

Evacuation from Redding Fires- What I learned

I never thought it would happen. In fact, nothing every really happens in Redding itself. We get some low grade earthquakes here and there but most catastrophes happen to other people in other places that we watch on the internet. This time it was my turn, I guess. Here are some of the things my family and I learned by bugging out while the world burned around us.

1. **Evac Lists**- I put together an evacuation spreadsheet list about a year ago. It lists out what items my family would need to take depending on how much time we had to leave. It was very valuable to me and kept us on task and made sure we grabbed the most important things before we worried about anything else. Several of my neighbors were over and didn't know what to take. They found the list beneficial as well. It's not a good time to have to think about this when there are 100 foot flames coming toward your house.
2. **Camp trailer**- I felt very fortunate to receive promptings several months ago to get my old camp trailer in order and road worthy. It proved very helpful in this situation. My wife and I and our 4 boys use our trailer for camping. But we purchased and set up the trailer just in case we ever had to leave. In this case it was ready to go except for clothes and food for a camping trip. So most of the work was done and we were able to spend our time filling it full of items from the house we didn't want burned. Also hotel rooms were quickly booked up two hours in every direction within 12 hours of the first notice of evacuations.
3. **Cash**- We keep a #10 can full of cash in \$20 bills. Many people lost their homes and many businesses including banks didn't have power due to power lines and power towers burning down. So you couldn't get money and sometimes could not use your debit card. Cash is king and it's a good idea to have as much cash as you can, in an easy place to grab. In this case these types of events last way longer than people think. Some of the areas that were hit the hardest will take up to 15 days or longer before they allow people to return to their homes or what is left of them.
4. **Fuel**- Many gas stations also lost power. Keep some fuel and a siphon shaker hose to quickly put fuel in your car if needed. Also we keep the tow vehicle at least $\frac{3}{4}$ full at all times. It's an excursion diesel that holds 44 gallons. It can get from Redding CA to Provo UT on one tank. We were able to fill up all 4 of our cars quickly without going to the gas station. We try to keep the other car at least half full. Sometimes we aren't so good about it thou.
5. **Protection and rotten looters**- Only a suggestion. Get your CCW and a good weapon. Many looters have come up from the Auburn and Fairfield to rob those evacuated homes. One of my friends did not evacuate and had to run off two groups of looters trying to get in his house. Most of the looters who were arrested were armed with guns and knives. This morning my friend, a CHP officer, sent me a picture of a full auto Uzi Pistol and a machete that he just pulled off a guy looting. These people are coward thieves and most use Meth or Heroin. They only care about themselves. I spoke with several people who wished they had something to protect themselves with. I on the other hand am locked and loaded. To make matters worse, I have heard of several people who had evacuated and had their car stolen with all their important possessions.
6. **Important Documents**- A couple of years ago my wife scanned important documents onto two flash drives and keeps one in the trailer and one in her purse. The hard copies of those documents are kept in an easy to grab accordion file. This made it quick and easy to grab and go.

7. **72 hour kits are not enough**- I was evacuated for 5 days. We just got back into our house last night and that is just because the amazing fire fighters were able to save our neighborhood by bombing from the air...so no houses burned in my neighborhood. Fortunately we had our camp trailer, because our 72 hour kits would never been enough to do much more than keep us alive. Of course I know that is their purpose, but having enough to just be stay alive is just no fun.
8. **Medications and First Aid**- You will not have enough. I work for a pharmacy. People all over were trying to get prescriptions filled because they forgot to take theirs as they evacuated. Take medications and take plenty so you can share. Don't forget over-the-counter like Acid reflux and anti-diarrhea. It becomes difficult to know what you will be eating and how you will react to it. Also, everybody needed headache medication and allergy meds due to all the smoke and garbage in the air. And here is a plug for fish antibiotics. I treated a UTI while evacuated. But be warned, I work for a pharmacy and am familiar how this antibiotic was prescribed. Worked great.
9. **Communications**- I would have been lost without my phone and computer for communication and fire info. Make sure you bring ways to charge your batteries. Our solar was of little help due to the smoke. Otherwise it works great. In this case we kept things charged with a goal zero 400 watt and some Anker battery packs I keep charged. I could recharge with the generator or plug in when we could find power. Several of the radio towers burned down so Radio stations, texting and calling was difficult at times. Ham radios would have been great if we could get enough people in our church to have them. There was a lot of bad information being passed around. After a while you start questioning everything until it was confirmed by someone seeing it.

There were a few things I wish I had done better or had

1. I wish I had another generator that I could link with the one I already had to have enough combined power to run the AC on the trailer. It was getting up to 112 degrees. So I will be getting another one. Plus it could act as a backup the other generator went down.
2. I wish we had more N95 masks. The smoke was nasty and is causing a lot of respiratory problems. Within a few days, pharmacies and other places started giving them away, a lot of us still sound like we have smoked for years.
3. I wish our church leadership were ham trained. The cell phones were invaluable...but as cell towers burned, calls started getting dropped and texts sometimes would not download for a while.
4. We already added some things to the evacuation list. But mostly personal things i.e. Grandma's old handwritten cookbook and other similar things. To answer some other questions about the evac list. It was set up by how much time you had to leave. It goes from 15 minutes to 2 hours+. In each section, it lists out the items to take if corresponding with the time. It was not done by room...just a list. We found the items we needed without too much trouble. When we knew it was time to leave...we printed the list and posted it on the inside front door, so everybody knew what to take.
5. Have an up to date cell phone list of those you want to contact.
6. Like I said before, medications become important. Take extra so you can share.
7. Board games and dog toys went a long way for the kids and animals. I will probably never play a game of Uno again though. These were prepacked in our camp trailer.
8. Dogs were easy to handle. Cats are harder to evacuate. If you have a cat, get a kennel for it.