

It's hard to believe it's already hurricane season, and it's also hard to believe that this season is projected to be as bad as or worse than last year's season that saw hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. We're here to help you prepare, but rather than repeat the usual "flashlight and first aid kit" disaster preparedness checklist, we're going to give you new details that will help your family plan an evacuation should a severe hurricane threaten your area.

One of the most crucial assets in any emergency situation is **time**, and nowhere is time more important than in an evacuation. When the order is given, all you want to have to do is go. A safe and speedy evacuation does two things. First, it gets you and yours out of the way before the massive traffic gridlock takes place, and two, if enough people evacuated earlier, this gridlock won't be as bad for the people who did not prepare as they should have.

Let's look at a few ideas that will save you considerable time in an evacuation scenario and help keep your family safe. Going with that theme, let's use the word **S.A.F.E.** to cover these hurricane preparedness topics, namely **Shutters, Accessories, Fuel, and Evacuation**.

1. **Shutters.** Get your shutter materials today. If you plan to protect your windows and doors before you evacuate, get the materials you need now, and prep so you can put these shutters up by yourself. For example, if plywood is your choice material, you should already have it on your property somewhere and cut (for fit and manageability) and labeled as to which opening it covers. Have small hooks over each window and corresponding holes in the plywood so you can hang the shutter in place by yourself while you drill in the screws. During an emergency, you shouldn't waste time and money gathering materials you should already have, and you don't want to tie up other people performing chores that could be done by one person.

2. **"Accessories"** covers both your household supplies and your evacuation gear. One common time waster is standing in line at the grocery store for consumables you should already have, so get your food and water now. You should always have between 2 and 4 weeks worth of food in your home (including pet supplies), and you should continually rotate your stock so you don't have a separate stash that reaches its expiration dates and is lost. Besides, if you're stocked ahead of time, you're helping others by being out of their way when they make last-minute shopping trips. Also, you want to have adequate supplies of food and water on hand after the storm when stores will be closed or empty, and you won't have the time, money, or gasoline to shop.

Next, keep a "Bugout Kit" packed 24/7 with a "last-minute list" on top. In an evacuation, you should grab your kit, your few last minute items that could not be prepacked (such as perishable medications, etc.), and be out the door. Your kits should be inexpensive, second-hand backpacks or wheeled suitcases, and they should be packed as if you were going on a two-week trip with only "carry-on luggage." Pack what you need, but pack lightly. Also, you must have copies of important documents (hardcopies and computer disks) including insurance papers, household inventories (with photos), child ID kits, etc. Having your paperwork with you is the only way to make sure you get your life back in order as quickly as possible. (For the very basics, see www.redcross.org, or www.ready.gov. For a "Last-Minute List," write us at info@disasterprep101.com.) For a source of gear visit: www.1800PREPARE.com.

3. **Fuel.** Always keep your car's gas tank full. Forget everything you've heard about the "half-tank rule" and make it a firmly entrenched habit to top off your tank about 3 times a week, even if it only needs a gallon or two. When it's time to leave you don't want to waste time in line at a gas station that may not have gas when you finally get to the pump. Also, if you have gas-powered lawn equipment at home, keep a 5-gallon gas can rather than the 1-gallon size. This will let you top off your tank before hitting the road.

4. **Evacuation** means worlds more than "get out of the house." For this short article, we'll focus on your destination. Line up your evacuation destination today, and choose one that provides the best balance between protection, accessibility, and economy, selecting a location that offers protection from the storm, but yet is close enough for you to get back home quickly. A friend or relative's house tops our list since you'll save money and you'll be around loved ones. Balance your options, but make your choice now, so you'll definitely have a place to stay, and make this destination a prominent part of your plan. (For a destination criteria checklist, email us at info@disasterprep101.com.)

Put these ideas to use today as you make your family's evacuation plans, and plan now so when the hurricane is heading your way, all you have to do is act. Time is that critical.

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