

Quilt Drills: Lessons From an Evacuation

You can never be fully prepared when a disaster strikes, but you can take precautions to lessen its effects.

MARY TABAR



Recently southern California was hit with wild fires that destroyed more than 1,700 homes, including mine. My neighborhood received a mandatory evacuation in the early morning hours of October 22, 2007.

Some families were awakened by a reverse 911 call commanding that we leave in the next 30 minutes. This was followed by a second reverse 911 call calling for immediate evacuation. Other families woke up to the smell of smoke and went directly to their automobiles and fled. In other neighborhoods, families were packed and ready to evacuate at any time, from that day throughout the whole week of October 21. More than 500,000 people were mandatorily evacuated during six wild fires in San Diego County. To date it is the largest evacuation in U.S. history.

The “Quilt Drill”

It is sad when a neighbor or friend loses her art/sewing studio, so I have an innovative idea to help preserve the work of quilters, artists and sewers. It is a strategy to get as much of your work and supplies out of your house as fast as possible. I call it the “Quilt Drill,” and it will help quilters and artists be better prepared for an actual mass departure and avoid the loss of work.

Step One — Adequate Preparation. Train your family members to recognize the most important things in your house, namely quilts, supplies, books, maybe lesson plans and computer backup hard drives. These would be items that are either irreplaceable or hard to replace.



San Deigo quilter Jan Krentz along with her family packed their cars on October 22 in anticipation of a potential evacuation. She packed quilts, quilt tops, manuscripts, computer hard drives, tower and laptops in addition to other family items. Jan tracked the fires on her blog found at www.jankrentz.com.

Step Two — Practice, Practice, Practice. Here in Southern California we have wildfires, earthquakes and other natural disasters, so start these drills any time of the year — the sooner the better! Have each family member grab as many possessions as quickly as possible. Using a stopwatch will definitely help the situation. If you have some strong neighbors, you may solicit their help as well. And, do not forget to wake them up during a real evacuation! Practice these drills so that your family gains speed and effective carrying techniques with your most important belongings. Show them how to cram, squeeze and pack every inch of your automobile. Practice at least once a month to start. In Southern California, you might need to practice the Quilt Drill once a week starting the month of October. Also if you have only one car, you might find it beneficial to buy a truck or lease one other vehicle in order to stow more belongings!

Step Three — Bypass “Important Documents.” There are no important papers! You could waste up to 15 minutes looking for these important papers, e.g., marriage licenses, birth records, passports, tax and insurance documents. I promise all of these documents are all on a computer somewhere. Do not waste time gathering these items!

Step Four — Motivate Your Family Unit. Most families will need some incentives for these drills. (The items you are training them to save are *your* quilts!) In my house, the family member who collects the most stuff in the swiftest speed is the winner of these Quilt Drills. This family member could have special privileges for a week or two. Make it something simple; their favorite home-cooked meals for a week could be a great motivator.

General Preparation

While the Quilt Drill is designed to save your important quilts and irreplaceable business materials, you need more planning for your home and family to prepare for a potential disaster.

Here’s an additional line of attack.

- Plan your evacuation in advance; divide up duties with family members.
- Pre-package needed emergency supplies: health insurance cards and copies of prescriptions, any medication.
- Have copies of insurance policies along with phone numbers for your agent. Make copies of all your personal identification and credit card numbers and a list of important telephone numbers and contacts. Also include specific comfort items for family members and hand-quilting supplies for you.
- Create a home inventory and store it elsewhere, away from your house, e.g., in a safe deposit box at the bank. Pictures and videos are great. I cannot seem to remember what kind of interior doors my house had for rebuilding purposes.
- If you are concerned about my approach of bypassing important papers, you can store the originals in a safe deposit box.
- Establish an out-of-town contact. Hopefully they live in the direction where you are evacuating! Be sure all family members have this contact information, in the event you are separated.
- If you are mandatorily evacuated, leave your front door unlocked. This allows firefighters to enter your home and search if necessary. Keep a porch light on; this helps firefighters in the air to see areas that still have electricity.



Mary Tabar's sewing machine was a Quilting Juki 98E in its former life

- As soon as you are able, contact your homeowners insurance carrier. You might have damages that are not visible. Also your insurance will pay for temporary living arrangements while you are displaced. If your area is declared a national disaster by the President, you do not have to pay a deductible to your insurance company.

- Accept help from the Red Cross, FEMA and local agencies. They are there to help and comfort you, even if you think you don't need their assistance. If your friends insist on giving you fabric and other art supplies, enjoy their generosity with open hands.

Insurance Information

After the fire I learned quite a bit about insurance. Here are some tips for you.

- Your homeowners policy does not cover your business. A typical homeowners policy might cover damages up to \$2,500 (the cost of only one sewing machine). It is your responsibility to update your coverage levels on a regular basis; do not depend on underwriters and agents to upgrade your insurance. Even building codes change every year.

- For as little as \$14 a year you can double the standard policy limits from \$2,500 to \$5,000 with an endorsement to your homeowners policy. Endorsements to your homeowners policy are typically only available for businesses that generate \$5,000 or less in annual receipts. They are available in most states.

- For about \$200 a year you can insure your business property for \$10,000 with an In-Home Business Policy. General liability coverage is included in this policy. If your business is shut down because of damage to your house,

your in-home policy will cover loss of income and ongoing expenses such as payroll for up to one year.

- A Business Owners Package Policy (BOP) is designed to offer insurance to small- and medium-size business owners. It can cost \$300-\$1,500 annually, depending on your gross sales. Like the In-Home Business Policy, it covers business property and equipment, loss of income and extra expenses and liability, but on a much broader scale. It also covers customers' quilts in your care, custody and control that are damaged in a fire.

- If you are using your car for business activities — transporting quilts or traveling to lecture at quilt guilds — you need to make certain that your automobile insurance will protect you from accidents that might occur while you are on business. Contact your auto insurer.

- Resources for insurance information: Independent Insurance Agents of America (www.iiaba.net) and the Insurance Information Institute (www.iii.org).

While none of us wants to have to evacuate, it's better to be have a disaster plan in place. Good luck with your preparations.

MARY TABAR teaches quilting, dyeing and surface embellishments for Palomar College and San Diego Continuing Education. Her recent work makes use of photo transfer pictures and piecing to produce pictorial and portrait art quilts. Her quilts have been exhibited locally, nationally and internationally. While her house was one of the 222 houses that burned from the Witch Creek Fire in Rancho Bernardo, Calif., Mary is looking forward to rebuilding and working in a new studio. She'll also be prepared in the eventuality she'll need to evacuate in the future. You can reach Mary through her Web site, www.marytabar.com.