

Ready or Not: Safety Considerations

UC ANR emergency information and resources—before, during, and after

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Be prepared for a disaster

This issue of Ready or Not provides information and safety considerations for you and your family before, during, and immediately after a natural disaster strikes.

Find out what types of natural disasters are most likely to occur in your area. Local emergency agencies, your local Red Cross chapter, [redcross.org/](https://www.redcross.org/), and Cooperative Extension offices have information on preparing for possible natural disasters common to your local area.

Learn about your county's emergency alert systems. Many communities have disaster-specific warnings. Sign up for your county's emergency notification system to receive emergency alerts and evacuation notices. Find out what alarms may sound like, what they mean, and what to do should you hear them ([ready.gov/alerts](https://www.ready.gov/alerts)).

Find out about disaster plans at your workplace and your child's school or day care. Create a family disaster plan to help you and your

family safely cope during and after a natural disaster. For more information, refer to Issue 4: Emergency Considerations for Children and Families.

If you need to evacuate

Some disasters, like fires and floods, may require you to leave your home, place of work, or other locations. You may be ordered to evacuate on a very short notice.

Never disregard an official evacuation order. When ordered to evacuate, do so immediately; do not wait until the last minute to leave. Listen to your radio for information on evacuation routes.

- If there is time, take emergency supplies with you. Keep things in perspective: Family and personal safety is more important than property and possessions.
- If time allows, turn off utilities. Always lock your home when you leave it.



- Move quickly and calmly and avoid taking chances. If possible, keep a portable radio and smart phone with you for up-to-date emergency instructions.
- Know where you are going before you leave and always follow the suggested evacuation route. Dangerous obstacles may be blocking alternate routes.

General safety after a disaster

The first and most important thing is to check that your family is safe from falling debris, fire, flood crests, or other immediate hazards.

- Check for injuries. Give first aid for minor injuries and seek medical aid for major injuries.
- Cooperate fully with local authorities, rescue crews, and local Red Cross chapters.
- If possible, help locate shelter, food, clothing, transportation, and medical help for victims.
- Obey health regulations for personal and community protection against disease epidemics.
- Follow guidelines for food and water safety and preparation. (Issue 3 in the Ready or Not newsletter series contains food and water safety guidelines.)

Entering buildings after a disaster

It is extremely important to take precautions when entering a building after a disaster. The structure may be weakened; may pose safety hazards due to live electrical wires, broken gas pipes, or debris like broken glass; or may be contaminated with mold or sewage, which cause health risks.

Always use extreme caution when entering any damaged building. Make sure children are clear of the damaged building and cared for while you check the structure. Wear protective clothing and carry a flashlight. Never use an open flame, such as a candle, torch, or lantern. Do not smoke in the building. Learn how you can safely shut off your water, gas, and electricity at your residence.

Use your senses to seek out a gas leak. If you smell gas, leave the building immediately and call 911. Contact your gas company to repair the leak. Air out the building after the leak is repaired to remove gas fumes before reentering.

Watch for electrical shorts or live wires. If electrical shorts or live wires are found, turn off the main power switch and have an electrician check the system and restore power.

Watch for hazards. These can include nails, splinters, holes in floors and walls, falling plaster, and an undermined foundation. If you encounter a flooded basement, do not begin pumping out water until any flood waters are below basement level.

How to shut off gas

You should shut off the gas only if you notice structural damage to your house or if you smell or hear leaking gas.

The main shut-off valve is located next to your meter on the inlet pipe. Use a crescent or pipe wrench and give the valve a quarter turn in either direction. When the valve is crosswise on the pipe, the line is closed. Do not attempt to turn on the gas; this must be done by the gas company.

How to shut off electricity

Shut off electricity if there is evidence of damage to your house wiring. If you shut off electricity unnecessarily, though, you may lose the vital services of refrigeration and lighting.

Locate the fuse box or circuit breaker box to your house to turn off the main power. Many units will automatically shut off service to your house if there is electrical trouble.

