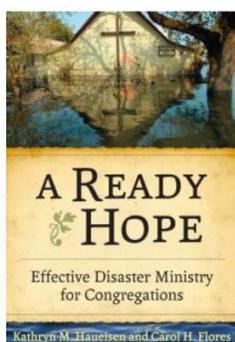


How to Prepare and Respond for the Next Natural Disaster



Natural Disasters seem to be coming more often and with more force than ever before. Regardless of any political, scientific or philosophical discussions about why this is happening, the need to know how to prepare for a disaster, what to expect when one strikes your community, and what you can do to help with recovery efforts are skills worth cultivating. Here are some tips to help you be a disaster pre-responder and then a valuable volunteer recovery responder.

Prepare Ahead of Time

Assemble an emergency kit in a sturdy portable bin with a tight-fitting cover so it's ready to grab and go when you have to leave in a hurry. It should contain:

- * Safe drinking water – a gallon a day/person for three days, plus some for pets
- * Appropriate clothing for the situation
- * Blankets for cold weather; battery-operated fans for hot weather
- * Flashlights with spare batteries
- * Chargers for electronic gadgets and an auxiliary battery charger
- * Facemasks to avoid breathing in mold, smoke, or toxic chemicals
- * Hand sanitizers
- * A whistle to call for help
- * An ax to cut through a roof, breakout a window, or chop away fallen debris
- * A stocked first-aid kit
- * A three-day supply of ready to eat food, silverware, can opener, paper plates and towels
- * Trash bags
- * Cash – ATM machines don't work when the power is out
- * Copies of critical documents including proof of insurance for car, home, health, car title or proof of ownership, health records, passports, birth, marriage certificates, pet health records
- * Games, cards, puzzles to occupy your time while waiting.

Have an emergency plan in place before a Disaster:

- * Know where you will go and an alternate route to get there if roads are closed
- * Determine who you'll need to notify. Store the information in your Contacts List
- * Find out whether you can take pets. If not, make arrangements for them too.

Things to Know Before You Go to Help

- Make sure you go to address what the community really needs; not to meet your own need to be needed.
- Know your abilities and your limits. Disaster zones are dangerous and people in them are often fragile. Not everyone can handle the devastation and levels of grief pervasive in a disaster zone. You can help in other ways besides going yourself.
- Go with what the person you're helping wants. What looks like trash to you may be a treasured possession and a reminder of better days. Don't pitch without asking – even if it's obvious it belongs in the trash.
- Don't make promises you can't keep such, "As everything's going to be alright."
- Pace yourself. Disasters typically last a few days, but the recovery process unfolds over months and even years.
- Remember that you are one of many, many people rendering assistance. Take breaks and take good care of yourself so you don't become one more person needing assistance.
- Expect to be over whelmed. Build in some personal recovery time after you return from working in a disaster zone.
- Find out before you go where you'll be housed, what food options are available, what supplies you need to bring with you, and what kind of work you'll be doing.
- Please follow directions. The professional disaster responders know what they're doing. While it may not make sense to you, they have reasons for doing what they do the way they do things.
- PLEASE – DO NOT SEND OR TAKE THINGS such as clothing and household goods unless specifically asked to do so. The mountains of unsolicited items that pour into a disaster zone become a secondary disaster to be managed. Send cash to a reputable disaster response organization or gift cards. That reduces the need for people to sort the items, the need for storage facilities to warehouse the items, and allows people to get what they actually want and need. As stores open again after a disaster it also helps support the local economy.

Learn more about natural disasters and recovery from *A Ready Hope: Effective Disaster Ministry for Congregations*. Available at [Rowman & Littlefield](#) or [Amazon](#).