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How To Prepare an Emergency Evacuation Plan

**Sandi Schwartz**

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Emergencies can happen to anyone at anytime. Learn how to keep your family calm, safe and together if you need to evacuate your home.

Living in Florida entails being ready to evacuate [when a hurricane approaches](#). More than once, my family had to get out of town when a large storm headed our way.

Fortunately, we had plenty of time to [prepare our home](#) and take an inventory of our belongings. We were also lucky enough to find a hotel on the other coast of Florida, or make it back to our summer home in New Jersey to weather the storm.

However, not all emergencies come with ample warning. We never know when disaster will strike, and [different types of emergencies](#) can happen to anyone at any time. Having a plan and knowing what to do in the event of an emergency can minimize the negative impact on you and your family.

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What Is an Emergency Evacuation Plan?

It's a detailed guide that outlines all the steps household members must take to exit any room in the house, leave the area and make it to a safe location. A well-thought-out plan prevents or limits confusion, chaos, injury, damage and stress during an emergency.

It often starts with [an evacuation order](#) from a local government or law enforcement official. According to [Law Insider](#), "persons subject to the order are encouraged to relocate outside of the geographic area covered by the order due to an imminent danger resulting from an earthquake, fire, flood, riot or other natural or man-made disaster."

According to Cheryl Nelson, a meteorologist, science reporter and certified lifestyle expert at [Prepare With Cher](#), "An emergency evacuation plan is something people need to do to save their [lives]. In some situations, you may not have a lot of time to evacuate. You need a family plan so everyone knows where all the exits are in the house and how to get out and where to go."

Emergency evacuation plans typically include the following components:

- A way to receive emergency alerts and warnings;
- Floor plan indicating exits, escape routes and where to shelter in place;
- Safe meeting place location;
- List of community shelter locations;
- Evacuation routes;
- Family communication plan;
- [Emergency preparedness kit](#);
- Home inventory for insurance purposes;
- List of other items to bring and where to find them, i.e. important documents, medication, clothing, money, food and water.
- Plan for pets, people with disabilities and those who can't drive.

It's best to include a checklist, maps of home exits and evacuation routes, and laminated cards with key contact information. Home evacuation plan templates are available at [Ready.gov](#) and [American Red Cross](#).

Types of Emergency Evacuation Plans

There are many different [types of emergencies and disasters](#) to consider, from home fire or gas leak to a natural disaster. Some may depend on where you live or the time of year. Others could happen anytime, anywhere.

No matter the type of emergency, your evacuation plan will have many of the same elements mentioned above. Some emergencies, like a fire or gas leak, require immediate evacuation. Others, like a hurricane or blizzard, provide enough warning time to prepare before leaving.

While it may be convenient to save your plan on your computer or phone, it's better to print it out. During an emergency, technology may not work or be accessible. Nelson recommends laminating a map of your home that highlights all exits and fire extinguishers, and at least two escape routes on each floor. Hang copies on the refrigerator and bedroom doors for everyone to see.

To learn more about different types of emergencies and how to prepare for them, visit [Ready.gov](#) and [American Red Cross](#).

Who Needs an Emergency Evacuation Plan?

No one is immune from potential disasters, no matter where they live.

"Everyone everywhere should have a plan," Nelson says.

"There is a lot of complacency in the world, and with climate change we are seeing more extreme events in areas that weren't as vulnerable before but now more people are at risk. If you are in an area with certain types of emergencies, know your risk and what types of disasters you are prone to. All of us are susceptible to house fires."

Practicing Your Emergency Evacuation Plan

Practicing your emergency evacuation plan is key to staying prepared and safe. Running through it lets all family members become familiar with what they need to do during an emergency. The [American Red Cross](#) recommends practicing your plan twice a year.

Nelson suggests referring to the floor plan and heading to the actual safe destinations. It's also helpful to hold practice drills for each type of situation, like exiting the house during a fire, or closing it up before a hurricane. Walk through the steps of grabbing your emergency kit and your pets and following your evacuation route. Make it fun by picking different scenarios out of a hat and keeping a timer.

By consistently practicing your evacuation plan, you'll work out the kinks and help everyone in the household feel calm and confident if an emergency should occur.

Choosing a Safe Destination

Choosing a safe meeting place during an emergency is critical to keeping your family together. Decide on a single location, but have a backup one as well. Some suggested meeting points include the end of the driveway, an intersection, a neighbor's house, a local restaurant within walking distance, etc.

"Know the evacuation routes and have paper maps since GPS might not work and landmarks may be gone," Nelson says. "Establish an out-of-town place you will go, such as a hotel or the home of a relative or family friend. Also, know your area shelters and have all of these mapped out so you aren't scrambling last minute."

What if your family isn't together at the time of the emergency? Be prepared to communicate with family members.

"It is so important to get to know your neighbors," Nelson says. "Your neighbors could end up being your first responder. Ask them to be the special person to meet your child if separated. And establish an out-of-town contact who family members can call."

Finally, if you have pets, consider them in your evacuation plan. Many shelters and hotels don't allow pets, so make sure your destination is pet-friendly by checking resources like [Petswelcome.com](https://www.petswelcome.com).

Community Resources To Tap Into

Every city or county has a disaster emergency management agency. Get in touch with your local jurisdiction and visit their website to learn your evacuation zone and other details.

[DisasterAssistance.gov](https://www.disasterassistance.gov) is a good place to start.

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**Sandi
Schwartz**

Sandi Schwartz is a multi-award-winning author of the book "Finding Ecohappiness: Fun Nature Activities to Help Your Kids Feel Happier and Calmer" and a freelance journalist specializing in sustainability, home and garden, green living, nature, and wellness. Her work has been featured in The Washington Post, National Geographic, Yahoo!, BobVila.com, Earth911, mindbodygreen, Verywell, and many more publications. She enjoys relaxing walks and bike rides, nature art, and her new meditation garden.

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