

Go-Bags & 72-Hour Kits

A pre-packed kit of essentials, ready to grab, so a household isn't scrambling to gather things during an actual emergency. This guide isn't tied to one manual chapter, because a real kit is really just Water & Food, Medical Care, and a few other chapters, repacked into one bag instead of spread across the house.

Same kit, different names

"Go-bag" and "72-hour kit" describe the same core idea, and the contents below work for either. The difference is emphasis, not substance:

- **72-hour kit** is the term most familiar in Utah specifically, taught for decades through LDS Church emergency-preparedness lessons and the state's own "Be Ready Utah" campaign. It anchors to a fixed duration: the classic emergency-management baseline that a household should be able to get through the first three days on its own before outside help reliably arrives. Even Be Ready Utah's own current guidance has moved past a strict three-day window, now recommending "three days, five days, or longer" and treating the exact "72-hour" figure as somewhat dated, though the name has stuck around in everyday use.
- **Go-bag** is the more nationally-used term, and it emphasizes grab-and-go speed and portability over any fixed time window. It's also used more loosely: this site's own Document Go-Bag guide is a go-bag too, just a narrower one scoped to paperwork alone, not the full kit below.

Two related terms worth knowing, since they show up elsewhere and aren't quite the same thing: a **bug-out bag** implies leaving home entirely for an extended stay somewhere else, so it's typically bigger and more self-sufficient than the kit below. A **get-home bag** is kept in the car or at work, sized only to get you home from wherever you happen to be, not to shelter you once you're there.

What actually goes in it

Category	What to pack	Notes
Water	1 gallon/person/day, at least 3 days	See Water Purification for making more once the kit runs dry
Food	3-5 days, non-perishable, no-cook or minimal-prep	Rotate it into your regular pantry use so it's never actually expired when you need it
Health	First aid kit, a few days of any prescription meds, spare glasses or contacts, basic OTC medication	See Medical Kits: What Actually Goes in Each One for exactly what belongs in this bag's kit, and First Aid Basics for how to use it
Light & power	Flashlight or headlamp, extra batteries, a NOAA weather radio, phone charger or power bank	See Family Communication Plan & Emergency Radio
Tools	Multitool, whistle, dust mask, duct tape, plastic sheeting, a wrench or pliers for utility shutoff, manual can opener	The whistle and mask are the two items households most often skip
Warmth & clothing	A full change of clothes, sturdy closed-toe shoes, an emergency blanket or lightweight sleeping bag	Broken-in, not brand new; see Physical Readiness
Sanitation	Wet wipes, a couple of small garbage bags, hand sanitizer, a little toilet paper	Doesn't need to be a full kit, just enough to get through a few days
Documents & cash	Copies of ID, insurance, and medical records; small-bill cash	The real version of this belongs in its own fireproof kit; see Document Go-Bag & Digital Backup and Financial Preparedness Basics
Household-specific	Infant formula or diapers, pet food and a leash, backup power for a medical device	See Pet Evacuation Basics and Backup Power for Medical Equipment

Size it to how it'll actually be carried

One go-bag per person for personal items (clothes, meds, documents), plus a shared household bag or tote for the bulkier items that don't need duplicating, water jugs, tools, a larger first aid kit. If there's any real chance of walking with it, the bag itself matters: a properly fitted backpack that carries weight on the hips,

not a plastic tote or a bag that was never actually tried on loaded. See Physical Readiness for what a well-fitted pack actually looks like.

Keep a separate, smaller version in each vehicle too, sized as a get-home bag rather than a full kit: your car is one of the more likely places to actually be stranded away from home, and a kit that only lives in the garage closet doesn't help there.

Check it twice a year, not once and done

Water and food need rotating, batteries corrode, kids outgrow clothing and shoe sizes, and prescriptions expire. Pair the check with something already on the calendar, a clock change, a birthday, so it actually happens instead of becoming the thing that was "ready" three years ago.

Sources

- Ready.gov, "Build A Kit": Ready.gov
- Be Ready Utah, "Get a Kit: Family": Be Ready Utah

Using AI to Plan Your Preparedness

An AI assistant can't stock your pantry or test your water filter. What it's genuinely useful for is the part every chapter on this site asks you to do yourself first: figuring out where your household actually stands and what to do about it next. This guide isn't tied to one manual chapter, because it applies to all fifteen equally.

Want this already built instead of building it yourself?

AI Prep Coach is a ready-to-paste version of this exact approach: one prompt that interviews you across all 15 categories and builds a full plan by actually browsing this site's live pages. The prompts below are for narrower, one-off asks, budget priority, a scenario walkthrough, meal planning from an exact pantry, once you already have a plan, or if you'd rather write your own instead of using a pre-built one.

