Personal Preparedness Plan

Prepare for an unexpected departure from post

A publication of the Family Liaison Office (FLO)
“Prepare every day; you never know when you are going to have to leave!”
—Angela Moore, Community Liaison Office Coordinator (CLO), Abidjan

Expect the Unexpected

Every day U. S. Government employees and family members live with the possibility of a sudden departure from an overseas post — in response to political unrest, natural disaster, death in the family, divorce, family crisis, or medical emergency. Occasionally, you may need to shelter in place at your home or in the embassy or consulate for a few days rather than leave the country. Personal, political, family, and medical emergencies are more complicated when they happen overseas; being as prepared as possible will help you maximize your control over the situation.

In the last five years, there have been 42 evacuations of Foreign Service employees and family members from overseas posts. Some evacuations are brief; others last up to six months. Depending on the event that leads to an evacuation, you may travel to a nearby country for a short period to safehaven (an “interim stop-over”) or you may return directly to the U.S. No matter how calm things are at your post, you should not be lulled into thinking that “it can’t happen here.”

Having a personal preparedness plan will help you and your family, be ready to leave post at a moment’s notice. Whatever the reason for a sudden departure from post, the Family Liaison Office (FLO) is there for you, providing guidance and support along the way.

“Everyone experiences an evacuation differently, but for me it felt like there was this sudden death and then an unfamiliar, unsettling, feeling of being away from your home and in a new place.” — Matt Weiller, Management Officer, Bamako
Before Going Overseas

Being familiar with the host country and the local language is crucial to preparing for an overseas tour and coping with a possible crisis at post. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) offers distance learning and classroom-based courses that employees and family members may take with their agency’s approval.

The Overseas Briefing Center, a division of FSI’s Transition Center, has a wealth of information to share, including post-specific information. Visit the FSI website for an overview (www.state.gov/m/fsi). Consider attending FSI’s Security Overseas Seminar (SOS) when you are in Washington, D.C., and reviewing FSI’s online resource, Overseas Crisis Readiness, which is free and available online at www.state.gov/overseascrisisreadiness.

Develop a plan for communicating with your family and friends back home. Discuss with your immediate and extended family how they should contact you in case of an emergency at post. Provide them with the emergency telephone number for the State Department’s Operations Center (202-647-1512) and other contact information for your agency. Keep an up-to-date locator card in the Department’s Employee Services Center (located at Main State) or with your agency. The Family Liaison Office frequently receives calls from family members asking to pass messages to employees in a crisis zone because they don’t know how to contact the employee directly.

At the end of this booklet is an “Important Documents and Emergency Contact List.” Keep this information up-to-date and carry it with you when moving from one locale to another. Remember that this is personal information that you should only share with trusted family and friends.

“Before you leave Washington, decide where you will go (your safehaven) if you come back to the U.S. on an evacuation. It is really important to have a credit card that can take up to $20,000 because your monthly bills are going to be high.”
– Damascus evacuee
Organize Your Personal Affairs

Regardless of your family size or status, you should have your legal and medical affairs in order. Ask trusted friends, family members, and financial professionals to help you with preparations. You should consider having a meeting with your bank or financial advisor, insurance representative, and family attorney to discuss the need to:

- Execute a power of attorney for each adult family member; have several originals and copies made.
- Establish individual credit cards for emergencies, and talk to your bureau about getting a government travel card.
- Make sure you have a credit limit or access to at least $20,000 in the event you initially need to cover costs associated with a sudden departure from post. It may take several weeks to receive voucher reimbursements.
- Get an automatic teller machine (ATM) card for your bank account that can be used worldwide. Make sure your spouse/partner knows the personal identification number (PIN).
- Create online banking accounts (whenever possible), including direct deposit of paychecks and online bill payments.
- Purchase medical evacuation insurance for Members of Household.
- Purchase personal property insurance for your storage and your household effects (HHE), making sure it provides adequate coverage for all events including flooding and acts of war.

