

Be Smart, Responsible and Prepared Disasters Hit Close to

By Robyn Rominger

Flooding, earthquakes, wildfires – natural or human-caused disasters – can strike at any time, so it's essential that everyone prepare in advance. Mario Granillo and his family were among those Vacaville residents who found themselves in an emergency situation when a fierce winter storm led to flooding in their neighborhood on New Year's Eve. During the powerful storm – which reportedly dumped more than five inches of rain on Solano County – several homes were flooded with more than a foot of water when Alamo Creek overflowed its banks.

Granillo and his family – his wife, 11-year-old son and 80-year-old mother – had to evacuate their single-story home located on Tulare Drive. He explained that around 5:30 a.m. on Dec. 31, water from Alamo Creek, located two-and-a-half blocks away, began to encroach on their front yard. "All of a sudden," Granillo said, "the water was underneath the house and it started seeping up into the house."

The family called 9-1-1. "The dispatcher told me they were looking for rescue boats," but those boats never showed up, Granillo said. Meanwhile, the family rushed around, gathering up personal belongings as quickly as they could. Ultimately, "the neighbors that have their own personal boats were the ones doing the rescuing." He said a neighbor with a bass boat helped rescue his elderly mother, who suffers from "extremely bad" arthritis and had to be carried onto the boat.

The family was evacuated to a shelter that had been set up at a nearby community center. They spent the next few days in a hotel, then at a friend's house in Sacramento, as they waited for their home to be repaired. The floors and walls of their house were damaged, as well as the contents of their home and two of their vehicles.

After the flood water receded, the clean up began. Piles of muddy carpeting, soggy drywall, waterlogged mattresses, disabled refrigerators and other flood-damaged household items sat on driveways and front lawns throughout the neighborhood, waiting to be hauled away. The city of Vacaville provided immediate roadside debris collection. Inmates from the state prison in Vacaville were brought in to help clean up flood victims' properties.

Granillo took time off from his job at Lowe's to clean up his property. "We were not prepared in advance," he said, as prisoners wearing fluorescent-yellow coveralls and rubber boots shoveled household debris on his driveway into waste containers. He also noted that he, like many of his neighbors, does not have flood insurance.

So, what can families do to prepare for such disasters? The American Red Cross is a non-profit agency that helps people during emergencies in various ways, such as by giving them hotel vouchers, food and clothing.

Diana Gustafson, emergency services director for the American Red Cross of Yolo County, provided a few flood preparation tips.

"We always try to encourage preparedness; you may be able to prevent the loss of your home and the items in it," she said. In the case of potential flooding, "Sandbagging is really good," Gustafson said, noting that fire departments and county public works departments provide sandbags. Also, "It's best if you have a backpack ready to go and have medications, eyeglasses and other things that you'd need during an evacuation."

During the winter storm that inundated Northern California on Dec. 31, Gustafson noted that the Yolo County Sheriff's Department ordered a mandatory evacuation of homes in Yolo, a rural community along the north side of Cache Creek.

"When it's a mandatory evacuation, it's really important that you listen to them," she said.

The state Office of Emergency Services provides disaster-preparation tips and encourages families to have a plan.

"Injury and loss of life is avoidable when individuals take responsibility for preparing their families and communities," said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who recently declared May as Disaster Preparedness Month. This year's theme is "Be Smart, Be Responsible and Be Prepared."

How to Create a Disaster Preparedness Plan:

- When preparing for an emergency, plan on having enough supplies to get you and your family through at least the first 72 hours. This includes food, water, clothes, medical supplies and other necessary equipment for everyone in your family. Make sure everyone knows where to find them.
- Decide where to reunite your family should you be apart when a disaster strikes.
- Choose a person outside the immediate area to contact if family members are separated. Long distance



Photo submitted by Robyn Rominger

- Practice emergency exit drills in the
- Know the locations of the nearest fire
- Take photos and/or videos of your va
- city or state.
- Include your babysitter and other ho
- and car keys on hand.
- Keep extra cash and change. If elect
- For additional information on disaster
- site at www.oes.ca.gov.

Robyn Rominger is a freelance writer

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Responsible and Prepared When Disasters Hit Close to Home



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phone service will probably be restored more quickly than local service.

- Know the policies of the school or daycare center your children attend. Make plans to have someone pick them up if you are unable to get to them.
- If you have a family member who does not speak English, prepare an emergency card written in English indicating that person's identification, address and any special needs, such as medication or allergies. Tell that person to keep the card with him/her at all times.
- Know the safest place in each room because it will be difficult to move from one room to another during an earthquake or explosion.
- Locate the shut-off valves for water, gas and electricity. Learn how to shut off the valves before an emergency. If you have any questions, call your utility company. Remember not to shut off utility valves unless directed to do so by your utility company.
- Make copies of vital records and keep them in a safe deposit box in another city or state. Make sure your originals are stored safely.
- Establish all the possible ways to exit your house. Keep those areas clear.

- Practice emergency exit drills in the house, as well as "stop, drop and roll" drills for fire.
- Know the locations of the nearest fire and police stations.
- Take photos and/or videos of your valuables. Make copies and keep them with a friend or relative in another city or state.
- Include your babysitter and other household help in your plans. - Keep an extra pair of eyeglasses and house and car keys on hand.
- Keep extra cash and change. If electricity is out, you will not be able to use an ATM.

For additional information on disaster preparedness, visit the Governor's Office of Emergency Services' Web site at www.oes.ca.gov.

Robyn Rominger is a freelance writer in Winters. She may be reached at robynrominger@hotmail.com.

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