



DISASTER PREPAREDNESS: HOW TO BE READY FOR THE NEXT BIG STORM

Protect people and property

Cover windows properly. Experts used to recommend taping windows to limit breakage to a few large pieces, rather than many smaller ones. But small and large pieces can be equally deadly. A safer bet: Keep windows shut and close blinds, shades, and drapes. Longer-term, consider impact-resistant windows or hurricane shutters (about \$40 per square foot), which might also net you an insurance discount.

Secure outdoor items. High winds can turn lawn chairs, potted plants, trash cans, and other outdoor items into deadly projectiles. Move whatever you can into a garage, a shed, or a basement.

Park cars on high ground. Two feet of floodwater can carry a car away. What's more, driving in water just 8 inches deep can ruin the engine if the water seeps in through the air intake. Park at a high elevation or on a hill—but not beneath trees.

Protect your valuables. Move what you can to higher floors if you expect flooding. Also think ahead by documenting and photographing items you'd include in an insurance claim if lost or ruined.

Stock up on essentials



Build an emergency kit. It should have a whistle to attract help, dust masks, duct tape, a wrench or pliers to turn off water if needed, flashlights and batteries, and local maps. Plan on 1 gallon of water per person per day for at least three days. Include moist towelettes, garbage bags, and plastic ties for personal sanitation. Also consider changes of clothing and sleeping bags or blankets.

Be prepared for injuries. A first-aid kit should be stocked with bandages in various sizes, sterile dressings and gloves, hand sanitizer and antibiotic towelettes, a thermometer, pain medicines, tweezers, and scissors.

Fuel up. Fill all of your vehicles' tanks, because gas stations could lose power. Remember that most gas generators require roughly 12 to 20 gallons of gas per day. Also figure on at least a gallon of gas for extensive chainsawing. Store all fuel away from the house.

Have the right phones. Keep at least one corded phone because cordless phones require AC power. Our post-Sandy survey also found that cell phones were more reliable than landline phones, though we lack data on differences for fiber and cable vs. older copper-wire systems. Be sure cell phones are charged. And have an out-of-town contact you can call, because long-distance phone service can be more reliable than local service during and after a storm.

Get the right foods. Frozen food may last two days without power, but refrigerated items can spoil after 4 hours. Keep at least a three-day supply of nonperishable foods such as crackers, whole-grain cereals, and canned foods. And don't forget the manual can opener.

Check your fire extinguishers. You should have one with a minimum classification of "2-A:10-B:C" on each floor. Check the dial or pop-up pin for adequate pressure each month. Professionally repressurize extinguishers older than six years, and replace any older than 12 years.

Prepare for special needs. Tell your utility and local fire department before a storm if someone in your home uses an oxygen concentrator, ventilator, or medical bed; your power could be restored sooner. And keep a one-month supply of medication during hurricane season.

Tune in. A battery-powered or hand-cranked radio will keep you connected if your computer or the Internet is down. NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) weather radios are also handy for emergency information.

Have some ready cash. Banks and ATMs could be out of service, assuming you can get to them.

Stay safe during the storm

Find the safest place. Stay in a central room without windows. Have kids? Ease the fear factor with books, a toy or two, and if you have power or a generator, some movies and video games.

Avoid electrocution risks. Don't use any plug-in device if flooding or wetness is nearby. Landline phones can also be a shock hazard in an electrical storm. If you must make a call during a storm, use a cell or cordless phone if possible—or use a landline phone's speaker mode to reduce contact with the handset. Avoid baths and showers until the storm passes. And watch out for downed power lines and live wires.

Use cars safely. Obey emergency crews and follow designated routes. If your vehicle stalls in water, shut off the ignition and seek higher ground; the leading cause of Sandy-related deaths was drowning.