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Wisconsin Household Emergency Readiness Guide

> What to prepare, what to do, and how to practice before disaster strikes

EVERGREEN COMMUNITY GUIDE
Updated August 2026
Prepared for Wisconsin households and communities. Review annually, seasonally, and after every real emergency.

Preparedness guidance belongs here. Current incident information belongs on the Hub.
Use this guide to build and practice your household system; use FoxValleyRecovery.org during an actual local emergency for changing resources and recovery information.

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During an active emergency

Follow current instructions from local officials, emergency management, utilities, public health, and the National Weather Service. This guide is for preparation and quick reference; it does not replace an evacuation order or emergency dispatcher.

Life-threatening emergency: call 911

Call for injuries, fire, trapped or missing people, suspected gas danger, structural collapse, live wires, carbon monoxide symptoms, or another immediate threat to life.

Essential needs and disaster aftercare: call 211

Dial 211 or 877-947-2211 for help locating shelter, food, transportation, healthcare, utility assistance, and other community resources. Availability varies by incident and location.

60-second tornado response

Shoes on. Phone in hand. People and pets to the shelter. Helmets on. Weather radio or official alerts on. Headcount. Stay sheltered until the warning has expired and immediate hazards are checked.

The core idea

Preparedness is not one giant survival duffel. Build three layers: a permanent shelter station, portable go-bags, and a larger home outage reserve. Then add household resilience upgrades as time and budget allow.

Quick-start priorities

1. **Choose the shelter location.** Use a basement or a small interior room on the lowest level, away from windows. Mobile and manufactured homes require a plan to reach a sturdy building or designated shelter before the storm arrives.
2. **Put protection where it is needed.** Store helmets, sturdy shoes, headlamps, gloves, eye protection, and a whistle inside or immediately beside the shelter area.
3. **Build portable go-bags.** Each adult should be able to carry a bag while also helping a child, older adult, person with a disability, or pet.
4. **Build the home reserve.** Store water, food, sanitation supplies, lighting, battery power, and seasonal equipment for at least several days.
5. **Practice realistic failures.** Run drills in darkness, with pets, with one exit blocked, and with only one adult available.

Know the alert - act without debate

Alert or condition	What it means and what to do
Tornado watch	Conditions are favorable. Charge devices, bring pets inside, clear the shelter route, place shoes and helmets beside the shelter, and keep official weather information on.
Tornado warning	A tornado has been detected or strongly indicated. Go to shelter immediately. Do not look outside, film, finish chores, or wait for a second source.

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Alert or condition	What it means and what to do
Severe thunderstorm warning	Damaging wind, large hail, or dangerous lightning may be approaching. Move indoors, stay away from windows, and be ready to move to the tornado shelter.
Flash flood or flood warning	Move away from low areas and follow evacuation instructions. Never drive into floodwater or around barricades.
Winter storm or extreme cold	Expect travel disruption, power loss, and dangerous exposure. Charge devices, protect plumbing, confirm safe heating plans, and avoid unnecessary travel.
Air-quality or smoke alert	Limit outdoor exposure as advised, close windows, use appropriate filtration when available, and follow health guidance for vulnerable household members.
Power outage	Switch to battery lighting, keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed, check the serving utility, and prevent carbon monoxide exposure from fuel-burning equipment.
Evacuation order	Leave by the route officials direct. Take people, pets, medications, critical mobility equipment, phones, identification, keys, and prepared bags. Do not delay for property.

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1. Build the three-layer household system

Layer A - Permanent shelter station

Keep these items permanently in the designated tornado shelter. Do not depend on collecting them after a warning begins.

