

## Faith Communities & Evacuation Planning

Large-scale evacuations ordered when a coastal storm or flooding is approaching, or smaller-scale evacuations due to a fire or environmental health hazard, may lead to long- or short-term displacement. Planning ahead for an evacuation for your household and your congregation can reduce stress and increase the likelihood that you will stay connected with your family and have the resources

TIP SHEET

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Evacuation should be addressed as part of everyone's planning efforts. Officials will tell you when to evacuate through the media and direct warnings systems. Evacuation is used as a last resort when a serious threat to public safety exists. If you must evacuate, **YOUR FIRST PLAN SHOULD ALWAYS BE TO STAY WITH FAMILY OR FRIENDS.**

In a planned evacuation, such as for a coastal storm or major flooding, residents will be advised of which areas are impacted and given guidance on how the evacuation will proceed - only follow designated routes. In an unplanned evacuation, such as for a hazardous material spill or terrorist attack, officials will advise you to leave the immediate area until the danger can be removed. Always have your go bag prepared and easily accessible in case of any evacuation. You and your family may not have time to assemble your belongings, and you may not be allowed back until the hazard has passed.

### PREPAREDNESS

#### Preparing Yourself, Your Household, and Your Loved Ones (and your household pets)

- **Have an Evacuation Plan** for your home (and your office). Familiarize yourself and others household members with all evacuation plans, emergency exits, and alternate means of evacuating your home, school, house of work and workplace. **If possible, make a plan to stay with friends or family outside of the effected area.**
- **Choose a meeting place** for connecting your loved ones and/or co-workers; identify a place both within the community and outside of the area where you could meet in case of an evacuation order.
- If you think you or a loved one will need assistance during an evacuation, ask people who are likely to be in the area if they can assist; **create a small network** (more than two people) that can help.
- **Create a communications plan**; ensure that everyone in your network knows each other's contact information and identify someone outside the area that everyone can call to make connections. (Caution; do not rely on cell phones, during many types of emergencies, cell phones do not work—memorize critical phone numbers and discuss alternative way to communicate with one another.)
- **Life Saving Evacuation Tools**
  - **Create a "Go-Bag,"** a collection of items you and your loved ones may need during an evacuation. A Go Bag should be packed in a sturdy, easy-to-carry container such as a backpack or suitcase on wheels. A Go Bag should be easily accessible if you have to leave your home in a hurry. Make sure it is ready to go at all times of the year. Look at the "other resources" section for a sample list and remember special needs items (extra medication).
  - **"Shelter-in-Place" Kits,** Keep enough supplies in your home to survive on your own, or shelter-in-place, for at least three days. If possible, keep these materials in an easily accessible, separate container or special cupboard. You should indicate to your household members that these supplies are for emergencies only. Check expiration dates of food and update your kits when you change your clock during daylight-saving times. Look at the "other resources" section for a sample list and remember special needs items.

#### Create a House of Worship Evacuation Plan

- **Identify emergency exits and procedures** for evacuating your house of worship and other facilities.
- **Hold evacuation drills** in your house of worship and review emergency exits and procedures before meetings and services.
- **Identify at least two alternate locations** to conduct religious rituals and hold programs. One should be in your community, the other outside of the area. Plan so that you may continue providing critical programs and services. **See NDIN Disaster Tip Sheet "Continuity of Operations Planning"**
- **Develop a risk-communications strategy** so that you can reconnect post-disaster/evacuation with congregations members and staff. Consider a reverse communications plan whereby congregants, staff, and program participants can call a central number and/or view a website to check for important messages regarding the status of your house of worship after an evacuation.

## EVACUATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, SENIORS, AND OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS

In the case of people with disabilities, seniors, and other special needs populations, preparing for evacuation is essential. Identifying evacuation needs before a disaster occurs is important and allows people to put support networks in place, or to identify equipment and necessary resources (such as evacuation chairs, accessible transportation, sensory alarms, etc.). As a religious leader, you can encourage your faith community to play a vital role in ensuring your congregants and neighbors with special needs have evacuation plans in place.

