Emergency Scenarios: How to Respond to the 5 Most Likely Crises

The right response to an earthquake is completely different from the right response to a flood — and confusing the two can cost you your life.

Introduction

Generic survival advice has limited value because different emergencies demand different actions. Sheltering in place is the correct response to a chemical spill — and potentially fatal during a flood. Evacuating quickly is correct during a wildfire — and unnecessary during a neighbourhood power outage.

This guide covers the five emergency scenarios most likely to affect households in Europe and North America. Study all five — you rarely get to choose which one you face.

Scenario	Primary Danger	Default Response	PREPORA Tools
Power Outage	Cold, no information, food spoilage	Shelter in place	Radio, flashlight, power bank, candles
Flash Flood	Drowning, contaminated water	Evacuate early or move to high floor	Whistle, water filter, waterproof case
Earthquake	Falling objects, structural collapse	Drop, Cover, Hold On	First aid kit, radio, flashlight
Civil Unrest	Physical threat, looting	Shelter in place, reduce profile	Radio, full kit readiness
Air Quality	Fine particle inhalation	Seal home, stay indoors	Face masks, duct tape

Scenario 1: Extended Power Outage

A power outage becomes a survival scenario when it extends beyond 24 hours, affecting heating, refrigeration, medical equipment, and communications infrastructure simultaneously.

1. **Don't open the fridge or freezer unless necessary.** A sealed freezer maintains safe temperatures for 48 hours. A sealed fridge holds for 4 hours. Prioritise eating perishables first; switch to shelf-stable food and rations afterwards.
2. **Switch to battery or manual lighting immediately.** Activate your PREPORA rechargeable flashlight and set up emergency candles in your primary shelter area. Conserve flashlight batteries for movement; use candles for ambient light when stationary.
3. **Turn on your battery-powered radio.** Tune to your local emergency AM/FM frequency for government updates. Cell networks are often overloaded in the first hours — radio is more reliable than data.
4. **Manage heating proactively.** Move the household into a single room and use insulating layers, emergency blankets, and candles to maintain warmth.

> **CARBON MONOXIDE WARNING**
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> Never use petrol generators, gas BBQs, or combustion appliances indoors during a power outage. Carbon monoxide is odourless, colourless, and **a leading cause of outage-related deaths.**

5. **Charge critical devices from your power bank.** Keep mobile phones at 80%+ charge. Prioritise devices that maintain communication with emergency services over entertainment or convenience. 6. **Monitor medical equipment needs.** If anyone in the household depends on electrically powered medical devices (CPAP, oxygen concentrators), contact the equipment provider and your local emergency management office immediately.

Scenario 2: Flash Flooding or Storm

Flash floods can rise from ankle height to waist height in minutes. Storms can make roads impassable within hours. Both demand earlier decisions than most people make.

1. **Monitor official weather warnings obsessively.** A flash flood watch means conditions are right for flooding; a warning means it is imminent or occurring. Do not wait for a warning to begin preparations.
2. **Move valuables and documents to the highest floor.** If flooding is possible, move documents, medications, and electrical devices to the upper levels of your home immediately. Your PREPORA waterproof survival case protects passports and critical papers.
3. **Fill containers with clean water immediately.** Once flood warnings are issued, mains water quality can be compromised by contamination of pipes and treatment plants. Fill every available container from the tap before the warning escalates.

> **NEVER DRIVE THROUGH FLOODWATER**
>
> Just 30 cm of fast-moving water can knock an adult off their feet. 60 cm is enough to float a car. **More people drown in vehicles during floods than in any other location.**

4. **Do not drive through floodwater** — see warning above.
5. **Evacuate early or not at all.** If evacuation is recommended, leave before roads become impassable. If you miss the window and water is rising, move to the highest floor and signal for rescue from a window using your PREPORA whistle or flashlight strobe.
6. **After flooding recedes, treat all water as contaminated.** Use your water filter and purification tablets before drinking any tap water until officials confirm the supply is safe.

Scenario 3: Earthquake

Earthquakes give no warning and can cause structural damage that makes both evacuation and sheltering dangerous. Your response in the first 60 seconds is critical.

