



This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / [Community News](#) / [Natomas News](#).

Handy help in flood

Thousands of area residents are being given a kit to guide them to a speedy evacuation.

By Bobby Caina Calvan - Bee Staff Writer

Published 12:00 am PDT Thursday, September 27, 2007

The floods may never come. But Joedy Zapara and his family say the risk is too great to ignore in their Natomas neighborhood, where questions linger about levees that are supposed to keep the Sacramento River within its banks.

As winter approaches, the concerns grow.

On Wednesday, Zapara family members opened their home for a demonstration of how they are preparing for the calamity of a devastating flood.

Part of their preparation comes packaged in a small plastic bag containing an emergency evacuation kit that, in essence, is a bundle of common sense.

"People as a whole don't really understand what they're at risk for," said Zapara, who is vice president of the Regency Park Neighborhood Association.

Zapara is trying to educate neighbors about the value of preparing for a catastrophic flood.

The Regency Park neighborhood is a collection of some 3,000 homes, partly bounded by Natomas Boulevard, Club Center Drive and Elkhorn Boulevard.

Keeping important information handy -- such as contact numbers for family and anyone else who needs to be notified in case of an evacuation -- is often overlooked.

The kit also includes a leave-behind alert system -- a two-sided door hanger to be hung on the front-door knob -- that lets emergency responders know if help is needed or workers should move on.

The Safely Out kits -- 10,000 of which have been distributed in the past year throughout the capital region -- help residents with some of the most essential elements of an evacuation plan.

An additional 15,000 kits are in production. The goal is to distribute 100,000 of the kits.

Sacramento County has pledged up to \$250,000 over five years to support the program.

"We learned from Katrina the hard way," said Gary Dietrich, co-founder and president of Citizen Voice, a local group that is spearheading the project in partnership with the Red Cross.

"You can't put everything on the backs of emergency first responders. All citizens will have to be first responders," Dietrich said.

The Safely Out program was primarily designed to help the community's most vulnerable, such as the disabled and the elderly.

A Bee analysis last year found that more than 150,000 poor, elderly and disabled Sacramento County residents live in areas prone to flooding.

Citizen Voice is continuing its push to widen the reach of the program.

The target demographic group has widened, said Dietrich, to include families with young children.

"Sadly, it's going to take more flooding in other parts of the country" for people to take the risks more seriously in their own backyards, said Zapara.

The Safely Out kits are only part of the solution, he said, adding that he and his family have begun to draft a more comprehensive evacuation plan -- including putting together a stash of food, clothes and supplies.

"It takes some planning," Zapara said. "You have to set some time aside."

Go to: [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

Copyright © [The Sacramento Bee](#)