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# How to Pack an Emergency Kit for Any Disaster

*August 28, 2017*By **KENNETH R. ROSEN**<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/03/smarter-living/packing-emergency-kit-disaster.html>

Credit Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

The Atlantic hurricane season started in June and runs through November, but if you're more worried about fire, flood, earthquake or even man-made disasters, it's never too early to talk with friends and family about their emergency plans. Those plans should also include an emergency go-bag, no matter where in the world you live.

what goes in your emergency bag, said William Booher, a spokesman for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

“It’s important to build an emergency supply kit and have it ready and available at a moment’s notice,” he said.

Frank Smyth, the executive director of Global Journalist Security, a hostile environments training and consulting firm, cautioned that “what might make sense in one place might not be recommended in another.” Variables in putting together the right kit for your needs include everything from how much money and in what currencies you’d like to store, whether you want to keep a bag at home and at your office, and how many people you’re packing for.

[FEMA](#), the [American Red Cross](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) all provide checklists to help you get started, and many items they recommend overlap. Each agency offers a basic list, which includes water, food, a battery- or hand-powered radio, a flashlight, batteries and a first-aid kit.

Building from there, here’s what you should include in an emergency bag if you’re on your own, have a family of four or have a pet in the mix.

## The Bare Basics

[Ready.gov](#) has guidance and materials for virtually every emergency scenario: biological and chemical attacks, cyber-incidents, droughts, landslides, home fires, snowstorms and even space weather. The Sweethome, a product review website owned by The New York Times, [spent 120 hours researching and testing](#) nearly 100 products to assemble the perfect emergency kit. Whether you buy one or build it, here’s what every kit should include.

**Water:** Nearly every professional preparedness organization will suggest stocking away bottles or pouches of water and gallons of potable water in the event of an emergency. But if you have to move, it’s best to carry a portable filtration system. “People think you need to stash gallons and gallons, but a filter carries better and means as long as you have access to running water, your supply is nearly unlimited,” said Will Egensteiner, an associate editor at Outside Magazine. The [LifeStraw](#) is Mr. Smyth’s choice for purification straws you can drink water through. If you have a container to drink from, iodine water purification tablets are a simpler, nearly weightless alternative.

**Food:** Three days’ worth of nonperishable food can come in many forms, including massive hunks of survival food bars that contain 2,000 calories. But setting aside a few boxes of Clif Bars or your preferred energy bar is a better tasting, reliable option.

**Portable Lighting:** Flashlights and tea candles are ideal for setting up emergency lighting around a home or in a primitive dwelling, but a headlamp is compact and frees up both hands. “At night, even minor problems can be a hassle if you can’t see what you’re doing,” said Rik Paul, an editor at The Wirecutter, a product review website owned by The New York Times. “While a flashlight is handy, we recommend having a headlamp.” He [suggested the Black Diamond Spot](#), which lasts up to 200 hours on three AAA batteries (50 hours at its maximum illumination setting).

others in hazardous conditions.

**A Dust Mask:** Airborne debris, fumes or gas from accidents or natural disasters can cause respiratory problems. A simple painter's mask or surgical mask will do in any kit, although more advanced models can filter out a wide variety of smaller particulates and last much longer before they need to be replaced. Consider what you may need to filter out of the air, and buy the right type of mask for that purpose.

**Solar Chargers:** If you don't have access to an electrical outlet or reliable power, a solar charger like the Anker PowerPort Solar Lite, [a favorite of The Wirecutter](#), will charge devices as large as a tablet with a day's worth of sun. If there is very little sunlight, rechargeable battery packs are the next-best option (and [The Wirecutter has some suggestions there, too.](#)) As with any technology and most other things in the bag, "It's a good idea to check the bag every couple of years in case tech has become outdated or batteries have lost their power," Mr. Egensteiner said.

**Miscellaneous Items:** Don't forget to pack a few days' supply of personal medications and prescriptions (especially life-preserving ones), as well as medical items you rely on, like glucose and blood-pressure monitoring equipment and supplies. Make sure you also pack a spare pair of glasses, sanitary towelettes, paper maps of your area, tweezers, scissors, duct tape, wind-resistant matches, and cash, traveler's checks or change.

## For One Person

An emergency can occur at any time, even when you're alone. In those cases, you need to plan for yourself, but also how you'll find and reach friends or family in an emergency.

"You should have a general evacuation plan as well as a communication plan. You should sit down with your family and discuss," said Mr. Booher, the FEMA spokesman, "but also share with your friends and colleagues in case something was to happen — someone outside your immediate family would be able to track you down."

Here are some items to keep on you or at the ready in your home or office, in addition to the basics.

