

# How to Prepare for a Volcanic Eruption

Three Methods: [Making Emergency Plans](#) [Ensuring You Have the Necessary Supplies](#) [Taking the Right Course of Action in an Eruption](#)

Being prepared in the event of a volcanic eruption can mean the difference between life and death. More likely, it will help you protect your health and property from volcanic ash. Organizing a plan of action is key to proper preparation, and educating everyone in your family or household will help to better ensure their safety and well-being when disaster erupts. When an eruption occurs you should follow official guidance, but be prepared both to take shelter and to evacuate.

Method  
1

## Making Emergency Plans

**1 Draw up an emergency communication plan.** Volcanic eruptions can be very dangerous, and require thorough preparations to be made by those living or working in the vicinity of an active volcano. The first step of your preparation should be to draw up a comprehensive plan for how you will get in touch with your family if there is an emergency.

- Start by writing down all the different ways you can contact each other, and the relevant phone numbers and email addresses. Don't forget landline phone numbers.
- The eruption might occur suddenly when your family are not all at home, so it's important to know the emergency plans of the relevant schools, workplaces, and local government.
- Identify somebody out of town, such as a family member or family friend, who can act as your central point of contact.
- If you get separated and can't get in touch with each other, check in with this person out of town who will be able to relay information between you all.<sup>[1]</sup>

**2 Identify emergency meeting points.** As part of your emergency planning, you should decide on some specific meeting places where your family members can head to if there is an eruption and [you have to evacuate](#). If you have a family member with disabilities, ensure all the places you choose are accessible. Include your pets in your planning and locate places that can accommodate animals. Determine four distinct meeting places.

- One of these should be indoor, preferably at home or a nearby storm shelter, somewhere you will be protected from winds and potential volcanic ash.
- The second should be a place in your neighbourhood that is not your home. If for any reason you cannot get to your house, a nearby location is the next best thing.
- The third place should be in your town, but outside of your neighbourhood. A central public building such as a library or community centre could be a good choice.
- Finally, decide on a place outside of your town. This is the place you will go to meet up with your family if you have to leave town suddenly. A family or friend out of town is the best choice for this meeting point.<sup>[2]</sup>

**3 Discuss the plans with your family.** Take the time to talk through the plans with your family so everyone understands, and make sure everyone has a copy of all the relevant contact details in their purse or wallet. Everyone in your family should know what to do if there are warnings to [evacuate](#), and understand that it is not fair to other family members if some of you choose to stay behind in spite of evacuation warnings.<sup>[3]</sup>

- You can rehearse the plans and revise them at regular family meetings to ensure that everyone is involved and feels part of the planning.<sup>[4]</sup>
- Talking to children about the possibility of a disaster is better than pretending it may never happen.
- If children are aware that everything is planned, and know what to do, their fear and [anxiety](#) will be reduced in the event of a disaster.

**4 Consider potential financial implications.** As well as emergency preparations, you should also take care of the

more mundane precautions. That means considering insurance for potential damage caused by volcanoes, and thinking about what impact an eruption could have on your business. If you run a business located in the vicinity of volcanoes, [create a business continuity plan](#) to ensure that staff can get to safety, and stock, equipment, and any other business essentials are protected.

- If you run a business, you have a responsibility for your staff as well as your family.
- A volcano can cause severe property damage. Consider purchasing [insurance](#) if you are in a high-risk area.<sup>[5]</sup>

**Method  
2**

## Ensuring You Have the Necessary Supplies

- 1 Put together an emergency supply kit.** This kit is something that anyone living in a volcano zone should have prepared at all times.<sup>[6]</sup> The kit should include a [first aid kit](#), food and water supplies, a mask to protect against ash, such as one used when mowing lawns, a manual can opener, a flashlight with extra batteries, any necessary medications, sturdy shoes, goggles or other eye protection, and a battery-powered radio.
  - Make sure that everyone in your family knows where the kit is kept, and can easily access it in an emergency.
  - A flashlight, phone charger, and radio combined as one, that runs on both solar power and hand cranking is the ideal item to have ready in your house for any natural disaster event. Pack this if you have one.
- 2 Create an emergency kit for your car.** As well as a more general emergency kit, you should be sure to put one together that includes items specifically for your car. This kit should combine general emergency supplies including food, a first aid kit, sleeping bags, blankets and spare batteries, with items to help keep you on the road. Make sure you have a map, as well as booster or jumper cables, a fire extinguisher, and some tools.
  - Try to make sure you have a full tank of gas. If you don't have access to a car, consider asking a neighbour or friend if you can make an arrangement with them to share a car.
  - Be sure to speak to the friend or neighbour in advance and don't wait until the evacuation is under way.
  - If you don't have transportation arranged, speak to local emergency services staff during the evacuation.
- 3 Consider respiratory protection.** One of the main health dangers of a volcanic eruption is the potential of volcanic ash to damage your respiratory tract. The ash can travel for hundreds of miles on the wind, and is most dangerous for young infants, older adults, or those with pre-existing respiratory illnesses.<sup>[7]</sup> If you think any member of your family is at a heightened risk, you can consider buying an air purifying respirator.
  - The N-95 disposable respirator is recommended for use by the government, and can be purchased at local hardware stores.
  - If you do not have a respirator, you can use a simple dust mask. This might help ease the irritation if you are only exposed to the ash for a short time, but does not offer the level of protection that a respirator does.
  - If there is volcanic ash in the air outside, stay inside as much as possible to avoid the worst effects.
- 4 Prepare communication devices for updates.** Make sure you have all the possible means of receiving updates from the local authorities in good working order, and ready to go. Use your [radio](#) or television at home to listen for volcano updates or evacuation notices. Listen out for disaster sirens, and familiarise yourself with what they sound like so you know what to expect. When a volcanic eruption occurs, you'll need to listen for the sirens to go off.