## DURING AN EVACUATION ORDER

### Get Information

- **Monitor information about evacuations** on the radio, television, internet, and through emergency response agencies.
- Listen to officials so that you can make decisions based on sound advice and instructions, and encourage others in your faith community to do this as well.
- **Evacuate** when directed by officials, or when in immediate danger.
- Continue to **monitor information and instructions** after evacuating, to determine when it is safe to return.

### Where to Go When Evacuating

Evacuations can result in short-term or long-term displacement from home, workplace, house of worship, or community. Although the a city/town or state may open public shelters, it is advised that people evacuate to friends' and family residences where they may be more comfortable, have access to support, and have appropriate dietary or religious observance needs.

### What if my children are in school?

U.S. schools are required by law to have plans for sheltering and evacuating students. If you do not know what your child's school has planned, you should contact the school and ask. You should not try to get to the school if the children are being sheltered there. Getting to their school may be difficult or impossible. You may not be allowed to enter the building. And transporting your children from their school may put them, you, and others at increased risk.

## American Red Cross—National Shelter System

The ARC National Shelter System has a new online locator for open shelters. This is a Google map that is automatically updated every 30 minutes with open shelter locations and population information from ARC chapters around the country. You can search for the nearest open shelter at any time, by address, city, state or zip code. ARC has thousands of possible shelter locations around the country and this map allows anyone to find shelters that are currently open because of an emergency situation.



**Search for Open American Red Cross Shelters Online at: <http://www.redcross.org/nss/>**

## SHELTER-IN-PLACE

Sometimes, government officials or emergency managers may recommend that people “shelter-in-place” rather than evacuate. This is likely to occur during a tornado or if there is a release (intentionally or unintentionally) of biological, chemical, or radiological materials into the air. The idea behind sheltering-in-place is to put a physical barrier between you and weather or airborne hazards. Some steps you can take if this occurs:

- **Listen for instructions** from officials
- **Seal off any openings in your home**, such as windows and doors: use masking tape and/or plastic sheeting
- **Move to an interior space** a basement or saferoom or, for airborne hazards, above the ground floor.

## OTHER RESOURCES

- American Red Cross (ARC)—Evacuations: [www.redcross.org/preparedness/cdc\\_english/evac-1.html](http://www.redcross.org/preparedness/cdc_english/evac-1.html)
- ARC—Chemical/Radiation Shelter-in-Place: [www.redcross.org/preparedness/cdc\\_english/Sheltering.asp](http://www.redcross.org/preparedness/cdc_english/Sheltering.asp)
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC) - Evacuation Centers: [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/evaccenters.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/evaccenters.asp)
- Emergency Evacuation Plan: [http://download.cpg.org/insurance/publications/pdf/Evacuation\\_Plan.pdf](http://download.cpg.org/insurance/publications/pdf/Evacuation_Plan.pdf)
- FEMA—Evacuation Plans: [www.fema.gov/plan/prepare/evacuation.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/plan/prepare/evacuation.shtm)
- FEMA—Ready America: Business Evacuation Plan: [www.ready.gov/business/plan/evacplan.html](http://www.ready.gov/business/plan/evacplan.html)
- FEMA—Ready American, Disaster Go Kit: [www.ready.gov/america/getakit/index.html](http://www.ready.gov/america/getakit/index.html)
- FEMA—Ready American, Shelter-in-Place Resources: <http://www.ready.gov/america/makeaplan/stayingput.html>
- Ready New York—Disaster Pet Guide: [www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/oem/html/ready/pets\\_guide.shtm](http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/oem/html/ready/pets_guide.shtm)

See [www.prepare.org](http://www.prepare.org) and [www.ready.gov/america](http://www.ready.gov/america) to obtain preparedness materials that address; planning for people with disabilities and other special needs, seniors, children, schools, and pet owners