

# Recovering From a Natural Disaster in College

## A Student's Guide for What to do on Campus

Be it a raging wildfire in California, a hurricane in New York or mass flooding in Texas, natural disasters are a fact of life. Between 2000 and 2012, worldwide natural disasters affected nearly three billion people and cost \$1.7 trillion in damages. Figuring out what to do in the immediate aftermath of a disaster is a challenge for anyone, but students living away from home from the first time may feel particularly vulnerable. The following resources can help.

### MEET THE EXPERT

**Bill Begal**

Founder & Disaster Restoration Expert, Begal Enterprises

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## What to Do Right After a Disaster

Many schools have disaster plans in place to help students prepare for a natural disaster and know what to do immediately after one occurs. For example, Texas A&M University (<https://texashelp.tamu.edu/browse/disaster-preparedness-information/college-students/>) offers tips and suggestions related to disaster preparedness, while Barnard College (<https://barnard.edu/publicsafety/emergency-plans>) has a public emergency management and disaster preparedness plan for all students to access. Check your school's website for similar instructions.

Bill Begal, a natural disaster preparedness specialist, has these additional tips for college students who want to be ready before a natural disaster happens and to know what to do in the hours and days after such an event.

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❑ **Create a “go” bag**

When students know a natural disaster is coming, having a “go” bag can help them move to safety quickly when it’s time to evacuate. “Think of what you need and cannot live without,” says Begal. “These need to be essential items you can grab and go with a moment’s notice.”

Items he suggests include a battery-operated radio and flashlight, first aid kit, cash, photo copies of documents, Ziploc bags, blankets, clothing, toiletries and non-perishable foods.

❑ **Sign up for your school’s text notification system**

“Real information in a timely manner can be the difference in making critical timeline decisions,” says Begal. “Your university’s text notification system will likely be the best, specialized information you’ll be able to find about what’s happening at the school during moments of crisis.”

❑ **Check yourself for injuries**

“In the moments after a hurricane or other disaster, it’s important to make sure you’re okay,” says Begal. “If you do have cuts or scrapes, use the first aid kit to attend to these wounds. If it’s something more serious, use the whistle from the kit to draw attention to your location, or try to yell for the attention of first responders.”

**☑ Stay in a safe place**

“In lots of natural disasters, many accidents happen after the worst of the event due to people being out and about too quickly,” notes Begal. “If the building you were staying in was destroyed, by all means seek shelter, but also remember that the aftereffects of a natural disaster can also be dangerous. Look out for falling debris or rising flood waters when evacuating.”

**☑ Make contact when possible**

“Part of the responsibility of colleges and universities is to protect and account for their students, and administrators will be in a frenzy to locate learners once something like this happens,” states Begal. “Without putting yourself in any further danger, try to get in touch with the school soon after the event to let them know your whereabouts.”

## **Support for Students Affected by a Disaster**

Once students and their families are safe, they often have many questions about what must be done to recover from a natural disaster. While circumstances for each person are unique, the resources given below are designed to help students begin the process of recovery.

**PHYSICAL****EMOTIONAL****FINANCIAL****INSURANCE**

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Some of the most pressing needs after a natural disaster are finding immediate shelter, food and medical services. There are many local, regional and national organizations that coordinate relief efforts for those affected.

- Direct Relief (<https://www.directrelief.org/>)  
This national organization is often one of the first responders to American natural disasters, offering services and support mechanisms in the crucial early days after an event. The Hurricane Preparedness Program is just one example of their services.
- Convoy of Hope (<https://www.convoyofhope.org/>)  
One of the organizations that is often first on the ground after a natural disaster, Convoy of Hope provides shelter, water, food and other vital services to communities in need.
- Habitat for Humanity (<https://www.habitat.org/>)  
Habitat focuses on helping individuals and families rebuild their homes after losing everything to a natural disaster. They also work to ensure short-term shelters are available in the interim.
- Catholic Charities USA Disaster Response (<https://catholiccharitiesusa.org/efforts/disaster-operations>)  
Catholic Charities has more than 175 dioceses throughout America that work to provide immediate relief in the aftermath of natural disasters, including temporary housing, counseling and food.

## How a Natural Disaster Can Affect Your College Application

The very nature of disasters makes it difficult to plan for them, and sometimes these events can have direct impact on a student's ability to apply for or attend college. Fortunately, many institutions have policies in place to help students.

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**Students whose standardized test scores are delayed**, be it because they weren't able to take the test yet or that grades are being held up, can contact prospective institutions to let them know that testing has been rescheduled or the release of scores will be delayed.

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**Students who are behind on their applications** can often receive an extension on the early action deadline, and possibly even the general application deadline, depending on their circumstances.

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**Students who find themselves unable to pay for application fees** due to a natural disaster can request a fee waiver based on circumstances beyond their control.

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**Students whose financial situations have changed after submitting the FAFSA** because of a natural disaster may be able to work directly with their chosen school's financial aid department to update their financial status and find other aid sources to help cover funds no longer available after the disaster.

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**Students whose grades have been affected** by a natural disaster while finishing their senior years should contact their prospective college's admissions department (and if necessary, have an administrator from their school do the same) to explain how and why grades have been impacted.

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**Referees and school administrators who need more time to turn in documents** can contact schools directly to let them know if recommendations, transcripts or other required materials are going to be late.

## How College Students Can Help After a Disaster

Depending on the time and resources they have, there are many ways college students can help after a natural disaster. These ideas are designed to help students think about how they can make a positive impact in their local communities and further afield.

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### Donate money

If you have the financial means, donating money directly to a reputable relief agency helps get resources and help to those who need it most in the days directly after a natural disaster. Many organizations make it easy to donate by providing numbers where you can text a pledge or donate directly via their websites. Use a resource like GuideStar (<http://www.guidestar.org/Home.aspx>) or Charity Navigator (<https://www.charitynavigator.org/>) to see which organizations and charities are reputable.

### Organize an event to raise money

Create a crowdfunding page



Hold a supply drive



Volunteer



## Organizations That Help After a Disaster

These organizations have been recognized for their dedication and innovation when it comes to helping those who have experienced loss after a disaster.

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American Red Cross (<http://www.redcross.org/about-us/our-work/disaster-relief>)

The ARM responds to nearly 64,000 disasters annually, with 90 percent of those incidents being home fires. Other examples include hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes and wildfires.

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Americares (<https://www.americares.org/en/what-we-do/emergency-programs/>)

Americares responds in a timely manner to disasters of all types, providing on-the-ground support and resources. The organization also provides thousands of emergency boxes, hygiene kits and first-aid kits to those affected by disasters.

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All Hands Volunteers (<https://www.hands.org/>)

This national non-profit mobilizes individuals who want to make a difference and serve their communities in the wake of a disaster.

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World Relief (<https://www.worldrelief.org/>)

World Relief focuses on both domestic and international disasters, providing resources, support services and funding to help families and individuals rebuild.

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