



Disaster **readiness - response - recovery**

For immediate release

Know what to do when evacuating by car

Disasters can affect every part of the United States at any time of year. People often panic in an emergency evacuation, either staying with or abandoning their cars at the wrong time. After almost every disaster, search-and-rescue teams find victims who might have survived if they had been prepared for emergency travel and had known whether to stay with or abandon their cars.

North Carolina Cooperative Extension recommends the following guidelines for evacuation preparedness:

Hurricanes: Evacuate Early

Before or during the hurricane season, have your car checked. A thorough safety check should include the ignition system, battery, lights, tires, cooling system, fuel system, exhaust system, heater and air conditioning, brakes, wiper blades and windshield washer fluid, coolant and antifreeze, oil and other lubrication.

Keep your gas tank full, and prepare an emergency kit that's ready to load in your car. The kit should contain blankets or sleeping bags, matches and candles for light, empty coffee can with plastic cover to use as a toilet, facial tissue and waterproof gear, high-calorie non-perishable food and manual can opener, bottled water, compass and road maps, knife, first aid kit, flashlight or signal light with extra batteries, battery cables, fire extinguisher, portable radio with extra batteries, pliers, screwdriver, adjustable wrench, shovel, traction mats and flares.

Select alternate routes out of the area, in case your preferred route isn't passable. Listen to the radio as you travel, and heed the latest weather information. If the weather suddenly turns severe, seek shelter immediately.

Try to travel with someone. Two or three people traveling together can provide mutual aid. Travel with another car if possible. Make sure someone knows where you are going, when you leave, the time you expect to arrive and your expected route.

Drive defensively. Never attempt to drive during a hurricane or until the all-clear is given after the storm. Avoid driving on coastal and low-lying roads. Storm surge and hurricane-caused flooding are erratic and may occur with little or no warning.

Floods and Tornadoes: Get Out of the Car

Floods and tornadoes often accompany hurricanes. Do not stay with your car under these conditions.

Never drive through water on a road. Water can be deeper than it appears, and water levels can rise very quickly. Most cars will float dangerously for at least a short while; during this time they can be buoyed by flood waters, and a missing section of road - even a missing bridge - will not be visible with water running over the area. If your car stalls in flood water, get out quickly and move to higher ground. The flood waters may still be rising and the car could be swept away at any moment.

Wade through flood waters only if the water is not flowing rapidly and only in water no higher than the knees. Just six inches of fast moving water can knock you off your feet.

(Know what to do when evacuating...2)

During a tornado, a car is the most dangerous place to be. When a warning is issued, do not try to leave the area by car. If you are in a car, leave it and find shelter in a building. If a tornado approaches and there are no safe structures nearby, lie flat in a ditch or other depression with your arms over your head.

If Trapped by a Storm

If you find yourself trapped by a storm in your car, stay in it unless there are flood or tornado conditions. The car will provide shelter. To make the car visible to rescue crews at night, keep the dome light on and flash your lights from time to time. Also blow your horn; an automobile horn can be heard as far as a mile downwind.

Avoid overexertion and overexposure, and try to stay calm. Keep fresh air in your car. If you are running the motor, keep the downwind windows open about an inch.

Exercise from time to time by clapping hands and moving arms and legs vigorously. Don't stay in one position.

Have one person keep watch. Don't allow everyone in the car to sleep at once.

Additional information on disaster preparedness can be obtained from your county Cooperative Extension center or on the Web at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/disaster/>.