

Editor's Pick: Things To Include In An Emergency Kit that Could Save Your Life

Source: Written by Linda Melone

Are you ready for this year's hurricane season? It officially kicks off in June and runs through November, with the majority of storms occurring from August through October. Being proactive by creating an emergency kit and planning ahead can save your life.

Fortunately, hurricanes occur with plenty of warning and give you time to prepare. "The countdown to a hurricane usually begins a week prior to the storm," says Al Berman, president of DRI (Disaster Recovery Institute) International, a nonprofit certification and education organization. "With Hurricane Sandy (the deadliest and most destructive hurricane of the 2012 Atlantic hurricane season) we had a two-week countdown." This helps prevent last-minute panic and enables people to consider things they may need if they're forced to evacuate.

Assembling an emergency hurricane kit ahead of time save you from running out for supplies when a storm is imminent and other shoppers flock stores all at once. "It's a good thing to have because you never know when you'll have to evacuate," Berman adds. He also suggests keeping medical and insurance information in the cloud and recommends an app such as DropBox, which enables you to access your information anywhere.

"Create an emergency kit with enough supplies for three to seven days," says Ron Rabena, division president, AlliedBarton Security Services. Items to include in this kit:

- One gallon or more of water daily per person
- Non-perishable packaged or canned food and juices (diabetics should also pack sugar supplements)
- Handheld can opener
- Cooking tools/fuel
- Paper plates and plastic utensils
- Blankets and pillows
- Seasonal clothing and rain gear
- Medications and prescriptions
- Toiletries
- Battery operated flashlights and radio with spare batteries
- Backup batteries for your cell phone

You'll also need cash. "One of the most common things people forget is cash," says Erika Voss, chair of the Preparedness & Disaster Health Sub council of the American Red Cross Scientific Advisory Council. "ATMs may not work and stores may not be able to accept credit or debit cards." Also make sure your cell phone is fully charged, propane tanks are full as well as your vehicle's gas tank.

In addition, pack a map or two. "People also tend to rely on GPS, which may not be working in an emergency," says Voss. "Or you may want to conserve battery life on your phone." A map can help you route around heavy traffic or impassable roads.

You'll also need a basic **First-Aid kit**. NSF International, a public health and safety organization, recommends the following items:

- Antiseptic cream or disinfecting pads
- Moistened novelettes or soap (for cleaning)
- Assorted sizes of safety pins
- Latex gloves, scissors, tweezers
- Non-prescription drugs (pain relievers, etc.)
- Sterile adhesive bandages/gauze pads
- Sunscreen; tube of petroleum jelly

Optional additional tools and emergency supplies include:

- Extra glasses, contact lens case and solutions
- Fire extinguisher; flashlight and extra batteries
- Matches in waterproof container
- Needles and thread; tape
- Paper; pen or pencil
- Personal hygiene items (toilet paper, soap)
- Plastic bucket with tight lid; plastic garbage bags with ties (for personal sanitation uses)
- Pliers, wrench (to turn off home's gas and water)
- Signal flares; whistle; compass

Special needs items you may also want to include are a three-day supply of any prescription medications for any family members who need them. Store your items in an easy-to-locate, container that's also easy to carry. If the case itself isn't waterproof place individual items in sealed plastic bags. Check the contents of your emergency kit every six months and replace items as needed.

After the storm

As soon as the storm fades, Voss suggests taking the following steps: "First and most important, let friends and family know you're safe. If you don't have a phone or email, but you do have a wireless signal, you can do this quickly and easily by having the Red Cross Emergency App downloaded on your mobile device." You can configure your "I'm safe" message in advance and simply hit "send" once the danger of the hurricane has passed. Other than letting friends and family know you're safe, use the phone only for emergency calls.

Second, if you were evacuated, stay in place, says Voss. "Return home only when officials say it is safe." Third, continue listening to local area radio, NOAA radio or TV stations for the latest information and updates. "This gives you information on when areas are cleared, when power is restored, where to find ice, and other information that will keep you safe," says Voss. "And avoid drinking or preparing food with tap water until you are sure it's not contaminated."

If you're unsure if your water is safe to drink, you can use household chlorine to bleach water and make it safe for drinking. Here's how¹:

--Use chlorine bleach from a freshly opened bottle. Do not use scented bleaches, color-safe bleaches or bleaches with added cleaners.

-- Mix 1/8 teaspoon (approximately 8 drops) of bleach with a gallon of clear water. For cloudy water, use 1/4 teaspoon (approximately 16 drops) of bleach per gallon.

-- Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.

If the water has a slight scent of chlorine, you can use it, says Voss. "If you can't smell chlorine, discard the water and find another source.

If the water storage container requires sanitizing, add a teaspoon of unscented bleach to a quart of water, pour it into the storage container and shake well, making sure to coat the entire inside of the container. Let sit for at least 30 seconds, then pour out the solution and allow to air dry or rinse with clean, fresh water.

Dangers such as live wires exist even after the storm has passed, so use extreme caution. "It's tempting to walk around looking at damage," says Voss. "If you're out and about and see loose or dangling power lines, stay clear. Turn around and report them immediately to the power company."

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Plus, help others when you can. Voss suggests checking in with neighbors who may require special assistance, such as people with

infants, the elderly and people with disabilities.

- Use flashlights in the dark if the power goes out. Do not use candles
- Stay alert for extended rainfall and subsequent flooding
- Watch animals closely and keep them under your direct control
- Wear protective clothing and be cautious when cleaning up to avoid injury
- Take pictures of home damage, both of the building/house and its contents, for insurance purposes
- Stay out of any building that has water around it

Expect to be on your own for a minimum of three days after a hurricane, and often much longer, says Marshall Thompson, a member of the city of Malibu, California's community emergency response team. "People often think the first responders will get to them right away, but they often won't. The individual and his/her community need to be their own first responders, responsible for food, shelter and water. Thus, everything is essential, especially community networks for mutual aid and individual preparedness."

1 "Make Water Safe", CDC, Downloaded on July 31, 2015. https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/pdf/emergency/09_202278-B_Make_Water_Safe_Flyer_508.pdf



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