

## Shelter in Place or Evacuate? Are You Ready for an Emergency?

*By the Water Quality & Health Council*

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### ***In a nutshell...***

This article introduces a new online feature, “[Should I Stay or Should I Go?](#)” to provide advice on supplies needed for emergencies that require either sheltering in place or evacuating. The feature links to both [Dr. Ralph’s Emergency Preparedness Closet](#) and [Nurse Barbara’s Go Bag](#). Dr. Ralph and Nurse Barbara are caricatures of two members of the [Water Quality & Health Council](#).

In the event of a public emergency, you have two choices: shelter in place or evacuate. The current [COVID-19 pandemic](#) is certainly testing our ability to shelter in place. Most of us are under stay-at-home orders to help curtail the spread of the virus. If you hadn’t prepared to hunker down before the pandemic, you are living through a very educational period now! Other types of emergencies, including encroaching fire and severe weather, may prompt evacuation orders. Are you ready to “get out of Dodge” in a hurry with the most important supplies? As Dr. Ralph says about these situations, “hope is not a plan.”



### ***Should I Stay or Should I Go?***

Where you live helps determine the likelihood of your need to shelter in place or evacuate. For example, is your home in a region subject to flooding, hurricanes, or forest fires? Some residents of fire-prone areas of California know they should be ready to evacuate their homes on a moment’s notice. On the other hand, by definition, a pandemic is widespread and affects people in most regions of the country and globe.

We created “[Dr. Ralph’s Closet](#)” around the time of the 2009 H1N1 Flu Pandemic to promote readiness for pandemic disease. But we hadn’t adequately addressed the “get out of Dodge” option until now. To prepare to evacuate in a hurry, we strongly recommend you explore “[Nurse Barbara’s Go Bag](#).” Not only does this new feature include suggestions for evacuating by car, it also lists what you should consider taking if you are leaving your home on foot. Now that we have addressed both branches of the emergency “decision tree,” we have rolled them together under a feature we’re calling “[Should I Stay or Should I Go?](#)”

### *Who Are Nurse Barbara and Doctor Ralph?*

Nurse Barbara and Dr. Ralph are caricatures of two members of the Water Quality & Health Council. Nurse Barbara is modeled after [Barbara M. Soule, RN, MPA, CIC, FSHEA, FAPIC](#). She is an infection preventionist who has worked in health care for over 40 years. Among many other accomplishments, Ms. Soule was editor-in-chief of the first curriculum for infection prevention and control; that curriculum helped define the profession. [Dr. Ralph Morris, MD, MPH](#), is a physician who has held public health positions in the US Public Health Service, the Texas Department of Health, the Galveston County Health District, and the US Army. He has also taught at Texas A&M University and the University of North Dakota. From 2002 to 2007, Dr. Morris worked for the Minnesota Department of Health in emergency preparedness and response.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a humbling learning experience for all of us; once we emerge from it, there are many things we can do to confidently prepare for any future crises. We trust the "[Should I Stay or Should I Go?](#)" tool will be helpful to you as you anticipate and navigate life's inevitable emergencies. In the wise words of the great football coach, Vince Lombardi, "Preparedness is the ultimate confidence builder."

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