

# Documents and Underwear To Go: How To Be Ready for an Emergency

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Hurricane Katrina spawned many stories and so will Hurricane Sandy for many years to come. One of my favorite stories is in a letter written by a Katrina evacuee to his family who shared the letter with friends. This man had been an evacuee, refugee and displaced person three times in his life, escaping two dictatorships in Europe and the flood in New Orleans. Each time he was grateful to survive and was able to reconstruct his life. He learned from these experiences to bring in emergencies his *important documents and three changes of underwear*.

Janice Winston, a volunteer with the Red Cross, Southeastern Chapter, who spoke at Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Temple Center City (OLLI) on Friday, October 5, recommends packing a Go Bag and keeping it handy in case you have to evacuate quickly in an emergency. Emergencies range from residential fires to hurricanes, earthquakes to terrorist attacks and other widespread disruptive events. Pack copies of important documents (proof of residence, birth certificate, passport and insurance policies), photo identification card, cash, keys, medication list, emergency contact information including out-of-town numbers (in case local phone lines are tied up), spare clothing and important personal and comfort items. You'll need to be able to carry this bag so it shouldn't be too heavy. At shelters, the Red Cross will supply food, water and medications.

The OLLI audience included many senior citizens and high-rise apartment building residents who had concerns. Winston recommended that people unable to evacuate should notify the manager of their residence in advance, and during the emergency hang a sheet out the window so emergency personnel know someone in that unit needs help.

An important note about fires: It's good to have a fire extinguisher in your home and to know how to work it. But if you can't put out the fire in *three seconds*, leave immediately and call the fire department!

In case of emergency, communication is important but emergencies sometimes include electric outages when your plug-in devices will not work. Have a battery radio with spare batteries at home so you can



*In anticipation of Hurricane Sandy warnings were issued for people to prepare for an emergency situation. As shown above, the Schuylkill River overflowed, but local damage as a result of Sandy was minimal."*

get news and announcements. Ordinary landline phones supply their own electricity so keep that phone service. Keep your cell phones charged and learn how to text because in an emergency texts may get through when voice mail won't. Emergency announcements will tell you whether to evacuate or if you should take shelter in your home. If you are told to take shelter in your home, grab your medications and cell phone, go to the room with the fewest windows and listen to any announcements.

In your home shelter room, the six most important items to store for an emergency are: 1) two-week supply of water (one gallon of water per person per day includes both drinking and washing water), 2) two-week supply of nonperishable canned food and manual can opener, 3) battery radio and spare batteries, 4) flashlights and spare batteries, 5) first aid kit and 6) list of medications. It's a good idea to store sanitation items and other personal and comfort items. Food and water need to be rotated periodically so clear out expired items. Store plastic sheeting and duct tape to seal windows and doors in case of poisonous material in the air. In this type of disaster,

turn off all air-conditioners and fans, close windows, doors and vents and seal them.

More information about preparing for an emergency is available from the Red Cross, including a list of additional items to store, how to plan with family members and emergency planning for your pet. For a copy of the handout at the presentation, go to [www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA\\_CustomProductCatalog/m4240190\\_Be\\_Red\\_Cross\\_Ready.pdf](http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA_CustomProductCatalog/m4240190_Be_Red_Cross_Ready.pdf)

More detailed planning information is available on [www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/plan](http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/plan). The Red Cross sells a supply kit that you can purchase online: [www.redcrossstore.org/Shopper/Product.aspx?UniqueItemId=3](http://www.redcrossstore.org/Shopper/Product.aspx?UniqueItemId=3).

The Red Cross has a phone line operating 24/7 every day of the year answered by a live person: 215-299-4000. To assist you with planning, the Red Cross will do a free presentation to any group. For more information about the Red Cross, go to [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org). For more information about emergency preparation, go to [www.readynotifyPA.org](http://www.readynotifyPA.org).