



## Emergency Evacuation Frequently Asked Questions

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### 1. **What is an evacuation?**

An evacuation is the process of removing people from a threatened or dangerous area. Evacuations take place when lives or property are put in danger due to an actual or impending emergency. The City of Santa Rosa may need to evacuate to different extents depending on the situation. For example, an evacuation may be required for just a few homes in the case of a water main break, or an entire neighborhood might need to be evacuated due to a wildland-urban interface fire.

### 2. **If the power is out when an emergency occurs and I need to evacuate, how will I be notified if emergency alert systems that rely on cell towers or electricity fail?**

Depending on the emergency, the City's ability to reach you via traditional alert and warning tools may be limited, especially if the power is out for an extended period of time. To help address this concern, as of October 1, 2019, Santa Rosa police cars and fire department vehicles are outfitted with Hi/Lo sirens. These European-style, two-tone sirens make a different sound than traditional sirens and will only be used in an emergency to alert residents within specific areas of the need to evacuate. If you hear the Hi/Lo, it's time to go. Watch video at [srcity.org/EvacutionAlertingTools](http://srcity.org/EvacutionAlertingTools).

### 3. **How will I know if I should evacuate?**

Public safety officials will determine the areas to be evacuated and escape routes to use depending upon the disaster. Law enforcement agencies are typically responsible for enforcing an evacuation order. Follow their directions promptly. You will be advised of potential evacuations as early as possible. Local public safety officials will use a variety of tools to alert you including SoCoAlert, WEA, Nixle, and Hi/Lo Sirens. Learn more about the tools the City will use to communicate with you during an emergency at [srcity.org/EvacutionAlertingTools](http://srcity.org/EvacutionAlertingTools).

### 4. **What are the different types of evacuation notices and what do they mean?**

Evacuation notices sent through SoCoAlert will use the following terminology:

- Evacuation Order: You must evacuate immediately due to imminent threat to life.
- Evacuation Warning: There is potential threat to life and property within a given timeframe. Begin preparing yourself, your animals, and your property for a potential evacuation order.
- Shelter-In-Place: Stay secure at your current location. This may be required when evacuation is impossible, too dangerous, or unnecessary.

### 5. **How will I know what my evacuation route is during an emergency?**

Evacuation routes are determined by Public Safety Officials at the time of the emergency based on current and anticipated conditions as well as the nature of the threat or hazard. Every effort will be made to provide residents the expected evacuation route as soon as possible prior to an evacuation being ordered. Knowing the ways out of your neighborhood ahead of time could save you time and worry during the emergency as you will already know all the ways to go, no matter which way is designated as the evacuation route for that incident by officials. Keep in mind that changing conditions may require changes to evacuation routes to ensure your safety. Traffic Control points may be established to ensure residents can remain on the designated routes. Please follow the directions of Public Safety Officials to ensure your safety.

**6. What if I choose not to leave during an “Evacuation Order?”**

Choosing not to follow an evacuation order is against the law and puts yourself and emergency personnel at risk. Furthermore, if you change your mind later and try to leave later, changed conditions may make it unsafe or impossible for you to leave.

**7. Why are Emergency Vehicle Access (EVA) roads not considered for evacuation route planning?**

Emergency response vehicles need to access emergency areas at the same time evacuation traffic is leaving that area. Public safety officials need quick and safe access along roads to reach the emergency or resources needed for response to the emergency. EVA roads are designed specifically for public safety officials, so they are able to reach areas and/or residents during an emergency evacuation as soon as possible.

**8. How will emergency officials prevent the roads from becoming clogged during an evacuation?**

Until the October 2017 wildfires, Santa Rosa residents had not experienced many evacuations. The 2017 wildfires moved quickly with little advanced warning time into our City limits and caused the evacuation of an estimated 100,000 residents countywide in a matter of hours causing traffic backlog. It's important to remember that not every emergency will be that widespread or impact that many people all at once. However, there are systems in place now that weren't in place in October 2017, that help provide much more advanced warning of an outside threat to our community.

- Advanced Warning Fire Cameras have been installed in strategic vantage points throughout Sonoma County and are used 24/7 by fire and dispatch agencies to monitor fires in and around Sonoma County. The cameras allow for greater advanced notice and the ability to activate our emergency alerting systems much earlier now. They also give situational awareness of a fire threat even when the fire starts in a neighboring jurisdiction. View cameras at [alertwildfire.org/northbay](http://alertwildfire.org/northbay)
- During a Red Flag Warning, which signifies critical fire weather conditions, Sonoma County fire agencies now work in partnership to up-staff firefighters and fire-fighting equipment to actively patrol areas specified as high-fire risk areas during a declared weather event. This action will allow for quicker and more immediate onsite resources in the event of a fire threat.
- You can do your part to ensure evacuations are as efficient as possible by knowing all the ways out of your neighborhood ahead of time, so you're familiar with the route designated for use by public safety officials during an emergency, and by following preparedness tips at [srcity.org/evacuationinformation](http://srcity.org/evacuationinformation)

**9. How will I know when it's safe to return to my home after an evacuation?**

You may not return home until the evacuation order has been lifted. Public safety officials will advise residents when it is safe to return home primarily through broadcast media, SoCoAlert, Nixle and social media. Updates will also be provided at Emergency shelters operated by the City of Santa Rosa or County of Sonoma to help keep residents informed of when it will be safe to return home.

**10. What should I do to prepare now for a potential evacuation in the future?**

Review the preparation steps provided at [srcity.org/EvacuationInformation](http://srcity.org/EvacuationInformation) to get your Go Bag in order, develop your family evacuation plan, and ensure you know how to do critical tasks like manually open your garage door and other actions that may be required when evacuating. Also review the Evacuation Checklist found on the website which outlines pre-evacuation steps to take inside and outside your home if time allow before an imminent evacuation. Keep the checklist somewhere visible so it's easy to access when it matters.