

## **Not My Fault: When you need to leave home in a hurry**

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard  
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Were you aware of Red Flag Warnings last weekend? Red Flag alerts are issued by the National Weather Service when high temperatures, very low humidity, winds and/or lightning mean an increased risk of fire over the next 24 hours.

Red Flag Warnings are not uncommon at this time of year, but coastal areas are not usually within the alert zone. Last weekend was different with less fog, higher than normal temperatures and the threat of dry lightning. We were fortunate that no fires were triggered but this doesn't mean you can ignore the fire threat.

Sixteen active Cal Fire incidents are currently raging in the State. The CZU Lightning Complex in Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties is a sobering example of what could happen here. At over 83,000 acres and growing, the fire started at multiple points during a lightning storm on August 18, consuming old growth redwoods and reaching the beach.

The CZU fire is larger but likely not much different than what happened on the North Coast in 1908 and 1945. "From Trinidad to Fieldbrook terrible and destructive forest fires are raging unrestrained," the Humboldt Times proclaimed in September 1908. In October 1945, another Times article describes, "cinders falling like confetti in Eureka." Historian Jerry Rohde tells me you can still see a burnt snag from the '45 fire at the 101 Northbound Rest Area just north of Trinidad.

How do you learn about Red Flag Warnings? I visit the Eureka NWS home page at <https://www.weather.gov/eka/> for my daily weather info. At the same time I can check for alerts on the graphic display. A number of local radio stations give weather updates including KMUD, KINS, KHUM and KSLG. Follow the NWS Eureka Facebook and Twitter feeds or listen to weather forecasts at (707) 443-7062. I'm not sure how many people knew about last weekend's alert. It is easy to be cocooned in your own entertainment silo. If you hear an alert is in place, let friends and neighbors know.

Humboldt, Mendocino and Del Norte all have Everbridge systems to notify you when you need to take emergency actions. If evacuation orders had been issued, you would have gotten a notification via text/email or telephone IF you had enrolled in your county system. But a Red Flag Warning is not an evacuation order and doesn't rise to the level of an EAS alert. It's a heads up that conditions are ripe for fire, you MIGHT need to evacuate and you MIGHT not have much time.

What should you do if a Red Flag Warning is in place? Put off mowing your lawn, don't light the fire pit in the back yard, torch the burn pile or do anything else that could generate a spark. Just as important as the DON'TS are the DOS. Do think be prepared to leave quickly if a hazardous situation suddenly arose. The problem with Red Flag conditions is how hard it is to pinpoint the spots where fires might start. Between August 15th and 19th, over 20,000 lightning strikes were detected in the State, a number of which triggered blazes that coalesced and started the fires that are still burning today.

What would you do if you had as little as ten minutes to leave your home? One Facebook post making the rounds last weekend talked about Grab-n-Go kits and listed what you should take in case of a 15-minute alert, 30-minutes, 1-hour and 2-hours. I was glad to see people thinking and sharing ideas, but my first reaction was - way too complicated. My second reaction, they miss the most important item.

Here is my kit primer. Think two kits – one that you have in your house for use when you must shelter in place after a major earthquake or winter storm that isolates you, cuts off power and makes you rely on your own resources. Visit <https://www.ready.gov/> for a good checklist. Grab-n-Go kits are the second kind. This is what you grab when you need to leave home in a hurry. Don't worry about how much time you've got – this kit needs to be put together IN ADVANCE and be ready for you to grab as you are running out the door.

The most important item in your Grab-n-Go kit is YOU and YOUR FAMILY. No you won't fit in the kit, but the most important thing is to get YOU out the door and on your way to safety. Spending time to stuff important papers into your kit or grab medicines will only delay your departure. If you haven't prepared that kit in advance, just concentrate on that most important item. You and your loved ones need to survive; if you don't, nothing else matters.

I prefer making your own kit to a commercial one. Find an old backpack or satchel. It should be easy to carry, have a zipper and be clearly identified as yours. Top of my list are things for life safety: medications, water, first aid supplies, a space blanket, flashlight and my emergency contact info. Next come my phone and charger (with photos of important documents), wallet and keys, energy bars, extra glasses, gloves, pocketknife, tp, garbage bags and duct tape. And finally, in today's COVID era include facemask and hand sanitizer and add few comfort items – for me this always means chocolate. Looking at lists is a starting point; personalize your kit with your own priorities.

I have a confession to make. My Grab-n-Go kit is in disarray. I put it together last year when I was making preparedness suggestions for this column. But over the past year I have pilfered it for other uses – the chocolate didn't last a month. I need to get into the habit of checking it once a month – and not just during fire season as one never knows what nature will throw our way and you need to leave in a hurry.

Note: Read an account of the 1908 Luffenholz fire in the Sacramento Union 9/28/1908 at

<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SU19080925.2.6&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>

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Lori Dengler is an emeritus professor of geology at Humboldt State University, an expert in tsunami and earthquake hazards. All Not My Fault columns are archived at <https://www2.humboldt.edu/kamome/resources> and may be reused for educational purposes. Leave a message at (707) 826-6019 or email [Kamome@humboldt.edu](mailto:Kamome@humboldt.edu) for questions/comments about this column, or to request a free copy of the North Coast preparedness magazine "Living on Shaky Ground."

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