

The First 24 Hours: Take Inventory

By now there's enough calm to actually look at what you have, rather than what you assumed going in. This is the shift from reacting to operating.

Walk the house and count what's actually there

Water, food, first aid, documents, power. Not a mental estimate, an actual walkthrough. The Household Preparedness Assessment is built for exactly this: a fill-in-by-hand worksheet that turns “we're probably fine” into real numbers.

Check on nearby family

In person if it's close and safe to do, or by the same text-first method as Part 1, per your Family Communication Plan. If your household comes first, this is where that ordering hands off to the people you'd check on next.

If there's property damage, document before any cleanup begins

Photos and video now are the evidence a claim depends on later, and once cleanup starts that evidence is gone. If you're returning to a structure that's been damaged, the order matters as much as the documentation itself: exterior checks, gas and electrical hazards, and structural red flags all come before you're inside taking pictures. See [Safely Re-Entering a Damaged Home](#) for that walkthrough in full.

Stand up sanitation now if the toilet isn't reliable

Waiting until it becomes urgent means solving it under worse conditions, with less patience, possibly at night. See [Bathroom & Hygiene Without Running Water](#) for the actual setup: a two-bucket system, hand hygiene, sponge bathing, and laundry by hand.

Make a first honest guess at duration

Is this resolving in the next few days, or could it run longer? You don't need to be right, you need a working assumption the next stage can plan around. You'll get another, better chance to answer this at the 3-day mark.

Next: Settle In

Once the household is actually inventoried, move to Part 4: The First 3 Days.