What to Hand Carry/Pack:

- Decide what to take to post and what to put into storage. Consider storing items that can't be replaced, including those with sentimental value, such as photos. Keep a digital photographic inventory of your possessions going to post, as well as those going into storage, including valuables such as artwork and jewelry.
- Update all personal address lists and store them on a thumb drive or CD, or upload to a cloud site.
- Hand-carry employment documents for adult family members including resumes, references, and SF-50 personnel actions. Keep duplicates in the U.S. and on the cloud.
- Bring school records, report cards, test scores, current samples of work, and Individual Education Plans (IEP) for children with special needs.
- Pack some seasonal clothing, winter and summer, regardless of post.
At Post: Create Your Personal Preparedness Plan

A personal preparedness plan contains all of your personal and post-specific emergency contact numbers, your important documents list (which you should create before leaving for post), directions to rally points, addresses of friendly embassies, and neighbors who may help. After you attend the post security briefing, and any personal preparedness workshops, you will know more about what you can do to be prepared and the information you will need should you have to leave post suddenly. Make sure the CLO and Human Resources Officer (HRO) have personal contact information (email and phone) for you and your dependents.

“One of the worst moments was the feeling of NOT having a bag packed and ready to go.” — Family member Brazzaville

Everyone needs to pack a “Go Bag.” You can print a list of items for a “go” bag from the FLO website, the Overseas Crisis Readiness Resource at www.state.gov/overseascrisisreadiness, or www.ready.gov. Discuss and practice emergency drills with your family and/or friends. Learn about the warden system at post. Know who your warden is and make sure he/she has all your current contact information.

If you have children in local schools, check the school’s emergency evacuation plan. Choose someone at post and give that person a current power of attorney for medical or other emergencies in the event you need him/her to care for your children unexpectedly. You also should have a plan for pets. The U.S. Government does not evacuate pets. Make advance arrangements for their care.

“Keeping in touch with radio communications was key to keep everyone in line since cell phones typically were jammed during demonstrations.” — Holly Adamson, Office Management Specialist for the Regional Security Office, Conakry
Sheltering in Place: Natural Disaster or Civil Unrest

Create a 72-hour shelter-in-place kit for you and your family. The kit is useful in case you are restricted to a specific location during an emergency. It should include: food, clothing, water, medication, cash, supplies, and important documents. If you have children, you may want to include small toys/games in the kit, as they will provide some comfort and entertainment during a stressful time. Plan to update your 72-hour emergency kit every six months to ensure that all the food and water are fresh, medications have not expired, all clothing fits, credit cards are up-to-date, and batteries are charged. Place these items in a waterproof container that is easy to carry, such as a waterproof duffle bag or a large backpack. For a sample 72-hour emergency kit, visit the FLO website, www.ready.gov/build-a-kit or www.redcross.org.

When events occur that could pose a physical threat, you will need an emergency plan for sheltering in place. Did you know that cellular telephone equipment may be overwhelmed or damaged during an emergency? Aim to have a hard-wired telephone in the rooms where you plan to shelter in place. Take your radio, 72-hour emergency kit, and your “Go Bag” with you when you shelter in place. Listen to radio stations and the embassy issued radio until you receive notification that all is safe, or that an evacuation is imminent. Be advised that the RSO may ask for the evacuation of specific neighborhoods/areas at greatest risk in your community. Also:

- Reach out to Post One on radio and CLO via phone.
- Remain calm and assist those around you in coping with the situation.
- Keep children occupied with a variety of activities while sheltering in place.
- Be sure to let Post One know if you have any special needs or have family members with disabilities who may require assistance.
When an Unexpected Departure is a Possibility:

“The real crisis wasn’t the actual attack, it was the aftermath; dealing with all of the people coming into my office and having emotional reactions to the crisis, not sure whether they should stay or whether they needed to leave.” — Angie Bryan, Deputy Chief of Mission, Sanaa

If evacuation becomes a reality, you will follow the emergency evacuation plan for your post. You will receive your evacuation travel orders from post. Before proceeding to your evacuation point, you may want to do a few last-minute checks to see if everything is in order. Put checkbooks, bankbooks, credit cards, and as much cash as you think you may need for a few days in a secure (but easily accessible) place. Ensure that visas to enter the U.S. and all passports for non-U.S. citizen family members are in order. Arrange for pick-up or forwarding of mail and plan for the care of household and domestic employees. Don’t forget about your pets. Since you may not be traveling directly to the U.S., be prepared for an interim stopover.

