



Disaster readiness · response · recovery

Traveling Safely by Car in an Emergency

People often panic in an emergency, 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 leave their cars.

Hurricanes: Evacuate Early


During the hurricane season, have your car checked. A thorough safety check should include:

- 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
- high grade oil and other lubrication

Keep your gas tank full.

Keep the following together, ready to be loaded in the car:

- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Matches and candles for light

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- Empty coffee can with plastic cover to use as a toilet
 - Facial tissue and waterproof gear
 - High-calorie non-perishable food and can opener
 - Bottled water
 - Compass and road maps
 - Knife
 - First aid kit
 - Flashlight or signal light with extra batteries
 - Booster cables
 - Fire extinguisher
 - Portable radio with extra batteries
 - Tools; pliers, screwdriver, adjustable wrench, shovel, traction mats
 - 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

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expect to arrive, and your expected route.

Always fill your car's gas tank before leaving, even for short distances. 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 floodwaters, 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. Remember, 6 inches of fast moving water can knock you off your feet.

A car is the least safest place to be during a tornado. 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

- Avoid overexertion and overexposure.
- Stay in your car where you are sheltered and more likely to be found.
- Stay calm.
- Keep fresh air in your car. Keep the windows downwind open about an inch if you run the motor.
- Exercise from time to time by clapping hands and moving arms and legs vigorously. Don't stay in one position.
- Keep the dome light on at night to make the car visible to rescue crews.
- Have one person keep watch. Don't allow everyone in the car to sleep at once.
- Signal with the horn. An automobile horn can be heard as far as a mile downwind. Flash your lights from time to time at night.



Adapted by Dr., Wilma S. Hammett, Extension Home Environment Specialist, *from Evacuation II – Safety Tips for Emergency Travel*, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, 1997