

# Your Disaster Kit



Part of the Public Safety Office's "Be Ready" series

You've heard it again and again: you need to have a disaster kit. Without it, you may be caught unprepared in the event of a major disaster.

Remember the "rule of threes:" three kits (home, work, and vehicle); three days; three things (water, food, utility items). Since many relief organizations recommend having enough supplies for as many as 9-12 days, having three kits will allow you to be ready, wherever you are, and be able to combine them to meet this nine-day guideline.

A disaster kit, if put together all at once, can seem expensive, especially for larger families. Multiply that by the need for three kits, for home, car, and work, and the cost can seem overwhelming. However, just purchasing 1-3 items each month can break it down and make it manageable for your budget. We've suggested which items you should buy together to keep the monthly cost down.

## Month 1

- Water—one gallon per person per day for 3-5 days (if you have a four-person family, 12-20 gallons; a case of 1/2-L bottles is enough for one person for three days)
- Spare prescription medication—ask your doctor for samples or an extra prescription, and keep the extra in your kit; rotate it out every month with new medicine
- Spare eyeglasses—when you get a new pair, put the old pair (in a hard case!) in your kit; the same goes for dentures if possible

## Month 2

- First aid kit
- Utility wrench or crescent wrench (for shutting off gas)

## Month 3

- Non-perishable food, preferably that doesn't need cooking, such as canned foods, granola bars, jerky, "disaster food" bars, etc., as well as "comfort" foods such as cookies or candy—enough

for 3-5 days

- Hand-operated can opener

## Month 4

- Portable AM/FM radio (battery-operated, solar, or hand-crank)
- Spare batteries if needed
- Sunscreen
- Bleach (for treating water from non-bottled sources—avoid fragrances and additives)

## Month 5

- Flashlights—one for each family member (these don't have to be fancy, and can often be picked up for as little as a dollar)
- Spare batteries
- Baby/toddler care items (if applicable), such as diapers, wipes, formula, etc.
- Feminine supplies (if applicable)

## Month 6

- Change of clothes for each person—these can be older, worn-out items: instead of throwing them out or donating them, stick them in your kit (make sure you rotate them as your kids grow!); don't forget socks and underwear
- Comfortable walking shoes or sturdy boots—again, can be older items

## Month 7

- Fire extinguisher—we suggest getting an ABC-type extinguisher, and the biggest one you can afford (2A10BC lasts twice as long on both A and B type fires as 1A5BC, and 4A30BC lasts four times as long on type A fires and six times as long on type B fires)

## Month 8

- Blankets—solar blankets (these look like giant pieces of foil) can be picked up for under \$2 apiece, and will keep you warm in the winter and protect you from the sun's heat in the summer; they also take up very little space in a kit
- Toilet paper and plastic bags for waste disposal (newspaper bags work well for this purpose)

Pet food and care items, such as a water dish and spare leash (if applicable)

### **Month 9**

- Waterless hand sanitizer
- Paper plates, plastic cups, plastic utensils, garbage bags
- Comfort items, such as toys, books, stuffed animals, board games, etc.

### **Month 10**

Storage totes to put it all together—should be water-resistant (a duffel bag won't protect your kit in a flood) and shock-resistant in case it gets bounced around during the quake or an aftershock. Keep the items inside sealed in plastic bags to protect against bugs and condensation. Especially for larger families, several smaller totes may be easier to manage than one large tote.

### **Months 11 & 12**

Any other items you need or want, such as a multi-tool, camp stove & fuel, sleeping bags, glow sticks, lighter/matches, portable generator, work gloves, etc.

Also try to set aside five or ten dollars in cash each month, as often times after a disaster it's cash-and-carry only.

Naturally, your home, car, and work kits will all be a little bit different. For example, you might not keep board games in your work kit, and you may want to add road flares to your car kit.

Remember, this is just a basic list. Feel free to add to it, but be practical—you may need to move your kit, such as if your home is uninhabitable. For those living in more rural areas, certain larger items may be desirable, such as large water barrels instead of just a few gallons, since it will likely take longer for supplies and utilities to be restored to those areas. However, a 55-gallon water barrel is probably not very practical for a family in an upstairs apartment.

A disaster kit isn't just for earthquakes. In any type of disaster, such as a 12-hour long power outage in the height of the summer heat, a good, well-stocked kit will keep you protected and your

needs met. Just remember to replace any items that you use!

Many online and other retailers specialize in disaster supplies; simply do a web search for "disaster supplies" or "earthquake supplies" to locate them. Most even offer pre-made kits based on family size. Remember though that sometimes a pre-made kit isn't the best solution for you and your family, so do your research and make sure you have the right kit for you.

Many people cite cost as the number one reason why they don't have a disaster kit. By doing just a little bit each month, not only does it fit more easily into your budget, but you'll have at least some necessary items should a disaster strike.

For more information, visit the following websites:

Ready America: <http://www.ready.gov>

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): <http://www.fema.gov/>

Are You Prepared?: <http://72hours.org/>