

Personalizing Ready, Set, Go!

BY SANDY SHAFFER

You wouldn't think that late summer would be the best time to discuss the Ready, Set, Go! (RSG!) program—we're still in fire season! But after going through a lot of educational materials on RSG! and not finding any that seemed complete, I began listing the tasks I'd personally want to consider under each of the three steps to prepare our rural household for an emergency or an evacuation.

After reviewing my list, I soon realized that it would take some serious time to *really* get **Ready**. So I thought that if we all started thinking and planning for the possibility of emergency evacuation *now*, and then worked through the fall, winter, and spring, we could all be **Ready** for *next* summer!

No surprise, it's my **Ready** list—preparing your home, property, and family for a wildfire threat—that had the most items to consider.

Ready covers everything from basic defensible space, installing fine metal mesh over vent openings; cleaning off the roof, gutters, and underneath the deck; sweeping leaves off the front porch; moving a wood pile away from the house; signing up for Citizen's Alert or reverse 9-1-1; having a water supply available; and having reflective address signs leading to your home. Also, your driveway must meet local slope, width, and vegetation clearance regulations—so that you can leave and firefighters can arrive safely!

Ready also covers thinning and cleaning up your yard and forested acres. Two concepts to address: (1) any continuous line of fuels leading (like a wick) to your home, and (2) those dry fine fuels that can easily build up and ignite from blowing embers ahead of a wildfire. (As I'm writing this article, I have another *two inches* of madrone leaves on the front lawn that fell *overnight!* Ugh!)

Working to meet these two fuels challenges will vary, depending on your property's elevation, slope, aspect, winds, vegetation types, tree health, and also neighboring properties (private and government). Every property's neighbors are different. Perhaps your elderly neighbors can't mow their portion of the shared driveway, but they could bake you a yummy berry pie as thanks for helping?

Being **Ready** also includes family planning for emergencies and must include *all* family members. Family plans should address the possibility of being without utilities and should include plans for evacuating (determine at least two ways out and a family meeting place), for not having all family members at home at the time of the emergency, and for communicating with relatives out of the area. Hint: Get those relatives to agree to *one* main contact, who then calls everyone else with *your* message.

Timing is everything: Who's at home? How much time will you have? How will your family communicate with each other? Think of all the possibilities and issues, and discuss them with your family members. Designate duties! Who does what?

Family **Ready** planning includes identifying important documents, licenses, keys, insurance contact information, medications for all family members and also for pets and livestock! Everyone makes their short list of "must takes," and this is included in the larger family list. Consider having packs ready at the start of fire season, with a short list of final essentials to add. Don't forget food for your animals!

A final **Ready** item: If pet and livestock evacuation is necessary, plan how to do this and arrange where you'd take them. Practice emergency crating or trailer loading so that you'll know how long this might take (see photo).



Sandy Shaffer's dog, Maggie, needs more practice crating on command—not to mention an attitude adjustment!

Set starts when there is a possible emergency situation such as a wildfire in the area. Be alert—listen to scanners or radios to find out what is happening while you collect your (and your pet's) emergency packs. Start laying out hose, pack the car, and hitch up the horse trailer. Communicate with family members, school, work, etc. Monitor the fire's behavior and be in contact with local authorities for road access and closures. Call your out-of-town family contact to explain your situation, and agree that *you* will update *them* again when it's safe for you to do so.

Finally, if there is a wildfire in your area, put on appropriate clothing and shoes, and monitor your home for flying embers that could ignite the home. Use that water supply!

Go! is when you are either instructed to evacuate or personally decide to. Don't wait until the last minute! Choose the safest route, inform family members, and meet at your designated location. Remain alert, cooperate with local authorities, and be safe.

Most importantly: Stick to your plan!
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