

WHAT TO DO WHEN DISASTERS LOOM

As soon as you hear in five-day weather forecasts that hurricanes, wildfires or heavy rains may threaten your area, it's time to start thinking defensively. What to do:

DAYS BEFORE:

- Monitor** your "tone-alert" radio for local weather and check the NOAA.gov web site to track broader storm or wildfire activities.
- Stock up** your SOS pantry.
- Photograph** your house for insurance purposes and send digital images to yourself and a friend before you leave.
- Gather your three emergency kits** and other necessities in a centralized location in your home.
- Review** your family emergency plan and evacuation map route.
- Call ahead** to hosts or hotels where you'll be staying.
- Clear** the yard of loose items, such as chairs, toys, tools and hoses.
- Fill your car** with gas and check your tires, including the spare.
- Prepare the exterior of your home** based on the type of disaster that threatens.
- Contact** your gas, water and electric companies to find out if and when you should turn off utility service to your home. Visit all of the main valves and switches to remind you of their locations.
- Fill the tub with water** after lining it with plastic sheeting.
- Review your safe room.**
- Keep pets inside** or in restricted areas until the threat passes.

IF ORDERED TO EVACUATE:

- Activate your family emergency plan.**
- Alert your long-distance point person** about your status and intended destination.
- Load emergency kits and other supplies into your car.**
- Review your map and directions to your safe house**—a hotel or the home of family or friends.
- Evacuate early to avoid being stranded.**
- Use routes designated by local authorities.** Do not take shortcuts, since they may be blocked or damaged.
- Watch for washed-out roads and bridges.** Do not drive into flooded areas.
- Avoid driving over or stepping on downed power lines.**
- Go to a public shelter as a last resort.** Shelters are not designed for comfort and do not usually accept pets.