**A Multi-Tool:** "I have one I bring climbing, one I bring camping/hiking and one for rafting/SUPing," Mr. Egensteiner said, referring to stand-up paddling. "They can do everything, and the list of tools packed into the big ones today is staggering." These tools, [like The Wirecutter's favorite](#), the [Leatherman New Wave](#), can also help with performing first-aid, making fires and repairing machinery or electronics. The best come with everything from a sharp knife and pair of pliers or tweezers to a can opener.

**Spare Clothing:** Consider your climate and pack for the most common weather. From an extra coat and gloves to a pair of walking shoes, consider the three basic layers for weatherproofing: base, insulation and shell. The base layer should include something that wicks away moisture and maintains body temperature such as synthetics or merino wool. Insulation layers can include puffy jackets stuffed with wool or down, or a fleece hooded sweatshirt or vest. The shell layer should be wind- and rain-resistant, but also breathable.

In the event of an emergency, especially a weather-related emergency, radio is your best bet to get up-to-date information on weather patterns, evacuation orders or official news from the authorities. A portable, easily powered radio like this one can keep you connected to the outside world even if you're stuck in a cellar, or a shelter. This one can be powered by battery, hand crank, solar energy or USB.

## For a Family

If you're packing for a family, including children, build off the basics and necessities for one person, and make sure you pack enough supplies for everyone. Here are some more items to include if you're considering more people.

**Mylar Blankets:** Full sleeping bags are too cumbersome for an emergency kit, so these are a lighter alternative. "Mylar thermal blankets or bags are windproof, waterproof and capable of reflecting more than 90 percent of your body heat," Mr. Paul, of The Wirecutter, said. "Inexpensive and easy to store, this should be the minimum you carry for warmth."

**Bleach:** Household chlorine bleach when diluted, nine parts water to one part bleach, can be used as a disinfectant, according to FEMA. "Or in an emergency, you can use it to treat water by using 16 drops of regular household liquid bleach per gallon of water," the agency said.

**Waterproof Container:** While practical for storing perishable or sensitive materials, a waterproof container that can easily fit in a backpack is also a secure place to keep insurance policies, copies of identification and any other documents you want to stay dry and safe.

**Miscellaneous Items:** Consider your family's specific additional needs, and pack accordingly. Infant formula and diapers shouldn't be overlooked and can be difficult to find on the go, especially in an emergency. You should also pack books, games, puzzles or other activities for children, to keep them busy and occupied during what could be a stressful time for you. If you can, pack mess kits, shelf-stable foods and snacks (like trail mix and energy bars) and paper cups.

## For Your Pets

"There was a huge increase in awareness and demand for pet kits after the wildfires that we had in Southern California in 2007," Jeff Primes, the president of the disaster-preparedness company [Ready America](#), told The Sweethome. "Over a million people had to evacuate their homes. All of a sudden there was a realization: Not only do I need supplies for me, I have to take care of the pets."

A few days' supply of pet food, extra water and any medications your pet may need are essential to keeping them happy in an uncomfortable situation. If the weather is particularly cold, dog owners may want something like Ruffwear's [Float Coat](#) or [Track Jacket](#), which is also good for travel, Mr. Egensteiner said. "The Float helps dogs in water situations and has a sturdy handle for picking them up, and the Track is very visible," he said. "If there's hoisting or high drops involved, there's the [Doubleback](#)."

For cat owners or anyone with other small animals, consider packing some extra blankets in their pet carrier, so you can grab it all on the way out in an emergency.

No emergency kit is complete without a first-aid kit inside. The Sweethome suggests the [Adventure Medical Kits Sportsman Whitetail](#). “The Sportsman Whitetail comes with a wide variety of supplies, instructional flash cards, and organization that makes providing first aid as simple as possible (even for the untrained),” they wrote in a review.

If you’re inclined to personalize, Mr. Smyth, who is also an adviser to the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#), offered a basic list that he provided to journalists in hostile environments.

Among the essentials in his D.I.Y. first-aid kit are moleskin fabric, liquid bandages, soft-wrap elastic bandages, micropore paper tape, fabric adhesive dressings and bandages in a variety of sizes, coverlet adhesive 4-wing dressing, non-adherent bandage pads, a sterile gauze bandage roll, adhesive wound closures, triangular bandages, alcohol swabs and antiseptic wipes, packets of Bacitracin antibiotic ointment with zinc, burn ointment, eye wash, a thermometer, petroleum jelly, pain relievers, anti-diarrheal medications, antacids and laxatives.

Finally, as with most things in your emergency go-bag, it’s important to periodically check that any medication, food or other perishable supplies (which can even include water or pain relievers) have not expired, and that the technology, such as your radio and battery packs, are still in working condition and compatible with your other equipment.

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