

Emergency Preparedness: Evacuation

Rick Griffiths¹

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New Mexico is at risk for drought, wildfires, floods, flash floods, high winds, landslides, severe winter storms, severe thunderstorms, hail storms, tornadoes, and earthquakes. It's easy to think disasters won't happen.

However, the more prepared you are before a disaster occurs, the less impact it will have on your life.

In most cases, sheltering at home is the safest action to take during a disaster. NMSU Extension Guide G-109, *Emergency Preparedness: Sheltering at Home* (https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_g/G109.pdf), provides recommendations to prepare for that event. This guide provides recommendations on how to prepare to evacuate your home or community should they become unsafe.



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HAVE A PLAN

It is important to have an evacuation plan in place for local and community evacuations. A local evacuation will occur if your home or neighborhood becomes unsafe, such as in the event of a gas leak. A community evacuation occurs when the entire community is unsafe, such as during a wildfire. In either event, the planning is very similar.

Local Evacuation Plan

Identify several places you could go in the event of a local disaster. These may include the homes of relatives or friends in different parts of the community, or a local hotel. Community centers, churches, schools, chapter houses, or fair grounds may also open as a community shelter.

Community Evacuation Plan

Identify several routes out of the community in different directions. In most cases, you will be evacuating away from a storm or disaster that will be blocking travel in specific directions, so have alternatives. Additionally, most

¹Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent, San Juan County Extension Office, New Mexico State University.



people will be evacuating on the main roads out of the community, so identify alternative routes to travel as well. After planning your evacuation routes, plan a final destination for you and your family to go until it is safe to return.

Reunification Plan

Evacuations happen very quickly, and there may not be time to wait for family members to return home before you have to leave. It is important to plan meet-up points along your evacuation routes so everyone can safely move outside the danger zones. As part of this plan, you should also decide who will pick up children and pets. Children away from home, such as at school, will be evacuated as a group to local shelters, so ask the staff at your children's schools and other organized activities what their evacuation and parent reunification plans are and include them in your family's plans. Older children away from home on their own should know the family's evacuation plan and where to meet parents if an evacuation has been ordered. It is also recommended that parents pin a family photo of themselves and their children inside each child's backpack. The photo should also include everyone's names, contact information, and an outside emergency contact; this will help shelter staff in reunifying your family.

Family Communication Plan

Communication systems like phone lines and cell-phone networks often become overwhelmed during a disaster. Therefore, you should have a plan to communicate with family and friends both inside and outside the disaster area. To communicate with family and friends inside the disaster area, have a designated

texting app. Texting uses the cellular data network, which is less utilized during disasters and is less likely to fail.

To communicate with friends and family outside the disaster area, pick one person to serve as a point of contact and send them updates on your family's health, safety, and movements. As part of your preparation, let the rest of your friends and family know they can get information about you and pass information to you through this one person. This way you can focus on evacuating and not trying to communicate with everyone checking up on you. Additionally, if social media is available,

it can be helpful to post an update letting loved ones know you are safe and evacuating.

GET PREPARED

Vehicle

Keep your vehicle properly maintained to be able to drive long distances on short notice. This includes having fluids, filters, belts, brake pads, and tires changed as needed. Additionally, keep the vehicle stocked with maintenance supplies, including run flat compressed air canisters, road triangles or flares, ice scrapers, paper maps, jumper cables, and windshield cleaner and wipers. Finally, keep your fuel level above a half tank normally, and if you are under an evacuation warning, keep your fuel level as high as possible so you don't have to wait in gas lines.

Evacuation driving tips

- Do not drive through flooded areas or roads; you can lose control of the car in as little as six inches of water, and your car can begin to float in as little as one foot of water.
- Flood waters can weaken roadways, which may collapse under the weight of a car.
- Avoid downed power lines if you encounter them; if a power line falls on your car, stay inside until a trained technician removes the line.
- Keep cat litter or sand in your car to improve tire traction if you get stuck.

Financial Documents

After a disaster you will need to work with your financial institutions as you recover from the event. This may include contacting your bank and credit card providers to let them know you are traveling and there will be irregular use on your accounts, turning off utilities, filing insurance claims, and contacting your mortgage and loan providers to let them know you are filing a damage claim on your insurance. It is important to let all your financial providers know you have been affected by a disaster because most institutions will have special policies to help you.

