

A photograph of a busy city street at night. The scene is filled with blurred lights from cars and streetlights, creating a bokeh effect. In the foreground, the side of a dark-colored car is visible, including the side mirror and door handle. The overall atmosphere is one of a bustling urban environment.

# **Emergency Plan Guide**

## **Evacuate from a Gated Community**

# A Short Report from **Emergency Plan Guide**

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## Evacuate from a Gated Community, Mobilehome Park, or other Neighborhood with Limited Access/Egress

The news about over a half-million people evacuating in just the past 3 weeks (!) has raised more questions from Emergency Plan Guide readers.

This report is directed to a particular group of people – those who normally enjoy the quiet of their gated communities but who suddenly are more aware of the danger posed in that same community **when everyone needs to get out – and there is only one exit!**

If you live in a gated community, here are some recommendations that may reduce your concerns. But . . . only if you take action to implement them.

### **FIRST: YOUR INDIVIDUAL FAMILY EVACUATION PLAN**

Ultimately your safety depends on you. If you haven't prepared to evacuate, if you put off evacuating, if you refuse to evacuate – there's nothing anyone else can do to protect you from whatever danger threatens, and there's no one else to blame.

A family evacuation plan is pretty straightforward. Here are basic steps:

1. Know what might cause you to have to evacuate so you'll recognize danger before it arrives.

2. Sign up with city or county alerts so you will be sure to get the notice/orders.
3. Consider where you would go, how far, etc.
4. Have transportation, cash and supplies to get you there.
5. If you need extra help (transportation, physical assistance, places for pets, etc.) make arrangements BEFOREHAND.

There's plenty more, of course. But this report is really about evacuating from a gated community. So keep reading.

## **SECOND: YOUR COMMUNITY'S EVACUATION PLAN**

With as many as 9 million people in the U.S. living in gated communities of one sort or another, and with that being the most popular trend in residential development these days, even if you're not in a gated community now you may be in one in the future.

Before you move in – or if you are in one now – here are some questions about evacuating that you need to get answers for.

### **Does your community have an “emergency plan?” Does it include an “evacuation plan?”**

The owner/s or managers of the property should be able to answer this question. In California, for example, every mobilehome park must have a published emergency plan in order to get a license to operate. Get yourself a copy.

**If there IS NO PLAN**, it's up to you as homeowner or resident to help get one started!

Resources for developing a neighborhood disaster plan could include . . .

- Ready.gov (generic planning)

- Your city’s Office of Emergency Management
- Your property owner and management company
- Industry and professional associations (such as organizations representing property managers, real estate developers, homeowners associations, apartment owners, mobile home park owners, etc.)
- *Neighborhood Disaster Survival Guides* from EmergencyPlanGuide.org (not specific for gated communities, but they are included)

**If there IS a Plan**, does it contain these details?

- Physical description and map of the community, showing roads, entrances, storage tanks, fire hydrants, etc. Are roads two-way or one-way?
- List of key emergency contacts for your community – Local police, fire, utilities, Red Cross, social services, potential shelter locations, etc. plus county and state emergency office contacts
- Description of how residents will be notified of emergencies (emails, TV, website, telephone call, door-to-door)
- Role of staff in emergency situation/evacuation (Notify people, direct traffic, assist people with special access or functional needs, coordinate with First Responders, etc.)
- Role of volunteers in emergency situation (same list as above – but remember, volunteers are volunteers, not paid staff)
- Evacuation protocol – “How to secure your home for evacuation” with recommendations about locking homes, turning on or off lights, etc.
- Evacuation plan based on different sections of the community evacuating in sequence to avoid or minimize congestion

- How the plan is made available to residents
- Security for community after evacuation
- Re-entry plan

Planning takes time. In the meanwhile, consider these IMMEDIATE safety steps if you live in a gated community.

### **GETTING OUT OF THE GATED COMMUNITY**

You may like the sense of security that your wall and gates provide, but in an emergency you could be trapped by them! Walls keep you inside. Gates could be damaged. They could be blocked by the emergency itself. You need **MORE THAN ONE WAY TO GET OUT!**

Find **all** the exits from your community. Some may be left over from the original construction. Some may be considered service roads just for utility workers or emergency access roads for First Responders. Be creative and identify **possible** exits – for example, a road that runs outside a fence that would be accessible if the fence were not there! (Our neighborhood emergency group has purchased a giant bolt cutter that would open up an otherwise locked gate onto just such a road.)



## **GETTING OUT OF THE LARGER NEIGHBORHOOD**

Study a detailed map of your region that shows all roads. If you get out of your community, will you find yourself forced into a bottleneck because there are too few feeder streets to larger roads? If the region has seen recent development, roads that used to be suitable could now be overburdened.

Identify multiple escape routes. Map them and share with neighbors.

## **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR GETTING OUT**

It's our understanding that in an emergency the fire department will call for evacuation, and the evacuation itself will be managed by police. Neighborhood residents who stay behind to help will at best get in the way of professionals and at worst require rescuing.

Even as a trained citizen responder (CERT member, member of local neighborhood response group, neighborhood watch, etc.) when it comes to evacuating your first job is to manage your own safety. Help others **only if that is safely possible**.

If professionals are on site, and they don't want your help, back off.

You can achieve the most by helping your community do the advance work of building a plan and then making sure all your neighbors get that information.

This knowledge will enable them to take personal responsibility for themselves during an emergency.

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