1. **Drop, Cover, Hold On — immediately.** Get below a sturdy table or desk. If no furniture is nearby, move to an interior wall away from windows, drop to your hands and knees, and protect your head with your arms. Stay there until shaking stops. Do not run outside during shaking — most earthquake injuries come from falling objects and broken glass during the attempt to flee.
2. **Expect aftershocks.** After the initial shaking stops, aftershocks follow within minutes to hours. Stay alert and repeat Drop-Cover-Hold if shaking resumes.
3. **Assess the structure before moving around.** After shaking stops, check for visible structural damage (cracked walls, buckled floors) before moving through the building. Check for gas smells — if you smell gas, leave immediately, leave the door open, and do not operate any electrical switches.
4. **Check for injuries systematically.** Start with yourself, then others. Apply the triage principle: bleeding and breathing problems first. Your PREPORA first aid kit contains a tourniquet, triangular bandage, wound dressings, and gloves for immediate trauma response.
5. **Do not use lifts.** Always use stairs after an earthquake. Aftershocks can trap people in lifts mid-floor.
6. **Listen to your radio before going outside.** Post-earthquake, roads, bridges, and buildings may be structurally compromised. Official guidance will identify which routes and facilities are safe.

Scenario 4: Civil Unrest or Lockdown

Civil unrest, riots, or security-related lockdowns are increasingly relevant emergency scenarios in urban environments. The strategic priority is different from natural disasters: the threat is human behaviour rather than natural forces.

1. **Shelter in place as the default.** In most civil unrest scenarios, the safest location is inside your home with doors locked and windows away from street level. Do not leave to observe events or retrieve anything outside.
2. **Avoid the windows facing the street.** Move to interior rooms or rooms facing away from the area of unrest. Ground floor windows are most vulnerable; upper-floor interior rooms provide the best combination of safety and situational awareness.
3. **Reduce your home's profile.** Turn off unnecessary lights visible from the outside. Do not display anything that could make your home a target for either looters or law enforcement.
4. **Monitor official communications continuously.** Follow your local emergency services on radio and official government channels. In a lockdown, do exactly what authorities instruct — individual judgement about when it is safe to leave has a poor track record in active unrest situations.
5. **Have a concealed emergency exit plan.** Know a secondary exit from your home (rear door, side gate, interior courtyard) and communicate it to all household members in advance. Do not discuss your emergency resources or supplies with people you do not trust.

Scenario 5: Wildfire Smoke or Air Quality Emergency

Wildfire smoke, industrial accidents, and volcanic activity can produce air quality emergencies that are invisible until symptoms appear. Fine particles at harmful concentrations cause immediate respiratory distress and long-term lung damage.

1. **Close all windows, doors, and ventilation gaps.** A sealed home significantly reduces particle infiltration. Use damp towels or duct tape to seal gaps under doors if air quality is in the hazardous range.
2. **Check the air quality index before going outside.** If AQI exceeds 150 (Unhealthy), avoid all outdoor exertion. Above 200 (Very Unhealthy), do not go outside without respiratory protection. Your PREPORA face masks filter airborne particles — wear them when moving outside is unavoidable.
3. **Do not rely on thin cloth masks.** Standard cloth face coverings do not filter fine particulate matter (PM2.5). Use your PREPORA face masks or a properly fitted N95/FFP2 respirator.
4. **Turn off HVAC systems that pull outside air.** Set air conditioning to recirculate mode only. This prevents drawing contaminated outside air into the home.
5. **Monitor vulnerable household members closely.** Children, elderly individuals, and anyone with asthma, heart disease, or respiratory conditions are at highest risk from smoke. Keep them in the best-ventilated interior room and watch for symptoms: coughing, shortness of breath, chest tightness.
6. **Have a prepared bag ready if evacuation becomes necessary.** Air quality emergencies can escalate quickly to full evacuation if the fire or source moves toward your area. Your PREPORA kit should already be accessible at short notice.

Key Takeaways

- Each emergency scenario demands a specific, distinct response — generic preparedness advice only takes you so far.
- The most common fatal mistake across all scenarios is delayed decision-making: evacuate too late, shelter too late, or take action after the window has closed.
- Your PREPORA kit tools — whistle, flashlight, water filter, face masks, first aid kit — apply directly in each of these five scenarios.
- Prepare your household response to each scenario in advance, so that when one occurs, you are executing a rehearsed plan, not improvising under pressure.

> ***The scenario you haven't planned for is the one most likely to catch you off-guard — read all five and prepare for each.***

Part of the PREPORA Survival Guide series. Download the full guide at prepora-gear.com/guides.