To help this process, you will need the contact information, account numbers, and passwords to all your financial accounts. It is recommended that you keep an emergency binder with that information plus all your active property, renters, health, and life insurance policies and statements; property deeds and rental agreements; vehicle registration and ownership paperwork; proof of residency; social security cards; birth certificates; child vaccination records; and pet ownership and vaccination records. If you have additional financial records, include them as well.

Pets

If you have a pet, you should have an evacuation plan and emergency supplies for them. Emergency shelters may not allow pets to enter the human shelter. However, many communities are including pet shelters in their emergency management plans. At most pet shelters, you will need to provide your pet's own supplies, such as food, cages, bedding, toys, and medications. Contact your local office of emergency management for information on how your community plans to shelter pets and what emergency supplies your pet will need. As you develop your community evacuation plan and routes, identify pet friendly hotels or boarding kennels you can use along the route, and make sure to have all of your pet's medical records with you. If you have not microchipped your pet, do so and update its stored information to include an out of town emergency contact. For more information, see the Federal Emergency Management Agency fact sheet "Prepare for Emergencies Now: Information for Pet Owners" (https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1390846777239-dc08e309debe561d866b05ac84daf1ee/pets_2014.pdf).



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Medical

During an emergency, you should be prepared to handle both ongoing family medical issues and any acute issues that may arise. To handle acute medical needs during an emergency, have a well-equipped first aid kit. For ongoing medical issues, have seven days of medications on hand if possible, as well as needed medical supplies, such as hearing aid batteries, contact lenses and cleaning supplies, a repair kit for glasses, and blood glucose testing supplies and equipment. Additionally, add over-the-counter medications your family may need, such as pain relievers, allergy medications, and diarrhea/constipation medication to your emergency storage. When you buy new medical supplies for your family's general use, switch them with your emergency supplies to ensure your kit's supplies don't expire.

Assemble an Emergency Supply Kit

During an evacuation and after a disaster, you will need to survive on your own for several days. It is recommended that you prepare a portable emergency supply kit that will last your household at least three days and that you can transport on foot for up to two miles. Therefore, the kit should be easily transported, such as in a wheeled suitcase, storage container, or duffel bag. It should also be stored where it's easily accessible.

The following items are recommended to be included in your emergency supply kit:

- One gallon of water per person and pet per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation
- Non-perishable food items, such as protein or fruit bars, dry cereal or granola, peanut butter, dried fruits, freeze dried meals, etc.

- Infant formula, bottles, diapers, wipes, and diaper rash cream (if needed)
- Pet food and extra water for your pet, and their leash, harness, cage, kennel, and litter (if needed)
- Manual can and bottle openers
- First aid kit
- Feminine supplies and personal hygiene items
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags, and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Flashlight
- Batteries
- Whistle to signal for help
- Cell phone with chargers and a backup battery
- Prescription medications
- Non-prescription medications, such as pain relievers, anti-diarrhea medication, and antacids or laxatives (appropriate for adult and child usage for your family members)
- Glasses and contact lens solution
- Cash or traveler's checks (in small denominations)
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person
- Complete change of clothing appropriate for your climate, and sturdy shoes
- Fire extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- All-in-one silverware/plate kit (mess kit)
- Paper cups, paper plates, paper towels, and plastic utensils
- Paper and pencil
- Books, games, puzzles, or other activities for all family members

After assembling your emergency supply kit, keep it in an easily accessible, cool, dry place. Replace expired items as needed and update the kit yearly based upon your family's changing needs.

Away from Home Emergency Supply Kit

In addition to your main emergency supply kit, it is recommended that you keep a car and office emergency supply kit. These kits should include enough supplies to last you at least 24 hours, and include water, food, a first aid kit, hygiene supplies, medications, and a change of clothes and walking shoes. In the event of an evacuation, you will use this kit to evacuate your current location to meet your family at your planned reunification point.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Ready.gov Evacuation website: <https://www.ready.gov/evacuation>
- Ready.gov Financial Preparedness website: <https://www.ready.gov/financial-preparedness>
- Ready.gov Make a Plan website: <https://www.ready.gov/plan>
- FEMA publication "Prepare for Emergencies Now: Information for Pet Owners": https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1390846777239-dc08e309debe561d866b05ac84daf1ee/pets_2014.pdf
- NMSU Extension Guide M-116, *Treating and Storing Water for Emergency Use*: https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_m/M116.pdf

SOURCES

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Rick Griffiths is the San Juan County Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent at NMSU. He received his M.Ed. in adult learning from Westminster College of Salt Lake City and B.S. from Southern Utah University in family and consumer science education. His areas of focus are personal finance, health and wellness, and emergency preparedness.

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