

The First Hour: Assess

If you haven't already worked through the safety decision, stop here and go to What to Do Right Now first. Nothing below matters until that's settled.

Why this hour is about finding out, not fixing

It's tempting to start solving problems the moment you're safe. Resist that for the first hour. Every decision that follows, how much water you actually have, whether anyone needs medical attention, whether you're staying or going, depends on information you don't have yet. Spend this hour finding it out, in this order.

Check every household member

Visible injury, bleeding, ability to walk and respond. This isn't a full medical exam, it's a fast pass to find out who needs attention first. If more than one person is hurt, don't treat the first person you reach, sort by severity so the worst injuries get help first. See Understanding START Triage for the five-question sequence that does this in about 30 seconds per person.

Check for secondary hazards

The smell of gas, visible structural damage, downed power lines, or signs of looting or unrest nearby. Any of these can mean the safety decision you already made needs revisiting, a room that was safe a minute ago isn't automatically still safe once you notice a gas smell, a new crack in the wall, or activity outside that wasn't there before. See Making it safe for what to actually do if it's people, not a structural or utility hazard, that's the concern.

Account for pets

A missing or panicked animal is far easier to find and calm in the first hour than a day later, once it's had time to bolt further or hide deeper.

Send one message, not a call

A text to your household's out-of-area contact often gets through when a voice call can't, because it needs a fraction of the bandwidth and queues for delivery instead of simply failing when towers are saturated. See Family Communication Plan if that contact isn't decided yet, that's worth fixing today, not during the next event.

Turn on a radio

A battery or hand-crank radio, tuned to a local station or NOAA weather radio, for official information rather than guesswork or whatever's circulating on social media.

Next: Stabilize

Once you know what you're dealing with, move to Part 2: The First 3 Hours.