Do not attempt to restore power if there is evidence of heat damage to wiring or to the fuse box or circuit breaker box. Call the power company or an electrician if you cannot restore service or if it seems dangerous.



Phone service and disaster

If it is not an emergency, do not use phones. You will only tie up phone lines and networks.

Use phones only for emergency purposes. Listen to your local radio station for the latest up-to-date disaster information.

Notify your relatives of your safety. Local authorities may waste time trying to locate you if you do not send word. It may be easier to use a phone outside the disaster area. If possible, have an out-of-state contact who can contact concerned relatives and friends in other areas of the country. This helps keep local phone lines and networks in the affected area from being overburdened. Write down phone numbers (in case your phone dies), bring phone chargers, and use emergency phone apps to find out information; communicate issues, needs, and location; and find emergency and recovery resources. Please refer to these websites for digital tips and apps:

- hsdl.org/c/
- inc.com/jessica-stillman/10-apps-to-help-you-survive-a-natural-disaster.html

Did you know?

Phone lines and cellular networks are not equipped to handle huge volumes of calls after a disaster. Use them for essential purposes only, not for browsing or entertainment.

Assisting people with disabilities

People with disabilities who are self-sufficient under normal circumstances may have to rely on the help of others in a disaster. The needs of older people often are similar to those of people with disabilities. If you know family, friends, or neighbors who are older or have disabilities, provide assistance whenever possible. Here are some things to keep in mind when you are assisting older people or people with disabilities:

- In an emergency, people with disabilities often need more time to make needed preparations. If you have any relatives, neighbors, or friends with disabilities, help them make an emergency plan so when a disaster does strike, they will be more prepared to respond quickly.
- Because disaster warnings are mostly delivered through audible means such as sirens, radio, and cell phone announcements, people who are deaf or hearing-impaired may not receive early disaster warnings and emergency instructions. You could provide them with the emergency information as it is broadcasted over the radio or television. Also, refer to your official county emergency alert system.
- Some people who are elderly, disabled, blind, or visually impaired may be extremely reluctant to leave familiar surroundings when the request for evacuation comes from a stranger. If possible, try to locate a familiar neighbor or a relative who can help explain what is happening and stay with them during the evacuation.
- In a disaster, a guide dog could become confused or disoriented. People who are blind or visually impaired may have to depend on others to lead them, as well as their dogs, to safety during a disaster.
- In most states, emergency shelters allow guide dogs to stay with owners. Check with your local emergency management officials for more information.
- People with impaired mobility who are lifted or carried are often concerned about being dropped. Find out the proper way to transfer or move someone in a wheelchair and the best exit routes from buildings.
- Some people with a mental disability may be unable to understand the emergency and become confused about what they should do and where to go. Be patient and understanding. You may need to lead them physically away from danger.



- Many respiratory illnesses can be aggravated by stress. In an emergency, oxygen and respiratory equipment may not be readily available. Send someone for help, then try to calm the person in need and let them know help is on the way.
- People with epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, and other conditions often have very individualized medication regimes that cannot be interrupted without serious consequences. Some people may not be able to communicate this information in an emergency. Look for a medical alert bracelet, which may identify an individual's medical condition.

For more information

Your county UC Cooperative Extension office may be able to advise you on preparing for emergency situations. Remember that being prepared will speed up the recovery process.

Refer to your county's website or call their office of emergency services for more information on how to sign up for your county's emergency notification system to receive emergency alerts and evacuation notices. Read more about emergency alerts at ready.gov/alerts.

About this publication

The Ready or Not Emergency Preparedness Newsletter Series is a resource for individuals and families. Each newsletter addresses a specific topic on how to prepare for a disaster. The series includes the following issues: 1: Planning for an Emergency; 2: Safety Considerations; 3: Food and Water; 4: Emergency Considerations for Children and Families; 5: Finances and Insurance; and 6: Time to Clean Up.

For more information about this publication, visit ucanr.edu/sites/CNH/.

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