

Be prepared: evacuation plans, supply kits essential for every household

Written by Darci Tomky



With fires raging in every corner of the state, many Coloradans are asking themselves what they would do if their home was in danger of fire or another natural disaster.

Depending on time, what should be packed and how should the house be left? What about pets and livestock? What is the evacuation plan?

According to American Red Cross, only 26 percent of families have actually developed and practiced a home fire escape plan. Home fires are the single most common disaster across the nation, so it's wise to come up with an evacuation plan and disaster supply kit.

Here are some tips from ready.gov, redcross.org and aspensfire.com.

—Install a smoke alarm on every level of the home and outside the sleeping areas. Test batteries every month and charge at least once a year.

—Practice a fire escape plan at least twice a year. Practice stop, drop and roll.

—Make sure everyone in the family knows at least two ways to escape from every room in the house. Consider keeping escape ladders near the windows of the top stories of a home. Once out of the house, do not return until given permission.

Be prepared: evacuation plans, supply kits essential for every household

Written by Darci Tomky

—Pick two meeting places for the family: a place a safe distance from the home and a place outside of the neighborhood in case it isn't safe to return to the area of the home. Plan more than one escape route from the home both by car and by foot.

—Prepare an emergency evacuation kit. Place it close to the door and make sure everyone knows where to find it. Also consider storing small disaster supply kits in a vehicle and at work.

—Depending on time, prioritize in advance what personal items will be packed, like photo albums and other things that cannot be replaced.

—If a wildfire is in the area, back a vehicle into the garage or park in an open space facing the direction of escape. Shut doors and roll up windows. Leave the key in the ignition. Confine pets to one room and make plans to care for pets in case of evacuation. Arrange temporary housing at a friend or relative's home outside the threatened area.

—If given time, take steps to prepare the inside of the home. Close windows, vents, doors, blinds and drapes. Shut off gas or propane and pilot lights. Move furniture into the center of the home away from windows. Turn on a light in each room to increase the visibility of the home in heavy smoke.

—Outside the home, seal attic and ground vents. Remove gas grills from decks and place propane tanks in the garage. Place combustible patio furniture inside. Connect garden hoses to outside taps and leave in an obvious location for firefighters. Place a ladder on house for access to roof for firefighters. Remove firewood, combustibles and all shrubs within 15 feet of the home.

—While evacuating, wear protective clothing like sturdy shoes, cotton or woolen clothing, long pants, long-sleeved shirt, gloves and a handkerchief to protect the face. Lock the house and tie a white towel to the front door so emergency responders know the home is evacuated. Tell someone the time of evacuation and where the family is planning to go.

Be prepared: evacuation plans, supply kits essential for every household

Written by Darci Tomky

Holyoke Enterprise June 5, 2012