- ☐ Properly fitting helmet for each person
- ☐ Dedicated sturdy, closed-toe shoes for each person
- ☐ Headlamp for each person and one bright lantern
- ☐ NOAA weather radio with spare batteries
- ☐ Charged power banks and the correct charging cables
- ☐ Work gloves, safety glasses or goggles, and N95-style dust masks
- ☐ Whistle for each person
- ☐ First-aid kit with large gauze pads, rolled gauze, tape, gloves, antiseptic, cold packs, and trauma shears
- ☐ Essential rescue medication and a printed medication/allergy list
- ☐ Several sealed water bottles and ready-to-eat snacks
- ☐ Blankets, pillows, or cushions for additional head and neck protection
- ☐ Waterproof pouch with household contacts, insurance information, and copies of key records
- ☐ Pet leashes, carriers, treats, and immediate medications
- ☐ Hearing protection and a comfort item for children or sensory-sensitive household members

Layer B - Portable go-bags

Each adult should have an easy-to-carry backpack or duffel. Smaller household members can carry a light comfort bag, but emergency essentials should remain under adult control.

Do not make the water impossible to carry

Carry a practical amount of drinking water in the go-bag. Keep the larger water supply in the home reserve and, when appropriate, in the vehicle. A bag that cannot be lifted while helping another person or pet has failed its purpose.

Go-bag essentials	Useful additions
Identification, small bills, and emergency contacts	Compact battery fan, rain poncho, hand warmers
Medication, medical list, glasses, and mobility-device supplies	FRS walkie-talkies and a waterproof notebook
Phone cables and power bank	Paper map and charging adapters
Carryable water and simple food for at least one day	Additional food and water staged in the vehicle or home reserve
Change of clothing and hygiene items	Small tarp, cord, duct tape, compact multi-tool
First aid, gloves, eye protection, and dust masks	Spare keys stored securely
Pet food, water, records, leash/carrier, and sanitation	Photo showing ownership and a familiar comfort item
Child comfort item and essential work/school items	Copies of lodging, insurance, and support contacts

Layer C - Home outage reserve

Store bulk supplies in labeled, accessible containers. Keep enough room in the shelter area for people; do not turn it into a cluttered storage room.

- ☐ Water: build toward at least one gallon per person per day for at least three days, with more for pets, medical needs, heat, or rural isolation

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☐ Nonperishable food for at least three days; build toward a longer reserve where outages or travel delays may last longer
☐ Manual can opener, simple utensils, garbage bags, toilet supplies, wipes, sanitizer, and hygiene products
☐ Lanterns, flashlights, common-size batteries, and recharged power banks
☐ Pet food, water, medication, litter, carriers, and waste supplies
☐ Blankets, seasonal clothing, rain gear, and heat/cold precautions
☐ Battery-backed smoke and carbon monoxide alarms
☐ Refrigerator and freezer thermometers
☐ Fire extinguishers, tarps, basic tools, and clearly labeled utility shutoffs
☐ Printed contacts and paper copies of critical plans

Household resilience upgrades

These are not go-bag contents. They are property or system improvements that can reduce disruption or make recovery safer.

Upgrade	Purpose
Portable power station and compatible solar panel	Quiet short-term power for phones, lights, communications, and selected medical equipment.
Generator and approved transfer equipment	Backup household power when installed and operated correctly. Generators must remain outdoors, more than 20 feet from doors, windows, and vents.
Battery backup for sump pump or medical devices	Reduces flooding or medical interruption during outages.
Professionally installed safe room or storm shelter	Provides substantial tornado protection when properly designed and installed.
Whole-home surge protection and monitored leak alarms	Reduces electrical and water-loss risk.
Documented home inventory stored off-site	Improves insurance documentation after a loss.

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2. Plan for people, animals, and separation

Need	Plan for it before the warning
Children	Give each child one simple job: go to the shelter, put on shoes and helmet, and sit in the assigned spot. Children should not search for pets, siblings, toys, or supplies.
Older adults	Plan for slower movement, hearing or vision needs, medication, temperature sensitivity, and safe transfer down stairs.
Disability or medical needs	Keep backup batteries, chargers, mobility equipment, written care instructions, and a support-person plan. Register for local alert or assistance programs when available.
Pets	Keep carriers and leashes accessible. Practice calm carrier entry. Include food, water, medicine, records, a photo showing ownership, and sanitation supplies.
Separated household	Choose an out-of-area contact, a nearby meeting point, a backup meeting point, and one short status format: SAFE - LOCATION - PLAN.
Neighbors	Know who may need warning, physical help, transportation, language support, or a wellness check. Do not promise help you cannot safely provide.

