

From Marin Independent Journal, PJ Bremier, Oct. 27, 2017**

In the case of an emergency with just a few minutes to spare, what would be the first things you would grab on the way out the front door?

That question hit me the day after the recent Wine Country fires started. There was so much wind, I considered what would happen if the fires spread to Marin. So, I started a list.

The pets would definitely go into the cars but, in a panic and without a list, I could easily have forgotten our family's quiet tortoise or have had no time to gather sentimental jewelry, family silver, financial documents or favorite photographs.

One Wine Country homeowner saved his home by hosing down his fences and roof so I bought 100-foot-long hoses for every spigot around the house. And, sprinklers. Just in case.

But what would people who were actually affected by the fires take or do differently?

The four women interviewed for last week's column had the same priority — children and pets were the first to go in waiting cars. If they had time, they'd take:

- Important financial documents including insurance, home and list of online passwords
- Sentimental items such as the urns of their loved one's ashes, family photographs and videos, letters or documents, jewelry, mementos of their children's schoolwork and the like
- Medications (pet's, too), eyeglasses and contact lenses and supplies. If your medications need refrigeration, keep cold packs ready to go in your freezer
- Computers, cell phones, fully charged batteries and cords

Some wished they had:

- Bottles of water, blankets, nonperishable food to get them through the first day or two
- A week's worth of clothing, toiletries, pet carriers and food
- A fire-safe lock box for important documents and jewelry
- An emergency alert system set up on all cell phones
- A full tank of gas

Jane Gyorgy, a former Point Reyes resident who moved to Oakmont four years ago, had time to pack and bang on nearby front doors to alert neighbors before being evacuated in the early morning hours.

One neighbor wasn't wearing her hearing aids, though. "She was confused and scared when we showed up thinking we were burglars," Gyorgy says, until a quick-thinking neighborhood block leader held up a sign in big, bold letters that read, "Fire!" Evacuate Now!"

"We had time, but so many people didn't," she says. "And, so many cats were left behind."

She suggests that pet owners prepare a sign in advance to post on the front door if unable to gather pets in time. It should note the pet's name, description or photo, and owner's cellphone number so a helpful neighbor or Humane Society officer could leave food and water. Leave it in your "go bag."

It took her an hour in traffic to go one mile when they evacuated. Fortunately, her dad “drilled it into me never to let my tank get lower than half” so she and her husband had full gas tanks.

Train yourself never to go to bed with an empty gas tank.

Pack a “go bag” for everyone in the family, even pets, in an easy access place. Things you might consider packing:

- A checklist of cherished items, in order of importance, that you’d want to take if you have time
- A change of socks and underwear and small toiletries
- Photocopies of credit cards, online passwords, important financial and legal documents
- A spare set of keys for cars, properties and safe boxes
- A list of medications and dosages and spare pairs of eyeglasses
- Small sentimental items
- A pair of walkie-talkies if cell coverage is out so you can still communicate if traveling in separate cars. A pad of paper, tape and a Sharpie pen for last-minute signs or notes

• A flashlight or two, with batteries installed backwards to stay fresh and a small blanket

What if you don’t have enough time to gather up all your financial papers and family photographs?

- Sign up for an online service such as Mint (which is free) where your budget, credit cards, bank accounts and bills are seamlessly and automatically consolidated in one place, and can be access from anywhere
- If you need receipts for tax purposes, look into digital scanners such as NeatReceipts or ScanSnap where you send your receipts as you get them and organize them on your computer. Mail receipts to Shoeboxed and it will scan them for you. Evernote or OneNote apps can keep track of your receipts, too
- Instead of taking boxes of photos, family documents and school artwork, take photos of them and keep them on a disk or thumb drive. Costco, among other stores, can transfer heirloom photos, films, and slides and so can services like Legacy Box, ScanCafe or Gophoto. Then, just slip the DVD in your go-bag or send duplicates to out-of-area family members for safekeeping
- Inventory your home and other properties for insurance purposes before a disaster with apps such as Encircle, Sortly, Home Contents and others.

Start your checklist and your go-bags today and take advantage of the digital opportunities now while you have time.

**** PRDC Note: Don't forget to check readymarin.org for Grab 'n Go information.**