

Prepare a disaster 'go bag'

Contributed by
Jehovah's Witnesses
Public Information Desk

Flashlights, jugs of bottled water, a first aid kit, and ready-to-eat meal

packs line the Arowcavage living room table. The family is not going camping — they are preparing for disaster by putting together a "go bag."

Adam and Ericka Arow-

cavage never used to worry about natural disasters in their quaint Willamette Valley home, but after the wildfires of 2020, they do not want to leave anything to chance for them and

their two children, Jonathan, 16, and Cosette, 13.

"We always felt that our area was free from natural disasters," Ericka said. She described how they were affected by two recent fires near their home: the Holiday Farm Fire to the northeast and the Archie Creek Fire to the south.

"We scrambled to throw stuff in the car," she continued. "After the threat was gone, we realized the need for our family to be more prepared in advance."

The Arowcavages are not the only family in Oregon affected by wildfires in the past few years. Residents in and near Detroit, Phoenix and Talent were also heavily impacted by last year's wildfire season, which in total burned more than 500,000 protected acres throughout the state, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Preparing in advance with a disaster-ready kit has helped families nationwide through extreme and abnormal weather events, which experts warn are on the rise.

"Having a personal preparedness plan increases your chances of staying safe," according to a training program from the Columbia University's National Center for Disaster Preparedness.

Jolted awake by a neighbor's urgent knocking, Aaron and Jacqueline Pate

were horrified to see the encroaching flames of the fast-moving Woolsey fire that had been miles away when they went to bed. It burned to within 100 feet of their Westlake Village home in 2018 as part of California's deadliest wildfire season on record.

"Because we had go bags, we weren't running around trying to pack things at the last minute," said Jacqueline. "We had the time we needed to comfort our kids and get everyone safely into the car."

The Pates credited the disaster-preparedness help they received as Jehovah's Witnesses, both through periodic reminders at their congregation meetings and from tips for putting together go bags on the organization's website, www.jw.org.

"Life is precious, so we encourage all to heed the Bible's advice to take practical steps to protect ourselves from danger," said Robert Hendriks III, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States.

Go bags also have proven useful in the opposite circumstances as "stay bags."

When February's Winter Storm Uri left millions of Texans without heat, electricity, and running water, many go bags there saw their first-ever use outside of hurricane sea-

son.

Houston residents Dan and Rhiannon Muey's advance preparation enabled them to shelter in place for days, even as many in their area braved treacherous road conditions to scour barren store shelves for supplies.

"Our hurricane 'go bags' became our winter storm 'stay bags,' but we were so glad we had them," said Dan. "Instead of waiting in lines for hours to get basics like drinking water, we already had what we needed."

The Gauthier family regularly sit down to review and replenish the family's emergency supplies. Their efforts paid off last August when Hurricane Laura hit them in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

"Having our go bags allowed us to act faster," said father-of-two Matthew Gauthier. "If we had to start from scratch it would've slowed us down a lot."

As for the Arowcavages, the family feels a sense of relief after preparing their go bags.

"Now that my family has prepared a go bag, I feel so much better," said Cosette. "The pressure seems to have gone away knowing that we are ready."

Disaster-preparedness suggestions and tips for putting together a go bag are available from FEMA at ready.gov.

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