What this is actually good for

Every category in this manual starts with the same kind of work: turn a vague situation into a specific list, turn a fixed budget into a priority order, turn "we should probably do something about this" into an actual plan. That's exactly the kind of task an AI assistant is good at, not because it knows your household, but because it's fast at organizing information once you give it the specifics. It replaces the blank page you'd otherwise be staring at before you start, not the hands-on skill, the professional advice, or the primary sources this manual cites throughout.

Where to find it: any general-purpose AI assistant works for this. The one you're already using is fine.

One trick works with all eight prompts below: paste in the link to the specific page on this site for your state or topic before you ask. Most AI assistants will read the page directly, which means the answer gets built on this site's own verified sourcing instead of the assistant's general, and possibly outdated, knowledge.

Eight prompts to start with

1. Household gap assessment

The same audit this site's own Tier structure assumes you've already done. Give it your real numbers, not a generic household. AI Prep Coach is the fuller, ready-made version of this exact idea, across all 15 categories instead of a single prompt; use the version below if you'd rather write your own or just want one quick pass.

"Here's my household: [ages, health needs, pets, vehicles, location]. Here's what we currently have stored: [list]. Compare this against a 2-week emergency supply standard and tell me our top 5 gaps, ranked by how fast each would become a real problem."

2. Budget-constrained shopping priority

Useful when the honest answer to "where do I even start" is "I have \$50, not \$500."

"I have \$50 to spend this month on emergency prep for a household of [size] with [specific needs]. What should I prioritize buying first, and why?"

3. Scenario walk-through

A cheap way to find the gap you wouldn't have thought to look for, before it finds you.

"Walk me hour-by-hour through what would actually happen in my house if we lost power for 72 hours in [month], given [household details]. Where would we run into trouble first?"

4. Family communication plan drafting

A starting draft for the same plan the Family Communication Plan guide walks through, including the out-of-town contact FEMA's own planning material recommends specifically because local phone lines can jam while long-distance calls and texts often still get through.

"Help me draft a wallet-card contact sheet for a family of [N], including an out-of-town contact, two meeting points, and each person's key medical info. Leave placeholders where I need to fill in real details myself."

5. Meal planning from what you actually have

Turns a pantry inventory into a real plan instead of a guess.

"Here's our current food storage inventory: [list]. Build a 14-day meal plan using only these items, accounting for [allergy or dietary need], and tell me what's missing to make it nutritionally complete."

6. Plain-language skill explainer

A supplement to a guide like this site's own, not a replacement for practicing the skill itself.

"Explain how to purify water using [method] in language a 14-year-old could follow, and tell me what could go wrong if a step is skipped."

7. Local law or hazard research, as a starting point

A first pass to figure out what to ask an official source, not a substitute for asking one.

"What are the current rainwater harvesting rules in [state]? Give me your best understanding, but flag anything I should double-check directly with [state agency], since laws change."

8. Multi-household coordination

Useful for extended family, not just the people under your own roof: aging parents, siblings scattered across town, a relative in another state.

"Help me draft a short, non-alarming message to my parents and siblings proposing we agree on an out-of-town relay contact and a check-in plan if a disaster hits our area."

What not to hand over

Describe it, don't paste it

Don't paste Social Security numbers, full account numbers, passwords, or exact medication and dosage details into a general-purpose AI chat. Describe things in relative terms instead, "a family member takes a daily heart medication" rather than naming the drug, the dose, and the pharmacy account. Consumer guidance on this is consistent: treat an AI chatbot the way you'd treat a stranger who's just offered to help you organize your files, useful for the organizing, not a safe place for anything you wouldn't hand a stranger directly.

Why you still have to check its work

AI assistants produce confident, fluent answers whether or not the underlying information is correct, a well-documented failure mode researchers call hallucination. Measured rates vary widely by model and topic, but the pattern is consistent across every study of it: a wrong answer reads exactly as convincingly as a right one. Nothing about how confident an answer sounds tells you whether it's accurate.

Treat it as a draft, the same way this site treats a single source

This site's own standard, stated on every state and skill page, is that a claim isn't trustworthy until it's checked against a primary source. Hold an AI assistant's answers to that same bar, especially anything with a real safety, legal, medical, or financial consequence. Ask it directly for its sources, and treat "you should verify this" as the correct answer, not a failure of the tool.

Three things AI specifically doesn't replace here: professional advice for anything medical, legal, or financial; official guidance from FEMA, Ready.gov, or your local emergency management agency, which this manual itself is built on; and hands-on practice. It can draft the water-purification steps; it can't tell you whether your actual filter works until you've actually run water through it.