**Method  
3**

## Taking the Right Course of Action in an Eruption

- 1 Evacuate when instructed.** It's important to pay close attention to the instructions and alerts given by the local government and emergency services. Remember the emergency services are fully trained to deal with the situation, and will most likely have access to more information than you. If you are told that you need to evacuate, do so swiftly, calmly, and according to the instructions given.
  - When you evacuate, only take essentials with you, such as your emergency kit and your car emergency kit. Be sure that you have a supply of any prescription medications that will last at least a week.
  - If you have time, be sure to switch off the gas, electricity and water in your house.
  - It's also advisable to disconnect your appliances before you go. This reduce the chances of an electric shock

when the power is turned back on.

- If you are driving, you should follow the designated evacuation routes, and be prepared for heavy traffic. Other routes may be blocked so stick with the given evacuation routes.
- If you evacuate, avoid low-lying areas and valleys. There is an increased chance of encountering a mudflow in these areas. If you come to a river, look upstream before crossing. Do not cross if you see a mudflow approaching.<sup>[8]</sup>

**2 Attend to livestock and pets.** In the event that your house and property are directly impacted by the volcano, your animals will not be able to escape. Do what you can within reason to ensure their safety. Be aware that most emergency shelters will be unable to accommodate them. If you're keeping your pets with you, you'll need to be sure that you have planned ahead and have enough food and water for them.

- Place your livestock in an enclosed area or make arrangements to transport them as far offsite as possible.

**3 Take shelter if you are told to stay where you are.** If you are not told to evacuate, but are advised to stay at home and take shelter, keep listening to the TV or radio so you can move quickly if required. When you are at home you should take extra measures to help ensure your safety and health. Start by closing and securing all of the windows and any doors that lead to the outside. Close your fireplace damper, and then make sure that your heater, air conditioner, and all fans are turned off.

- Run extra water in the sinks, bathtubs, and other containers as an emergency supply for cleaning (use as little as possible) or purifying and drinking. You can also get emergency drinking water from a water heater.
- Get your family together in a room above ground level that does not have windows in it, if possible.
- Keep listening to updates, but stay indoors until you are told it is safe to go out. This is the best way to avoid potential respiratory damage from volcanic ash.

**4 Assist others in need.** Whether you are advised to evacuate or take shelter, you should think of others around you, who may need need extra assistance. If you have neighbours who are elderly, have disabilities, or infants, be sure to help out in any way you can. If you are evacuating and have space in your car offer to take an elderly neighbour. If you are sheltering at home invite him to sit in with you, or make sure he is fully prepared in his own home.<sup>[9]</sup>

**5 Protect yourself if you do go outside.** You should avoid going outside unless given the all clear. If you do need to go out to help somebody, however, try to protect yourself as well as you can. If you have them, wear safety goggles to protect your eyes, and a respirator to protect your lungs. Cover as much of your body as possible, and wrap a scarf around around your head.<sup>[10]</sup>

- Even swimming goggles and clothing can be used to protect your eyes and breathing if that's all you have.<sup>[11]</sup>
- When entering a building after being outside under ash, remove your outer layer of clothing. The ash is difficult to remove from anything it falls on.<sup>[12]</sup>
- If you're going outside, remove contact lenses and wear glasses instead. If the ash gets in behind contact lenses, it can cut into your eye, causing corneal abrasions.

## Community Q&A

### How can I protect my house from a volcanic eruption?



In the event of a volcanic eruption in your immediate locale, there is very little that can be done to protect one's home. Closing and reinforcement (shutters etc) of all windows and doors will go some way toward preventing property damage from volcanic ash, though it is entirely possible that your house would be completely destroyed.

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## Tips

- Ideally have a landline telephone in the room in which you will be holding up. This can be used to let your emergency

contact know to keep their phone line available in case you need to let them know about any problems or issues.

- Check on friends and neighbours. This is especially important if you know they may need assistance, or have special needs.
- Report broken utility lines to local authorities if you see any.
- Only use the phone lines for emergency calls to avoid clogging the communications systems.

## Warnings

- Volcanic ash is a respiratory health hazard. It impacts all people but especially those with such respiratory problems as asthma and bronchitis.
- Avoid sightseeing! Not only do you endanger your own life but natural disaster sightseers are becoming a frequent problem for emergency services workers and can hamper rescue work. At all times stay out of designated restricted zones.

## Things You'll Need

- Emergency kit and car kit
- Maps
- Communications devices (telephone, radio)
- Flashlight
- Towels, etc., for sealing up house cracks
- Transportation for early evacuation
- Pet carriers and animal transportation
- Car keys
- Food and drink

## Sources and Citations

1. [http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1440520833367-b485ed4517c86bc824061197319f4999/Family\\_Comm\\_Plan\\_508\\_20150820.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1440520833367-b485ed4517c86bc824061197319f4999/Family_Comm_Plan_508_20150820.pdf)
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3. <http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan>

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