If you are able to travel via commercial aircraft, check the airline’s baggage restrictions. If the flight is on a DOS charter plane then you may be restricted to one checked bag and one carry-on. Make your carry-on your “Go Bag” with all your important documents (including a CD and/or thumb drive with scanned copies of important documents, just in case). Don’t forget to pack prescription medications, toys, wipes, water, snacks, cash, several changes of clothes, comfort items, as well as reading material. Think about whether you might be evacuating to a place with a different climate, or where the season will change in the near future.

About Evacuations:

There are two kinds of evacuations: authorized departure and ordered departure. Both are requested by the Chief of Mission (COM) and approved by the Under Secretary for Management. Under an authorized departure, designated employees and/or eligible family members (EFMs) may choose to leave post. Depending upon how events unfold, this may eventually transition to ordered departure. Under an ordered departure, designated employees and EFMs must leave post. There is no difference between authorized and ordered departure in terms of the benefits or allowances provided to those evacuated. For more information about evacuations, visit www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c1991.htm.
Important Documents and Reference Information

- Passport information: passport number and date of issue
- Visa information for non-U.S. citizen family members for entry into the U.S.
- U.S. driver’s license number
- Social security number
- Bank account numbers
- Credit card numbers
- Insurance policy numbers
- Car registration, title, serial number and car insurance
- Current prescriptions, including eyeglasses and contact lenses
- Vaccination card with up to date immunizations

Copy the documents you will need at post and leave the originals in a safe deposit box:

- Will(s)
- Powers of attorney (one of the originals)
- Birth and marriage certificates
- Naturalization papers
- Deeds
- Mortgage documents
- Stocks and bonds (or leave with broker in case you want to sell)
- Insurance papers — life, car, house, medical, and household effects (HHE)
- Current household effects inventory
Emergency Contact Information

Home Address: ____________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Home Telephone #: _________________________________________________

Name.: ____________________________________________________________
Tel. #: _____________________________________________________________

Name.: ____________________________________________________________
Tel. #: _____________________________________________________________

Day Care Name: _____________________________________________________
Tel. #: _____________________________________________________________

School Name: _______________________________________________________
Tel. #: _____________________________________________________________

Hospital Name/Address: _____________________________________________
Tel. #: _____________________________________________________________

Post One Tel. #: ____________________________________________________

Local Police Tel. #: _________________________________________________

Local Fire Tel. #: ___________________________________________________

Local Neighbor/Contact: _____________________________________________
Tel. #: _____________________________________________________________

Next of Kin Contact: _________________________________________________
Tel. #: _____________________________________________________________

U.S. Lawyer/Attorney: _______________________________________________
U.S. Doctor: ________________________________________________________
State Department Operations Center: ___202-647-1512____________________
Resources:
FLO Crisis Management and Support: www.state.gov/flo/crisis
FLOAskEvacuations@state.gov
or FLOAskSupportServices@state.gov or
(202) 647-1076; (800) 440-0397

Office of Emergency Preparedness:
Information on disasters, disease outbreaks, terrorism and bomb threats. http://prepare.state.gov/content.asp?Content_id=165

Crisis Management Support
(Operations Center)
Interagency point of contact on evacuation planning, policy, and implementation SES-O_CMS@state.gov;
(202) 647-7640 or Operationscenter@state.gov;
(202) 647-1512

Foreign Service Institute,
Transition Center
“Overseas Crisis Readiness” online resource for all ages: www.state.gov/m/fsi/ct/oct/
“Advanced Security Overseas Seminar” and other security training courses:
www.state.gov/m/fsi/ct/securitytraining/index.htm

Department of Homeland Security:
Information on packing “go” bags:
www.ready.gov

Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention:
www.cdc.gov

Federal Emergency Management Agency
(FEMA): Ideas for “go” bags and information on preparing for various emergencies:
www.fema.gov

American Red Cross:
Downloadable materials available: www.redcross.org. Go to “Getting Assistance” tab, scroll down to options at bottom of page and select “Plan and Prepare” and then select “Prepare Your Home and Family.”