Sources

- Out-of-town contact and family communication plan doctrine: Ready.gov; FEMA Family Emergency Communication Plan
- What not to share with an AI chatbot: AARP
- AI hallucination and verifying AI-generated answers: Forbes

Preparing Without Relying on Official Systems

This site's Filing Claims and financial guides assume a household that can call the police, file an insurance claim, and apply for FEMA aid without a second thought. That's not everyone's real situation: undocumented immigrants, mixed-status households, and anyone with a founded reason to be cautious around official channels face a genuinely different set of choices. This guide is those choices, stated directly rather than assumed away.

What FEMA aid actually covers, regardless of immigration status

Cash assistance through FEMA's Individuals and Households Program does require the applicant to be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or "qualified alien" (a category that includes lawful permanent residents, refugees, asylees, and several other specific statuses). But that's only part of what's actually available, and the part that isn't cash-limited is broader than most people expect:

- **Non-cash emergency aid is available to everyone, regardless of citizenship or immigration status.** Crisis counseling, disaster legal services, disaster case management, emergency food assistance, shelter, and emergency medical care are all real, in-kind programs FEMA and partner organizations provide without an immigration-status requirement.
- **Mixed-status households can still access cash assistance.** A parent can apply for FEMA's Individuals and Households Program on behalf of a minor child who is a U.S. citizen or qualified alien, living in the same household, without providing information about the parent's own immigration status or signing anything regarding it.

Receiving disaster relief does not affect a 'public charge' determination

Federal disaster assistance under the Stafford Act, which is what FEMA's individual assistance program operates under, along with other short-term, in-kind emergency disaster relief, is explicitly excluded from public charge consideration. This has been a source of real, harmful confusion that keeps eligible households from applying out of fear it will hurt a future immigration case. Public charge policy has changed between administrations before and could again; if this is a live concern for your situation, a real immigration attorney (see below) can confirm the current rule rather than you relying on this page alone.

Where to find it: apply at disasterassistance.gov or 1-800-621-3362; see Filing Claims After a Disaster for the full application process once you've confirmed what you're eligible for.

Real legal help that doesn't start with your immigration status

ImmigrationLawHelp.org is a free, national directory of more than 1,000 nonprofit immigration legal service providers across all 50 states, searchable by zip code, with no cost and no requirement to disclose anything before finding a real local option. Every organization listed either has BIA-recognized accreditation or attorneys on staff, not a directory of unvetted listings. This is the first call to make before a disaster, not during one, so you already know who to contact when something happens.

Alternatives to a system built around insurance and bank accounts

Cash, barter, and community reciprocity all work without a credit check, a Social Security number, or a bank account behind them. See Barter & Local Trade Systems for what actually holds up when normal financial systems aren't accessible, and keep a real cash reserve for exactly this reason; see Financial Preparedness Basics.

Community networks that don't gate on documentation

Mutual Aid Hub, covered in full in Finding Your Local Prep Community, is built around informal, community-organized mutual aid specifically, not a government or insurance-adjacent program, and most local mutual aid networks exist precisely to fill the gap for anyone official systems don't reach. Community-based organizations, immigrant resource centers, and faith communities in your own area are often the fastest, least bureaucratic path to real help after a disaster, faster than a federal application in many cases, and worth identifying before you need them, the same logic behind this site's own "pick one real connection" advice throughout.

Sources

- FEMA citizenship and immigration status eligibility for disaster assistance, non-cash aid availability regardless of status, and mixed-status household applications: FEMA; FEMA
- Public charge exclusion for Stafford Act disaster assistance and other emergency in-kind relief: DHS; USCIS
- ImmigrationLawHelp.org, national free/low-cost immigration legal aid directory: ImmigrationLawHelp.org
- Disaster relief guidance for immigrant communities: National Immigration Law Center; Texas Law Help

Finding Your Local Prep Community

Tier 4 of this manual is "Thriving," the point where preparedness stops being a household project and starts depending on the people around you. This guide is the "who to actually contact" layer behind that idea: real organizations, most of them already active in your area, that you can join rather than invent from scratch.

Start at the neighborhood level

Map Your Neighborhood (MYN)

A structured, 9-step program for organizing your literal block before anything happens: a meeting where neighbors identify who has useful skills or equipment, who'd need help first (older adults, anyone with a mobility or medical need), and what to do in the first 60 minutes after a disaster. Originated by Washington State's Emergency Management Division and endorsed by the American Red Cross; many counties and cities elsewhere have adopted it directly.

Where to find it: contact your local county or city emergency management office and ask whether they run MYN training and can supply the meeting materials; Washington's Military Department hosts the original program if your area hasn't adopted a version of its own.

