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Safety First: Emergency Preparation and the 'Go-Bag'

By Cynthia Brian



The coyote brush burned along with the hills in the Merrill Fire. Photo Cynthia Brian

Natural disasters know no boundaries. One never knows if a fire, earthquake, flood, mudslide, or other calamity is on the horizon. It's imperative to be prepared for all emergencies.

Residents of Moraga have had first-hand experience of being awoken in the middle of the night, without any power, and evacuated because of the fast-moving Merrill Fire (see related story on Page A4). One hundred and fifty firefighters from numerous districts battled the blaze while local police kept the community safe. Fortunately, all property and people were spared.

Whatever the calamity, it will behoove you to have an emergency supply kit (AKA "Go Bag") in every vehicle and a larger one in your home in a closet or area near the front door that will offer you supplies for a few days. You want duplicate Go Bags in your vehicles because when disaster strikes you may be in your vehicle and

unable to return home.

In an emergency at your dwelling, you may only have time to grab your keys, phone, wallet, pets, Go Bag, and what you can carry. There will not be time to "load your car" or to be searching or running from room to room to find what you need. Keep everything that is essential together in one place. Remember, you may be evacuated for hours, days, or weeks. Sometimes, as has been the case with our California wildfires and earthquakes, a matter of minutes means the difference between life and death.

Have a sign already made with your name and phone number and the words "All Evacuated" sitting on top of your Go Bag along with a roll of blue painter's tape. Only if time permits, tape your sign to your door when you leave so that firefighters know the house is clear.

Most of all, remember that saving your life and that of your family is the most important. Everything else can be replaced.

Fill a backpack or small case with the following and keep one of these in all of your vehicles and one in your home. Pack a small bag for each family member, or pack a larger bag to include everyone's items. Remember you may only take one vehicle upon an evacuation.

Go Bag Necessities

First Aid kit

Duplicate chargers for phones, tablets, and computers

Work gloves

Warm gloves

Towelettes

Small towel

Bottled water (1 gallon per person per day)

Blanket

Walking shoes

Socks

Warm jacket

Peanut butter

Honey

Protein bars

Personal hygiene kit with a toothbrush, soap, medications

Matches

Candle

Flashlight and headlamp with extra batteries

Eating utensils and plates

Breathing masks (Niosh-N95)

Clothing change

Extra undergarments

Extra set of keys to home, office, etc.

Cash

Toilet Paper

Hopefully, you will never have to use these emergency kits, but it's best to be prepared. The week after the Merrill Fire, several earthquakes with the largest being 4.6 on the Richter scale shook our area. It is natural to assume that a catastrophe will happen to someone else, but the reality is no one is immune. Across the country, natural disasters are becoming more prevalent and frequent. October and November are historically prime fire and earthquake months in California. Think safety first. The life you save could be your own.

Cynthia Brian is the columnist for Digging Deep in the Lamorinda Weekly. www.CynthiaBrian.com

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[back](#)

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