASP), a Red Cross group of experts. Knowing what to do before a disaster other emergency strikes can help give you the skills and confidence to act in a manner that truly makes a difference for you and those you love.

BEFORE A HURRICANE OR OTHER DISASTER HITS

Keep basic emergency supplies in an easy-to-carry emergency preparedness kit that you can take with you in case you must evacuate.

• Water—one gallon per person, per day (3-day supply) • Food—non-perishable, easy-to-prepare items (3-day supply) • Flashlight • Battery-powered or hand-crank radio (NOAA Weather Radio, if possible) • Extra batteries • First aid kit • Medications (7-day supply) and medical items • Multipurpose tool • Sanitation and personal hygiene items • Copies of personal documents (medication list and pertinent medical information, proof of address, deed/lease to home, passports, birth certificates, insurance policies) • Cell phone with chargers • Family and emergency contact information • Extra cash • Emergency blanket • Map(s) of the area

Plan what to do if you have to evacuate

- Decide where you would go and what route you would take to get there. You may choose to go to a hotel/motel, stay with friends or relatives in a safe location or go to an evacuation shelter if necessary.
- Plan ahead for your pets. Keep a phone list of pet-friendly hotels/motels and animal shelters that are along your evacuation routes.

Emergency Contact Cards for All Household Members

- Get your cards online at <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/ECCard.pdf>.
- Print one card for each family member.
- Write the contact information for each household member, such as work, school and cell phone numbers.

If you need to evacuate, quickly take steps to protect your home and belongings. Bring items you think you will need for a prolonged stay away from home.

- Tell your out-of-area contact person where you are going and when you expect to get there.
- Bring things indoors; lawn furniture, trash cans, children's toys, garden equipment, clotheslines, hanging plants and any other objects that may be blown around or swept away.
- Turn off electricity at the main fuse or breaker and turn off water at the main valve.
- Leave natural gas on, unless local officials advise otherwise, because you will need it for heating and cooking when you return home. If you turn gas off, a licensed professional is required to turn it back on, and it may take weeks for a professional to respond.
- Turn off propane gas service valves. Propane tanks often become damaged or dislodged in disasters.
- Unplug electronic devices and turn off all utilities except the natural gas (unless advised otherwise).
- Get in touch with your out-of-area contact person and let them know where you will be going and when you expect to get there.

Plan to take your pets with you in an evacuation. If it is not safe for you to stay, it is not safe for them either.

- Know which hotels and motels along your evacuation route will accept you and your pets in an emergency. Call ahead for reservations if you know you may need to evacuate. Ask if no-pet policies could be waived in an emergency.
- Know which friends, relatives, boarding facilities, animal shelters or veterinarians can care for your animals in an emergency. Prepare a list with phone numbers.
- Although your animals may be more comfortable together, be prepared to house them separately.
- Include your pets in evacuation drills so that they become used to entering and traveling in their carriers calmly.
- Make sure that your pet's vaccinations are current and that all dogs and cats are wearing collars with securely fastened, up-to-date identification. Many pet shelters require proof of current vaccinations to reduce the spread of disease.
- Consider having your pet "microchipped" by your veterinarian.
- Keep items in an accessible place and store them in sturdy containers so that they can be carried easily. Your kit should include—
 - Sturdy leashes, harnesses and/or carriers to transport pets safely and ensure that they can't escape.
 - Food, drinking water, bowls, cat litter/pan and a manual can opener.
 - Medications and copies of medical records stored in a waterproof container.
 - A first aid kit.
 - Current photos of you with your pet(s) in case they get lost. Since many pets look alike, this will help to eliminate mistaken identity and confusion.
 - Information on feeding schedules, medical conditions, behavior problems, and the name and number of your veterinarian in case you have to foster or board your pets.
 - Pet beds and toys, if easily transportable.
- When the disaster approaches:
 - Ensure that all pets are wearing collars with securely fastened, up-to-date identification.
 - Check that your pet disaster supplies are ready to take at a moment's notice.
 - Bring pets inside so you won't have to search for them if you need to leave quickly.
 - The behavior of pets may change dramatically after a disaster, becoming aggressive or defensive, so be aware of their well-being and protect them from hazards to ensure the safety of other people and animals.

RETURNING HOME AFTER A HURRICANE OR FLOOD

Before returning...

- Find out if it is safe to enter your community or neighborhood. Follow the advice of your local authorities.
- Bring supplies such as flashlights, batteries, bottled water and nonperishable foods in case utilities are out.
- Plan for delays when traveling. Bring extra food, water, pillows, blankets and other items that will make the trip more comfortable. Keep the fuel tank of your vehicle as full as possible in case gas stations are crowded, out of fuel or closed.