3. What to do during common emergencies

During a tornado warning

1. Go to a basement or small interior room on the lowest level, away from windows.
2. Put on sturdy shoes and helmets. Use blankets or cushions to protect heads and necks.
3. Bring pets into carriers or onto leashes. Do not let anyone leave shelter to find a hiding pet.
4. Use a weather radio or official alerts. Keep phone use brief so batteries and networks remain available.
5. Remain sheltered until the warning expires and immediate hazards have been checked.

Mobile and manufactured homes

Identify a sturdy building or designated storm shelter during fair weather and know how long it takes to reach it. Leave before the storm arrives. Waiting until a warning may be too late. A vehicle, mobile home, tent, or highway overpass is not a safe substitute for substantial shelter.

During a severe thunderstorm or lightning

- Move indoors and away from windows; damaging wind and hail may arrive before a tornado warning.
- Avoid contact with plumbing and corded electrical equipment during lightning.
- Keep alerts on and be ready to move to the tornado shelter immediately.

During flooding

- Move to higher ground when directed and follow road closures and evacuation instructions.
- Do not walk, swim, or drive through floodwater. Turn around; do not go around barricades.
- Keep away from downed wires, sewage, fuel, and contaminated water.

During extreme cold, winter storm, or heat

- Limit travel when officials advise it and keep a seasonal vehicle kit.

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- Use only heating and cooling methods intended for indoor use; never heat the home with a gas oven.
- Know where warming or cooling assistance can be found through 211 when local sites are activated.
- Check on people who are older, medically vulnerable, isolated, or without safe temperature control.

During smoke or poor air quality

- Follow current public-health guidance and limit outdoor activity when advised.
- Close windows and doors when outdoor air is hazardous, and use suitable filtration when available.
- Keep medications and a plan ready for household members with respiratory or cardiac conditions.

During a power outage

- Use flashlights or battery lanterns instead of candles whenever possible.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed. Use appliance thermometers to judge food safety.
- Report outages through the serving utility. Reserve 911 for immediate threats such as fire, injury, live wires, or carbon monoxide symptoms.
- Run generators outdoors, more than 20 feet from windows, doors, and vents. Use battery-backed carbon monoxide detectors.
- Never connect a generator to household wiring without approved transfer equipment installed for that purpose.

If the home becomes unsafe

60-second exit	10-minute controlled departure - only when entry is safe
People, pets, essential medication, phone, identification, wallet, keys, glasses, hearing aids, mobility equipment, sturdy shoes, and weather-appropriate clothing.	Prepared go-bags, insurance pouch, chargers, carryable water, food, clothing, hygiene supplies, pet gear, child comfort item, essential work/school items, and easily reached records.

Property is replaceable

Do not re-enter an unstable, burning, gas-filled, flooded, or electrically hazardous building for belongings. Wait for clearance from responders or a qualified professional.

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4. What not to do

Bad instincts create second emergencies. Review these rules during drills, not for the first time during a crisis.

☐ Do not rely on outdoor sirens, social media, or one phone as the only warning method.
☐ Do not watch, film, or photograph a tornado instead of sheltering.
☐ Do not shelter near windows or under a highway overpass.
☐ Do not wait for visible rotation, a second alert, or a neighbor to confirm a warning.
☐ Do not make children responsible for finding pets, siblings, or emergency gear.
☐ Do not store all supplies in one place that may become blocked or damaged.
☐ Do not overload a go-bag until it cannot be carried safely.
☐ Do not use candles when battery lighting is available.
☐ Do not use generators, grills, camp stoves, or fuel-burning heaters inside a home, garage, basement, enclosed porch, or near openings.
☐ Do not touch downed wires or anything they may be energizing, including fences, vehicles, trees, and standing water.
☐ Do not turn electrical switches on or off when natural gas is suspected.
☐ Do not enter a damaged building because the storm appears to be over.
☐ Do not assume cellular service, internet access, ATMs, or card payments will work.
☐ Do not let the emergency plan exist only in one adult's head.
☐ Do not let food, water, medication, batteries, clothing sizes, and pet supplies expire unnoticed.

