

Assembling Your Disaster/Earthquake Kit

As we continue in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic, we should use this opportunity as a reminder to be fully prepared for any disaster, whether man-made or natural. The information in this article may be the most important information you read for the rest of the year. That is because your completed earthquake/disaster kit will be the key to you and your family's survival. In the past several months, in addition to the pandemic, there have been several measurable earthquakes in our southern California region, and in the US, we have seen tornados and tropical storms, floods and breached dams, wildfires, and even dust storms from the Saharan Desert. Additionally, there have been several large earthquakes on the "Pacific Rim of Fire," the zone where earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are common (and the zone in which we live.) Recall from our previous articles that teams of scientists and other experts feel that a 7.8 magnitude earthquake (approximately 8 times stronger than the Haiti earthquake) striking Southern California within our lifetime is *inevitable*. When such an event occurs, we will likely be without gas, water and electricity; and public assistance will be slow or non-existent. The disaster/earthquake kit is the cornerstone to being prepared and self-sufficient. Put another way, your earthquake kit is the key to your survival. Implement your kit now and you won't have to think about it for the rest of this year.

Your disaster/earthquake kit should be able to sustain you and your family for a minimum of 3 days, although nearly all experts and relief organizations advise preparing for 14 days. The author of this article, having worked in national disasters and having seen firsthand the response time of aid, utilities, public service, etc., strongly advises that you prepare for a minimum of 14 days. This article will provide you with the basics of assembling such a kit. It is not meant to be exhaustive but more a point of reference from which you can tailor to your specific needs. Additional references are also provided at the end of this article.

One question that is frequently asked is, "Why do I need an disaster/earthquake kit? I already have everything I need in my home." This may be true but very short-sighted. Imagine everything that is on a shelf or cabinet, and the contents of every drawer are strewn on your floor. Then add 3-6 inches of water from the broken water main that you were able to turn off but only after the water flooded your bottom floor. Lastly, add some broken glass and some drywall from your collapsed ceiling. This is not the time to being collecting your supplies for survival.

Another frequent question is, "If it's that bad, why don't I just leave?" This, too, is short-sighted: you are assuming that no bridge or underpass is affected between your home and your destination, you are assuming that you have enough fuel to get to your destination (remember that with no electricity, there will be no working fuel pumps and even if you can get fuel, you're not going to be using your credit card,) and you are assuming that you have enough food and water in your car for any travel and unexpected stops. Lastly, if only 10% of the residents Orange County felt similarly and decided to leave, our roads would be in gridlock for days and it is likely that you will go nowhere fast. Your best option may be to "shelter in place" and you will need a disaster/earthquake kit to do so successfully.

On the following page is a Disaster/Earthquake Supplies list that you can use to help establish your family's Earthquake kit. Please tear this out or copy it to make as your own list. Additionally, we have provided you some important information below that further explains of some of the items on the list.

WATER. You should store at least one gallon of water per person per day, more if elderly, ill, breastfeeding, or in warm environments. Water should be stored in original containers in a cool dark place away from paints or other petroleum-based products. Be sure to observe the "use by" or expiration dates on the label. Additionally, water can be stored in food grade, water-rated drums or containers. If storing water in this manner, you should add the appropriate water preservative and seal the drum. This water should then be replaced every 1-2 years. Water from your home's hot water heater can also be used for drinking as long as the appropriate steps are taken to preserve the purity of this water during a disaster. Information on how to utilize your water heater's water, as well as water purification instructions (using water purification tablets or unscented bleach) can be found on the Nellie Gail website, www.nelligailranch.org and clicking "resources."

FOOD. Store at least a 2 week supply (and preferably a 1 month supply) of non-perishable foods. Ideally, select foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking and require little or no water. Also, select foods that you normally use at home so you can rotate this in and keep the stored foods fresh.

SHELTER. If you are unable to inhabit your home, you will need a place to shelter. A RV, such as a motorhome or trailer will make an excellent place to shelter. For others, a tent or tarp will protect you from any rain or wind, and provide you with shade when needed. Extra clothing can be items that you normally would have given to charity.

MEDICATIONS AND FIRST AID. Prescription medications should be in their original container and enough for one month. You should also have a written list of the medication, including dosage, instructions and the Rx number to aid in refills. Health insurance usually won't allow you to purchase an extra month's worth of medication, but your physician can provide you with an extra prescription that you can purchase without going through insurance, or you can ask your physician if he or she has samples of your medication. Be sure to rotate your medications to avoid storing expired medications.

PETS. Pets often play an important role in our lives so be sure to plan for their emergencies as well. You should also be prepared to evacuate with your pet, however, keep in mind that most public shelters will not allow you to bring your pet. As such make appropriate contingency plans, possibly setting up a "buddy system" of pet care with neighbors who also have pets.

MISCELLANEOUS. Cash is important because credit card terminals and ATM machines will be non-functional when the electricity is out. Copies of your important documents will make it easier for you to file insurance claims, access bank accounts, etc. New flashlights that utilize LED light bulbs are far superior as they use less electricity prolonging battery life, are less prone to burning out light bulbs, and are generally brighter. If you are going to purchase a flashlight, consider purchasing the LED flashlights.

STORAGE AND LOCATION OF YOUR EARTHQUAKE KIT. The idea of an earthquake/disaster kit is to have all necessities in one location that is stored away from sources of heat and light. Good areas include the back corner of one's garage or in an infrequently used closet. The location should be on the bottom floor of multistory buildings and next to an exterior wall for easy access should there be a building collapse. Lastly, the items should be stored in a sturdy container. The metal "contractor's box" found at construction job sites is an excellent type of container for your earthquake kit.

Again, this article and the accompanying supply list will help you get started on your earthquake kit. It is recommended that you copy this list and use it as the foundation of your family's earthquake kit. Future articles will include work and car preparation, and water purification. You can also find additional information on disaster preparation at:

www.fema.gov

www.redcross.org

www.readyoc.org

www.foodsafety.gov/keep/emergency/index.html

www.nelliegailranch.org