

## Wildfires



The wildfires currently raging throughout the west may directly or indirectly affect your employees and their families. In all the confusion associated with this type of disaster, there is useful information for those in need—and CONCERN: EAP is available to help. Feel free to remind employees that CONCERN is available to assist with emotional support and finding local resources. CONCERN is staffed 24 hours a day, every day.

**CONCERN: EAP 800-344-4222**

[concern-eap.com](http://concern-eap.com)

### Resources

[Google Crisis Map](#) – Updates on public alerts, evacuation notices, shelters, fire status

[American Red Cross - Safe & Well Website](#) – Reconnect with friends, family, and loved ones. Register yourself as “Safe and Well” or call 1-800-Red Cross (1-800-733-2767) to be connected to your local Red Cross Chapter

[American Red Cross - Open Shelters](#) - Find open shelters in and around your community

[FEMA](#) - Learn what protective measures to make before, during and after a disaster

Widespread wildfires are threatening homes and businesses, causing residents to evacuate and seek safety far from danger. In times of disaster, a plan of action can save lives. We have prepared this special edition of the *LifeAdviser* to give you vital information about how to create and execute a disaster plan should it ever become necessary.

## Before You Go - Emergency Essentials Checklist

### Important Family Documents

One of the most important elements is often the most overlooked: family documents. Records, contracts, deeds, and other important papers need to be protected during an emergency situation.

It's best to collect your documents in advance of an emergency. BUT, do not let the gathering of these items impede you from making a timely evacuation.

- Will
- Insurance policies
- Contracts
- Deeds
- Stocks and bonds
- Passports, social security cards, immunization records
- Bank account numbers
- Credit card account numbers and companies
- Inventory of valuable household goods, important telephone numbers
- Family records (birth, marriage, death certificates)

## Evacuating to a Public Shelter: What to Expect?

Evacuating an area where a disaster has occurred is the smart thing to do. It not only gives you the opportunity to move your family to a safer, more secure location, but it also reduces the amount of interference that occurs when emergency management professionals move into your area. Leave when you're asked to leave and you'll be doing your part to help with disaster recovery.

## Things you should know about going to an evacuation shelter

Evacuation shelters are provided during emergency situations for citizens who have no other place to go. If possible, make arrangements with a friend or relative who lives outside of the evacuation area. You will be more comfortable in a less crowded environment among friends. Remember, alcohol, weapons, and pets are not permitted in public shelters.

Many churches provide shelter for their members, and businesses are encouraged to shelter employees and families if possible.

Buildings used for evacuation shelters are normally public schools, event centers, or other large sites staffed by Red Cross volunteers, National Guard personnel, and other organizations. Shelters are often crowded, can be uncomfortable during power outages, have long lines for food and restrooms, with a constant level of noise that makes it difficult to rest or sleep. It's possible that you may have to stay for several days.

If you go to a public shelter, you should to take the following items:

- A change of clothing, rain gear and sturdy shoes
- Toiletries and personal items
- Blankets or sleeping bags and pillows
- Identification and any important papers
- Games or toys for children
- Books for adults
- Special items for infants or elderly family members
- Any special dietary needs and non-perishable foods for snacks
- Battery operated radio, flashlights and plenty of spare batteries
- Prescription medications or any over-the-counter medications you normally take

## Helping Children Cope with Disaster

A disaster may strike quickly and without warning. These events can be frightening for adults, and can be traumatic for children, especially if they don't know what to do.

During a disaster, your family may have to leave your home and daily routine. Children may become anxious, confused or frightened. As an adult, you'll need to cope with the disaster in a way that will help children avoid developing a permanent sense of loss. It is important to give children guidance that will help them reduce their fears.

## Children and Their Response to Disaster

Children depend on daily routines. They wake up, eat breakfast, go to school, and play with friends. When emergencies or disasters interrupt this routine, children might become anxious.

In a disaster, they'll look to you and other adults for help. How you react to an emergency gives them clues on how to act. If you react with alarm, a child may become more scared. They see our fear as proof that the danger is real. If you seem overcome with a sense of loss, a child may feel their losses more strongly.

Children's fears also may stem from their imagination, and you should take these feelings seriously. A child who feels afraid is afraid. Your words and actions can provide reassurance.

When talking with your child, be sure to present a realistic picture that is both honest and manageable.

Feelings of fear are healthy and natural for adults and children. But as an adult, you need to keep control of the situation. When you're sure that danger has passed, concentrate on your child's emotional needs by asking the child what's uppermost in his or her mind. Having children participate in the family's recovery activities will help them feel that their life will return to "normal." Your response during this time may have a lasting impact.

Be aware that after a disaster, children are most afraid that...

- ... the event will happen again.*
- ... someone will be injured or killed.*
- ... they will be separated from family.*
- ... they will be left alone.*

## Advice to Parents: Prepare for Disaster

You can create a Family Disaster Plan by taking these simple steps.

First, learn what hazards exist in your community and how to prepare for each. Then meet with your family to discuss what you would do, as a group, in each situation.

Next, take steps to prepare your family for disaster, such as posting emergency phone numbers, selecting an out-of-state family contact, assembling disaster supplies kits for each member of your household, and installing smoke detectors on each level of your home.

Finally, practice your Family Disaster Plan so that everyone will remember what to do when a disaster does occur.

- Develop and practice a Family Disaster Plan. Contact your local emergency management or civil defense office, or your local Red Cross chapter for materials that describe how your family can create a disaster plan. Everyone in the household, including children, should play a part in the family's response and recovery efforts.
- Teach your child how to recognize danger signals. Make sure your child knows what smoke detectors, fire alarms, and local community warning systems (horns, sirens) sound like.
- Explain how to call for help. Teach your child how and when to call for help. Check the telephone directory for local emergency phone numbers and post these phone numbers by all telephones. If you live in a 9-1-1-service area, tell your child to call 9-1-1.
- Help your child memorize important family information. Children should memorize their family name, address, and phone number. They should also know where to meet in case of an emergency. Some children may not be old enough to memorize the information. They could carry a small index card that lists emergency information to give to an adult or babysitter.

## After The Disaster: Time for Recovery

- Immediately after the disaster, try to reduce your child's fear and anxiety.
- Keep the family together. While you look for housing and assistance, you may want to leave your children with relatives or friends. Instead, keep the family together as much as possible and make children a part of what you are doing to get the family back on its feet. Children get anxious, and they'll worry that their parents won't return.
- Calmly and firmly explain the situation. As best as you can, tell children what you know about the disaster. Explain what will happen next. For example, say, "Tonight, we will all stay together in the shelter." Get down to the child's eye level and talk to them.
- Encourage children to talk. Let children talk about the disaster and ask questions as much as they want. Encourage children to describe what they're feeling. Listen to what they say. If possible, include the entire family in the discussion.
- Include children in recovery activities. Give children chores that are their responsibility. This will help children feel they are part of the recovery. Having a task will help them understand that everything will be all right.

You can help children cope by understanding what causes their anxieties and fears. Reassure them with firmness and love. Your children will realize that life will eventually return to normal. If a child does not respond to the above suggestions, seek help from a mental health specialist or a member of the clergy.

## **CONCERN: EAP is here to help.**

All of us at CONCERN: EAP send best wishes for speedy containment of the fires, our condolences to those who are suffering from their losses, and our thanks to all of firefighters who are working so valiantly.

For more information on preparing for a disaster in your state, please visit your state emergency management website.

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