5. Household drills

Drill	Exercise
90-second shelter drill	Trigger a simulated warning. Move everyone, secure pets, put on shoes and helmets, turn on the radio, and complete a headcount. Identify every delay.
Nighttime blackout drill	Turn off lights after dark. Test the route, headlamps, sleepy decision-making, pet handling, and whether the shelter is usable without power.
One-adult drill	Run the plan with only one adult available. This reveals whether bags are too heavy and whether pet, child, or mobility needs can be managed together.
Pet drill	Practice carriers, leashes, commands, and rewards without frightening the animal. Identify the pet most likely to hide.
Four-hour outage drill	Avoid normal electrical use. Test lighting, battery capacity, food, water, sanitation, communication, and refrigerator discipline.
Separated-family drill	Pretend household members are at work, school, or elsewhere. Practice the out-of-area contact and the SAFE - LOCATION - PLAN message.
Damaged-home exit drill	Block the normal exit. Practice sturdy shoes, gloves, alternate exits, bags, pets, outdoor meeting point, and staying away from lines and debris.
Uninhabitable-home drill	Assume the home cannot be occupied overnight. Leave within ten minutes and determine whether the household can function for 24 hours with only what was carried.

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Drill debrief

- ☐ What took too long?
- ☐ Who hesitated or went backward?
- ☐ Which pet hid or resisted?
- ☐ Was the route blocked or cluttered?
- ☐ Could one adult manage everyone and the bags?
- ☐ Did any essential item fail, expire, or go missing?
- ☐ Could the household function without internet or cellular service?
- ☐ What one change will be completed before the next drill?

6. Keep the system alive

Preparedness degrades quietly. Batteries discharge, children grow, medications change, pets age, contact information moves, and plans stop matching real life. Maintenance is part of the plan, not an optional extra.

Frequency	Actions
Monthly	Test the weather radio, alerts, lights, power banks, smoke alarms, and carbon monoxide alarms.
Every 3 months	Run a full shelter drill, clear the shelter route, confirm pet handling, and verify contact information.
Every 6 months	Rotate food and water, replace batteries, check medication dates, update clothing sizes, inspect documents, and test the nighttime plan.
Every spring	Review severe-weather procedures, tree hazards, sump-pump backup, tarps, tools, and insurance records.
Every fall	Add winter outage equipment, warm clothing, vehicle kits, and heating/ventilation precautions.
After every real event	Conduct a ten-minute debrief. Record friction, failures, and the specific correction.

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7. Household plan worksheet

Plan item	Household answer
Primary shelter location	_____
Alternate shelter location	_____
Outdoor meeting point	_____
Nearby reunion point	_____
Out-of-area reunion point	_____
Out-of-area contact	_____
Utility provider and outage number	_____
Insurance company and policy number	_____
Pet plan / carrier location	_____
Person who may need assistance	_____
Medication / medical equipment plan	_____
Where emergency bags are stored	_____
Where copies of records are stored	_____

Important limitation

This is general preparedness guidance. It does not replace an evacuation order, emergency dispatcher, fire department, utility crew, building inspector, public-health authority, medical professional, or other responsible authority.

Official sources and further guidance

1. ReadyWisconsin - Make a Kit - Home, to-go, vehicle, and pet emergency kit guidance.	**5.** Ready.gov - Build a Kit - Federal household emergency supply guidance, including water storage.
2. ReadyWisconsin - Tornadoes - Wisconsin-specific warning, shelter, mobile-home, drill, and recovery guidance.	**6.** CDC - Carbon Monoxide Basics - Generator placement and carbon monoxide prevention.
3. ReadyWisconsin - Be Alert - Wireless Emergency Alerts and public notification options.	**7.** 211 Wisconsin - Local essential-needs and emergency-resource directory.
4. National Weather Service - Tornado Safety - Official tornado safety information.	

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Prepared before it is needed.

The Fox Valley Recovery Library turns disaster lessons into practical community knowledge. Evergreen guides are designed to remain useful between incidents and should be reviewed as official guidance, household needs, and local systems change.

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Find help. Offer help. Recover together.

Questions or corrections: info@foxvalleyrecovery.org
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