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Ready for the worst?

Scout's honor: It pays to be prepared, because a natural disaster will strike when you least expect it

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SPECIAL TO THE P-I

One project that rarely receives much thought or attention is getting prepared for a natural disaster.

Whether it's an unexpected snowstorm like the one we experienced at the end of November, or the December windstorm, or an earthquake, disasters will come sooner or later, and there is no time like the present to get ready to survive challenging conditions.

There's also nothing like a little reminder of how bad it can be if you're not prepared. Hassles such as the loss of power for days, including that of yours truly after the windstorm, give us that nudge to take action.

I received another reminder in October. My friend Rob and I were about an hour from landing in Honolulu when the captain announced that there had been an earthquake off the shore of the Big Island, about 12 miles from our destination. We landed in Honolulu, then sat on the plane for 3 1/2 hours because there was no power to get the jet way to our aircraft.

Once we were finally off the plane, we sat in the dark, un-air-conditioned airport until we were able to get a flight to the Big Island. And we were the lucky ones; many travelers spent the night at the airport with no food and little water.

The aftereffects of the earthquake began to sink in when we arrived at our time share. The property had little damage, but restaurants were closed because of gas leaks and grocery stores were closed because of damage.

We were able to find one restaurant with limited service, but every grocery store we visited the next morning was closed. Luckily, within a day the stores and some of the restaurants began reopening.

Although the damage could have been much worse, it made me think about my own preparedness at home. Would I have been ready if this had happened here?

I do have an earthquake kit with food, some water, a camping stove, propane and some contact information, but I realized it was time to update my supplies.

I needed to rotate the food and because I had moved over the summer, a lot of information I had made copies of was out of date: insurance policies, titles, neighbor information, etc.

I decided to immediately begin updating my preparedness, especially since I learned from a local TV special if you don't act within 48 hours of hearing or reading about the need for disaster preparedness, you won't do it.

Just as with any organizing project, the first step is to make time. And this project will take you a bit of time to complete, but when the day comes, you'll be thankful you did.

Getting started

- Make a copy of your insurance policy and make sure you understand your coverage. Be certain whether your policy covers additional living expenses, temporary debris removal and temporary repairs. If it doesn't, maybe you need coverage that does. Store the policy in a fireproof box in your home.
- Make copies of essential documents such as contact information, copies of driver's licenses, passports, Social Security cards, citizenship or naturalization papers, fronts and backs of credit cards, etc. Store them in a waterproof container inside a fireproof safe.
- Take a household inventory. Stock up on food, water and batteries, enough for each family member and pet for up to three days or more. Be sure to label when the food was purchased so you can rotate your supply.
- Create a grab-and-go bag for each family member in case you need to suddenly leave your house.
- Strap your water heater to the wall.

There's plenty more to do, and this is not intended as a complete list, just a start. Use our resource guide to nail down all the details and then get started!

Resources

"Organize for Disaster" by Judith Kolberg (Squall Press, 150 pages, \$15.99)

This is the most comprehensive book or document I have found to help people prepare. Kolberg is a well-known veteran in the organizing industry, specializing in this area.

Also available at squallpress.net are free forms to help you prepare; including: Medical Information, Vital Contact Information and Family Communication/Reunion.

"Family Disaster Supplies and Preparedness Calendar," by Chevron, USA

This four-page calendar is broken down into a few items you should purchase each week and a few things you need to do each week for six months to create your disaster survival center. I found this guide helpful in breaking it down into "bite-size" pieces.

Available at: goto.seattlepi.com/r499, or eliminatechaos.com (click on "resources," then "organizing tips" from the drop-down menu, then "Family Disaster Supplies and Preparedness Calendar."

"Family Guide to Preparing for Disruptive Events," by Ned Cracolici of Cracolici & Associates

This free, 28-page publication is available at eliminatechaos.com (click on "resources," then "organizing tips"). Or, use this link to go directly to the guide: goto.seattlepi.com/r500.

Some of the information you'll find: Purchasing items for your stockpile; infant needs and non-food items; other "stuff" you might need; planning for infrastructure disruptions such as power outages and water-supply disruption or contamination; clothing needed to evacuate; emergency items in your vehicles; basic medical needs, including health supplies and equipment, special needs and refrigerated medicines.

"Your Family Disaster Supplies Kit," from the American Red Cross

This is a long checklist of items to gather, plus suggestions on how to pack and store them, when to update perishables, and tips on creating a family disaster plan. Find it at : goto.seattlepi.com/r503

"Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit," from FEMA

This site also has lists of items to gather, plus plenty of tips and suggestions for packing, storage, etc. There's a lot of other useful information on other pages at this site. Here's a link to kit pages: goto.seattlepi.com/r502

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