- Find out if local medical facilities are open and if emergency services are functioning again. Do NOT call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number to do this.
- Understand that recovery takes time. Focus on the positive and have patience. Others will have similar frustrations.

First Inspection...

- If possible, leave children and pets with a relative or friend. If not, keep them away from hazards and floodwater.
- Before entering your home, look outside for damaged power lines, gas lines, foundation cracks and other exterior damage. It may be too dangerous to enter the home.
- If your home was flooded, assume it is contaminated with mold. Mold increases health risks for those with asthma, allergies or other breathing conditions.
- Open doors and windows. If the house was closed more than 48 hours, let it air it out before staying inside for any length of time.
- Turn the main electrical power and water systems off until you or a professional can ensure that they are safe. NEVER turn the power on or off, or use an electrical tool or appliance while standing in water.

Cleaning your home...

- Throw out all food, beverages and medicine exposed to flood waters and mud, including canned goods and containers with food or liquid that have been sealed shut. When in doubt, throw it out.
- Some cleaning solutions can cause toxic fumes and other hazards if mixed together.
- If you smell a strong odor or your eyes water from the fumes or mixed chemicals, open a window and get out of your home.
- Clean hard surfaces (flooring, countertops and appliances) thoroughly with hot water and soap or a detergent.
- Take care of your pets
 - Watch your animals closely and keep them under your direct control as fences and gates may have been damaged.
 - Pets may become disoriented, particularly if the disaster has affected scent markers that normally allow them to find their home.
 - Be aware of hazards at nose and paw or hoof level, particularly debris, spilled chemicals, fertilizers and other substances that might not seem to be dangerous to humans.

Recovery

EMOTIONAL HEALTH

- Return to as many personal and family routines as possible. The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is having a devastating impact on the wildlife and people whose life and livelihood depend upon its waters, marshes and shores. Eleven lives were lost and it may take many years before the region recovers. Whether we're directly or indirectly affected by the spill, we may all be experiencing strong feelings of anger, sadness, fear and anxiety. *Why can't they plug the hole? When will the oil stop spilling into the Gulf?*
- While we find ourselves with more questions than answers, experts inform us that ecosystems have previously survived and recovered from very large oil spills. Over time,

beaches get scrubbed by waves and storms. Vegetation in surviving marshlands can recover within a few years.

- As we all struggle to cope with this crisis, it is helpful to remember that humans are naturally resilient—have the capacity to “bounce back” after difficult times. For centuries, we have survived natural and manmade disasters and, in many cases, have emerged stronger and wiser. In addition, there are steps we can take right now to build our resilience and successfully cope with this crisis:
 - **Maintain a Hopeful Outlook.** Know that many scientists and experts are working hard to stop and clean up the oil spill. It may take time, but some day the oil will stop spilling into the Gulf. We have strong allies--the air, water and sun help to evaporate, dissolve and breakdown the oil. Progress and recovery will take time and patience will be a key to maintaining a hopeful outlook.
 - **Make Connections.** Keep in touch with family members, friends and neighbors. We are not alone during this difficult time and we can find comfort and strength when we receive and provide support to those around us. Helping others will also increase our sense of purpose and accomplishment and reduce feelings of helplessness.
 - **Stay Informed, But Don't Overdo It.** Stay informed about the oil spill. This can reduce anxiety resulting from rumors or projections that are not grounded in fact. Those living in the Gulf Coast region can use information provided by government officials and community leaders to learn about newly available resources or to respond to health and safety alerts. At the same time, we can increase our stress by watching or reading too much news coverage of these events. ***It is especially important to limit children's exposure to the media.***

- The Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis is very distressing. However, we all have experience coping with stressful life events and we can draw upon those experiences to help us cope with today's new challenges. There are reasons to be hopeful for the future and there are steps we can take to increase our resilience and successfully cope with this crisis. Additional information and resources are available in the [Preparedness Fast Facts](#) section of this website (insert link) and the American Psychological Association has useful resources which can be found at <http://apa.org/helpcenter/index.aspx>.

- In the aftermath of a crisis, most stress symptoms are temporary and will resolve on their own in a fairly short amount of time. However, for some people, these symptoms may not go away as quickly as they would like and it may influence their relationships with family and friends. If you find yourself or a loved one experiencing some of the feelings and reactions listed below for 2 weeks or longer, this may be a sign that you need to reach out to a licensed mental health professional for additional assistance:
 - Crying spells or bursts of anger
 - Difficulty eating
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Losing interest in things
 - Increased physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches
 - Fatigue
 - Feeling guilty, helpless or hopeless
 - Avoid family and friends