

Emergency Preparedness

PLANNING FOR AN EVACUATION

By the Communications Team

"Be prepared!" Simply put, that is the key message of this 3-part series. If a sudden disaster—such as a wildfire—should affect our community, you must be prepared to vacate your home on short notice. Whenever there is a threat to public health or safety, the law requires that you cooperate with local officials and evacuate promptly when requested to do so.

We previously discussed the first two steps in emergency preparedness: developing your Family Action Plan and deciding which items should be included in your Emergency Supply Kit (an evacuation checklist). Now we will address the final step: helping you Plan for an Evacuation. Listed below are recommended steps you could take to ensure your safety and minimize property loss.

If an evacuation is anticipated:

- Listen to the radio for reports of evacuation information and instructions.
- Park your vehicle facing outward and keep the keys with you.
- Close garage doors/windows but disconnect the automatic garage door openers.
- Place your Emergency Supply Kit(s), important documents and valuables in your vehicle.
- Put your pets and their emergency supplies and carriers together in one room.
- Dress in comfortable, sturdy cotton or woolen clothing & shoes (long pants/sleeves preferable).
- Notify your out-of-area contact of a possible evacuation and where you can be reached if that occurs.
- Volunteer to help others, especially seniors and disabled residents.
- For emergencies *other than* wildfire, lock your home and turn off all utilities.

In the event of a wildfire, in addition to the above and if you have time:

- Shut off propane at the tank.
- Move propane BBQs away from structures.
- Leave lights on in each room and unlock doors.
- Close windows, blinds/drapes and doors, seal vents, and turn off air-conditioning.
- Move flammable furniture to middle of rooms.
- Connect garden hoses, wet the roof and place buckets full of water around the house.
- Gather fire tools (rake, axe, saw & shovel) for possible use by firefighters.

Depending on the nature of the emergency, you may need to use common sense based on available information to decide if there is immediate danger and you need to evacuate. Law enforcement officials will try to advise you of potential evacuations as early as possible, but you must take the initiative and stay informed by listening for public announcements. In an intense situation, authorities may not have time to knock on every door to provide information on what is happening and what you should do.

If evacuation is advised, don't hesitate! Leave early enough to avoid being caught in fire, smoke or road congestion—and carpooling will further reduce congestion. The authorities will determine the areas to be evacuated and the routes to use. Evacuations save lives and allow responding personnel to focus on the emergency at hand.

Some final thoughts: *Always...*

- keep your gas tank at least one-half full,
- have important documents and emergency supplies readily available and up to date,
- have a working, battery-operated radio, and
- evacuate immediately per officials' instructions, using designated evacuation routes.

For more information on emergency preparedness, go to the Home Page of our website, fmowners.com—no need to logon. Click on the *Community* tab, select *Contacts & Links*, and scroll down to the section entitled *Fire (Non-Emergency)* on the right side of the page. Several related links are posted under *Fire Preparedness*. *The suggestions presented are intended to assist you in preparing for an evacuation. As each family's needs are unique, we recommend that you refer to official emergency planning websites.*