Children at Home Alone During a Wildfire Evacuation

Children may find themselves home alone for a variety of reasons. Perhaps school has been canceled or they've returned home early, and your work commitments keep you tied up. Maybe you've run a quick errand, like picking up groceries or grabbing dinner essentials. Or, you're picking up a younger sibling from school, leaving your older child to wait at home.

No matter the reason, emergencies such as evacuation alerts can happen without warning. It's essential to prepare for these situations by ensuring children know how to respond if they're home alone during an emergency. Clear communication and preparation are vital to help them feel confident and stay safe.

The following is a list of some steps you can take.

Evacuation Plan Accessibility: Ensure your children have a copy of your evacuation plan and remind them to take it with them when they evacuate. Post the plan on the refrigerator or another visible spot where it's easy to find and frequently seen.

Emergency Alerts: Register your children for reverse 911 alerts on their cell phones, landlines, and emails to ensure they receive timely emergency notifications.

Support Network: Utilize the "Got 5" Tool to identify neighbors or friends who can assist during an evacuation. Prearrange transportation for your children, and list these contact numbers in your evacuation plan for easy access.

Communication Protocol: Instruct your children to call the "Got Five" list as their first action, as phone networks may quickly become overwhelmed during a wildfire. Encourage them to switch to text messages if calls do not go through. Inform the designated volunteers in advance to avoid confusion and have the volunteer handling pickup notify the rest of the group once plans are confirmed.

Pick-Up Point: Establish a clear pick-up location, such as the front door or the end of the driveway. If conditions, like an ember storm, make the designated spot unsafe, adjust the location as needed and clearly communicate changes to the "Got Five" volunteer.

Reunification Plan: Designate a reunification location and include it in your evacuation plan. Identify a remote family member your children can contact to share updates on their safety and status.

Simplified Responsibilities: Limit pre-evacuation tasks for your children. Focus on ensuring they are ready for pickup and evacuation. Discuss responsibilities for pets or livestock based on their ability to manage these tasks safely and quickly.

Protective Clothing: Advise your children to wear hats, long-sleeved shirts, and pants made from natural fibers. Synthetic materials, such as blends and nylons, can melt when exposed to embers and cause serious burns.

Go-Bags: Make sure each child has their own go-bag prepared and stored in a familiar, accessible location.

Evacuation Sign: Instruct your children to tape an “Evacuated” sign to the front door before leaving to inform first responders.

Pet Evacuation: If pets accompany your children, teach them how to safely transport the animals. Keep the pet go-bag alongside the children’s go-bags and make sure the “Got Five” volunteer is fully aware of the plan to include pets.

Practice these steps: Just like at school Fire Drills are practiced so the children know what to do when the alarm sounds. Help your children retain the steps they should follow in an emergency by holding your own “fire drills” at home.

By following this plan, your children can remain organized, safe, and prepared, reducing stress and ensuring a smooth evacuation process.