You may need to leave quickly.

Wildfires and storms don't give much warning. The calmest evacuations are the ones you've half-planned already. Here's how to be ready to go in under 20 minutes.

READ FIRST

If any of these happen, act first

! **Officials tell your zone to leave.**
Go. Per Ready.gov, the people that wait for the situation to “look bad enough” are the ones that end up driving through it. Your stuff is insured; your hours aren't.

! **There's water across the road.**
Turn around — per the NWS, a foot of moving water can float a car, and you can't judge depth from the driver's seat. Find another route, even a slow one.

FREE, RIGHT NOW

Start with these — they cost nothing

- [ ] Keep your gas tank above half
  during fire and storm season, so you never have to stop for fuel while leaving.
- [ ] Make a one-page grab list
  meds, documents, chargers, and pet supplies. Tape it inside a cabinet door.
- [ ] Photograph your important papers
  snap your IDs, insurance, and each room of the house for any future claims.
- [ ] Pick a meeting spot
  and an out-of-town contact everyone can check in with if you get separated.
- [ ] Back your car into the driveway
  so you can load up and pull out without delay.

UNDER 12 HOURS

A watch is issued — get ready

- [ ] Top off the gas tank now — stations jam and lose power once an order comes.
- [ ] Charge every phone, battery pack, and device while you still have power.
- [ ] Set your go-bag, grab list, and a carrier for each pet by the door.
- [ ] Bring pets inside so you are not chasing them later, and put meds in one labeled bag.
- [ ] Park facing out, or back into the driveway, so you can load and leave fast.
- [ ] Decide your route and a backup route, plus where you'll go and who you'll call.

General guidance for household planning — not professional advice. In an emergency, follow your local authorities and call 911.

12–48 HOURS

An order comes — go

- [ ] Leave early — if you're on the fence, that's your signal to go now, not later.
- [ ] Load pets, medications, documents, and your grab list before anything else.
- [ ] Follow the official route even if it looks longer; other roads may be closed or unsafe.
- [ ] Text a relative your route and destination so someone always knows where you are.
- [ ] Shut off gas if told to, lock up, and leave a light on so the house is visible to crews.

48 HOURS AND BEYOND

You're away from home

- [ ] Keep devices charged from the car or a power station so you stay reachable and informed.
- [ ] If your shelter has questionable tap water, filter or boil it before drinking.
- [ ] Check official sources — not social rumors — before you even think about heading back.
- [ ] When cleared to return, watch for downed lines, washed-out roads, and ash or debris.
- [ ] Photograph any damage before you touch it, for your insurance claim.

KNOW THE LINE

When it’s more than an inconvenience

- **Call 911: You're trapped, or every route out is blocked.**
- **Call 911: A medical emergency happens on the road.**
- **Call 911: You see someone stranded in rising water or in the fire's path.**
- **Leave: The moment your zone gets the order — no bargaining with it.**
- **Leave: Before the order, if it feels wrong: embers or an orange glow, water creeping up the street, a strong gas smell. Per CAL FIRE, leaving early is what keeps the roads usable for everyone.**
- **Leave: If you'd struggle to leave fast — mobility issues, livestock, a big family — treat a watch as your order and get a head start.**

WORTH KNOWING

Easy mistakes to avoid

- **Packing like it's a vacation**
  The go-bag is already packed — that's the whole point. Meds, documents, chargers, people, pets. Fifteen minutes, out the door.
- **Driving into smoke or water to save ten minutes**
  If you can't see the road or the road is wet and moving, that route is closed — whatever the map app says.
- **Leaving without telling anyone your route**
  One text to your out-of-area contact: where you're headed and which way. If plans change, text again. Rescuers can't search a route nobody knows about.

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- **Coming home before the all-clear**
  Downed lines, gas leaks, and re-flaring hotspots do their worst work after the storm looks over. Wait for officials to reopen your area.

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