CERT (Community Emergency Response Team)

Already covered in depth on this site: free, hands-on disaster-response training run locally in nearly every state.

Where to find it: your state's page in By State lists the specific program and local structure for where you live.

The official channel most people never hear about

Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC)

Federally mandated in every county under the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA), an LEPC brings together local officials, businesses, and community members to plan for chemical

and hazmat emergencies specifically and to keep residents informed about what's stored nearby.

Membership and meetings are usually open to the public.

Where to find it: your state's Emergency Response Commission (SERC) maintains the list of LEPCs; EPA's EPCRA page explains the structure and links to state SERCs.

Volunteer networks that already coordinate at scale

National VOAD and your State/Territory VOAD

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster is the umbrella that coordinates disaster-focused nonprofits, the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and dozens of others, so relief efforts don't collide or duplicate. Every state and territory has its own VOAD chapter.

Where to find it: nvoad.org's State/Territory VOAD directory.

American Red Cross

Already cited throughout this site as a source; also a real place to volunteer directly, disaster preparedness education, home fire safety visits, and instructor roles teaching the same skills covered in this manual.

Where to find it: redcross.org's Disaster Preparedness Volunteer page routes to your local chapter.

Team Rubicon

A veteran-led, secular disaster response organization active nationally, from wildfire response to long-term recovery operations.

Where to find it: teamrubiconusa.org.

Join the communication network, not just the radio

ARES / RACES

The Family Communication Plan guide mentions ARES/RACES as a reason to consider ham radio over GMRS, access to organized emergency communication nets, but doesn't cover actually joining one. The Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) is open to any licensed amateur radio operator; the Radio Amateur Civil

Emergency Service (RACES) registers through local civil defense. Both plug you into a real, organized network that activates when normal communication fails.

Where to find it: for ARES, identify your local Emergency Coordinator or contact your ARRL Section Manager and file form FSD-98; for RACES, contact your local civil defense office or Emergency Operations Center directly.

Faith-based disaster response

Several religious organizations run disaster response networks large enough to matter at a regional scale, open to volunteers regardless of the survivors they're helping.

Southern Baptist Disaster Relief

The third-largest disaster response network in the country by most counts: mass feeding, flood/wind/fire cleanup, water purification, and rebuild work, run through trained volunteers from local churches.

Where to find it: sendrelief.org/southern-baptist-disaster-relief.

Church World Service

A cooperative ministry of 37 Christian denominations coordinating both U.S. disaster response and longer-term recovery support through local interfaith groups.

Where to find it: cwsglobal.org/learn/disasters.

A real, distinct structure specific to this manual's own region

Along the Wasatch Front specifically, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints maintains an official emergency preparedness and welfare structure built into every ward and stake (its local congregation units), including published planning guides, a member skills/equipment inventory, and a list of members who'd need help first, the same categories Map Your Neighborhood covers, run through existing local leadership rather than a separate program to join. This is specific to members of that faith community and coordinated through a member's own ward or stake leadership, not a general public program the way the others on this page are, but it's a genuinely significant, well-documented structure in this exact region and worth knowing about for what it is.

Where to find it: members can start with their own ward or stake leadership; the Church's own Emergency Preparedness manual is published publicly.

Grassroots and informal

Mutual Aid Hub

A searchable directory of informal local mutual aid groups, community-organized and typically less bureaucratic than the programs above. A useful complement to the more official channels, not a replacement for them.

Where to find it: mutualaidhub.org.

Pick one

The same rule that applies everywhere else in this manual applies here: one real connection beats six half-considered ones. If your neighborhood has no organization at all, Map Your Neighborhood is the fastest way to create one. If you want a recognized skill credential alongside the connections, CERT does both at once. If you already have a radio, ARES turns it from a household tool into a community one. Pick the one that matches where you already are, not the one that sounds most impressive.

Whichever you pick, put the actual arrangement in writing once you've made one, even an informal one with two neighbors. The Mutual Aid Agreement is a real, printable template for exactly that: who brings what, what's owed back, and a simple way to settle a disagreement, before you're relying on a memory of a conversation instead of something you both signed.

Sources

- Map Your Neighborhood program structure and materials: Washington State Military Department, Emergency Management Division
- Local Emergency Planning Committees and EPCRA: EPA
- National VOAD and State/Territory VOAD directory: nvoad.org
- American Red Cross disaster preparedness volunteering: redcross.org
- Team Rubicon: teamrubiconusa.org
- ARES membership and RACES registration: ARRL ARES/RACES FAQ
- Southern Baptist Disaster Relief: Send Relief
- Church World Service disaster response: cwsglobal.org

- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ward/stake emergency preparedness structure:
churchofjesuschrist.org
- Mutual Aid Hub: mutualaidhub.org