

How to prepare for disaster

1. Get a Kit
Pack essential supplies

2. Make a Plan
Plan effectively

3. Be informed
Understand which disasters are likely to occur in your area and how to stay safe

EMERGENCY DRINKING WATER
Potable water with 5 year shelf life

Emergency radio

Phone charger

Crank-powered flashlight

Extra batteries

INFOGRAPHIC BY LINDSAY VILLAMOR

Gas leak evacuation was my wake-up call

It's more realistic to prepare for local disasters than end-of-world scenarios



Amani Hamed
STAFF WRITER

Here you are, the survivor of an ongoing global coronavirus pandemic.

A millennial or Gen Z marvel of self-reliance and efficiency. Nothing worries or phases you except homework and pointless classes.

Disaster? You came of age at the dawn of a strange new world in which disaster is commonplace. Global warming, the Trump administration's toll on the environment and public health, that time everyone became obsessed with a racist and his tigers. You were built for apocalyptic happenings.

You may think you are prepared for disaster, but you are woefully mistaken.

I was. When I received the alert to evacuate my San Jose apartment, it wasn't from the San Jose Fire Department (SJFD) or the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), but from the most reliable source for neighborhood information: a nosy-Nellie on my neighborhood information app Nextdoor.

Nextdoor connects neighbors to do things including advertise yard sales, find lost dogs and, in this instance, notify one another of a gas leak.

On Aug. 25, Nextdoor notified me that someone had noticed SJFD and SJPD vehicles next to where a crew had been working on the road only a block away from my apartment.

The street was blocked off at the intersection and the smell of hazardous gas permeated the air; a disgusting harbinger of potential doom and certain inconvenience.

This is fine, I thought. I'm prepared.

I have been prepping for situations like this since I was a teenager. I have gallons of water stored beneath my bed and first-aid kits within reach at all times.

I was once a literal card-carrying member of the Zombie Squad, a nationwide disaster preparedness organization inspired by the threat of a zombie apocalypse.

However, when I got the notification from Nextdoor, I didn't have cat food pre-packed or cat litter. I didn't pack a charger for my Apple Watch or books I needed for that week's assignments at school.

I managed to grab prescription medication for myself and my cat, but failed to pack my retainer. My bug out bag didn't contain a toothbrush

or deodorant, though it did contain a full-size tube of toothpaste and not one but two bars of soap of a brand I have never used.

It took several time-wasting trips to load the too-full trunk of my hatchback that was filled with my hiking backpack, school backpack and rolling suitcase. I then put my cat in his carrier and carried him down my apartment's stairs to my car.

In the 36 hours that I was forced to stay at my mom's place, eating Werther's Originals and watching "Forensic Files" reruns on what used to be my grandmother's bed, I didn't receive a single communication from the SJFD, PG&E or any other official organization.

On a hunch, I checked SJFD's twitter and found what I was looking for.

I looked at the map of the evacuation zone and realized just how many people had been forced to leave in a hurry like myself. Many had temporarily sheltered at the Bascom Community Center in West San Jose.

If I didn't have an alternate plan at my mom's place, who knows where my cat and I would have taken shelter.

I did however, have an entire box of matches and a flint-and-steel firestarter. I soon realized I was prepping all wrong.

Learn from my mistakes and prepare yourself, but not for

the zombie apocalypse or the collapse of civilization.

Prepare for a disaster that is benign and fucking lame.

If you can't get to a family member's place for a weekend on short notice with all the essentials, you aren't going to survive when the dead rise.

Learn from my mistakes and prepare yourself, but not for the zombie apocalypse or the collapse of civilization. Prepare for a disaster that is benign and fucking lame.

In order to be prepared for any disaster, be ready to both shelter in place and bug out, according to Ready, a national public service campaign designed to educate people for emergencies and public disasters.

There are three main things you must do to stay prepared

for a disaster: get a kit, make a plan and stay informed.

By doing things like packing a proper bug out bag, creating a fire evacuation plan with your family and signing up for alerts from weather stations and emergency services, you can remain prepared for any disaster, according to the American Red Cross website.

When I left, I didn't take a single piece of jewelry or family photo. I learned the importance of making another checklist of things you cannot pack ahead.

Know where you're going, who you must call and which utility or emergency services agency to ask for information.

Keep your car maintenance up to date and stash healthy snacks in your grandma's room so that when you end up fleeing a gas leak, you don't spend two days eating Froot Loops and caramels.

No matter how prepared you think you may be for the next minor inconvenience or major disaster, there is always room for improvement.

Preparing ahead will not only keep you safe, it will alleviate so much of the stress that comes from having to navigate an intense and dangerous situation. Pack now, plan ahead and prepare for disasters that could force you to shelter at home or run for safety.

Follow Amani on Twitter | @Amani_Marie_



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