

Get ready for the unexpected with a disaster go bag

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A change of clothes, jugs of bottled water, a first aid kit, and ready-to-eat meal packs line the Sargent's living room floor. The couple isn't going camping — they're preparing for disaster by doing the semi-annual check of their "go bag."

Kevin and Cortney Sargent never gave much thought to needing a go bag in their small town of Brookings. But while being evacuated from the Chetco Bar Fire of 2017, the couple experienced first-hand the benefit of having a go bag prepared.

"The go bag is the first thing we grabbed," remembered Cortney. "We had our game face on, and we grabbed our go bags and our documents."

Knowing that they had what they needed during the wildfire evacuation provided the Sargents a sense of calm.

"While we were loading up the car, it was surprisingly easy to say, 'That might be it. Whatever is left we might not see again,'" Kevin said.

The Sargents have lived in Brookings for 17 years and attend the North Brookings Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. During their weekly meetings, they periodically receive suggestions on how to build go bags as well as reminders of the Bible principles that stress the importance of being prepared.

"At our meetings at the Kingdom Hall, we received really good information about how we should be prepared in case of an emergency," Cortney said. "It was reminded to us that there still could be a natural disaster at any time."

Kevin explained why being prepared is important. "We're reminded to be prepared, we're reminded why to be prepared," Kevin said. "It's a respect for our life and that there are unforeseen circumstances that are out of our control."

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."

"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.