



## Notice for the Swiss Community in the U.S.: Precautionary Measures and Behaviour in Crisis Situations

### 1. Introduction and General Remarks

One of the standard duties of an embassy or consulate is to draw attention to potential threats and corresponding precautionary measures. This document should not be regarded as a reaction to changes in the security situation, but rather as a source of information and advice concerning generally necessary precautions. In the event of any specific changes in the security situation, you will receive details in a separate communication. This document provides information and tips on how to prepare for a crisis and how you should behave if one actually occurs.

You are encouraged to communicate to the Swiss Embassy or to the consulates where you are registered any changes of address, telephone number **including cell phone and e-mail**. This will help us to inform you swiftly if necessary. It is, however, important that you assume responsibility for your own safety and take appropriate precautions.

The Swiss Embassy in Washington, D.C., and the consulates in the U.S. closely follow the Department of Homeland Security's advisories, recommendations and measures. They have established close and regular contact with the U.S. authorities on the federal, state and local levels.

We would like to point out that it is the responsibility of the U.S. authorities to protect and guarantee the safety of persons living in the United States of America. Therefore everyone living the United States should follow the recommendations issued by the Department of Homeland Security. In a major disaster, it might be several days before vital services are restored and therefore we strongly advise you to prepare yourself. In case of a crisis, the Swiss representations abroad only have limited means of helping you. However, we will do our utmost to maintain our services as efficiently as possible and to keep you informed.

### 2. What kind of precautionary measures can be taken?

The following items should always be kept close at hand in case a crisis should occur:

- Valid passport/ID (obtaining a new passport can take up to 40 days), plus driver's license and vehicle papers, residence permit, valid entry visa, vaccination certificate for country of destination, and any other important documents
- Cash and foreign currency reserves, credit cards, bank cards
- List of important phone numbers and other details (relatives and friends, embassy/consulate and contact person, police, fire department, ambulance service, doctor, numbers of your passport, bank account(s), credit cards, social insurance, other insurance policies, blood group, etc.)
- Emergency supplies of drinking water, non-perishable foodstuffs which can be eaten without cooking unless you have a portable cooker, fuel
- Portable first-aid kit, including antibiotics and painkillers and particularly any medication you depend on
- Battery-operated (shortwave) radio, flashlight plus spare batteries
- Cell phone, fully charged spare battery or charger that does not require main power supply, plus adequate call credit
- Fire extinguisher
- This information sheet

Four simple steps can prepare you for an emergency:

- 1) Get informed
- 2) Make a plan
- 3) Make an emergency kit
- 4) Be aware

The Swiss representations in the U.S. strongly urge Swiss citizens living in the U.S. to familiarize themselves with the *Family Preparedness Guide* issued by the authorities of the states and cities where you reside, for example: <http://www.fema.gov/>, [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov), [www.72hours.org](http://www.72hours.org) and develop an emergency plan for you and your family.

### 3. How to Minimize the Risk of Damage or Losses

- Have your house and its installations and household systems inspected for safety (resistance to earthquakes, fire, flooding and storms), and be sure to install smoke detectors/fire alarms
- Ensure that all walls, doors and windows are properly burglar-proofed and, if necessary, hire the services of a security firm
- Prearrange a meeting place with your family to be used in case access to your house should be cut off
- Find out about escape routes and routes to the nearest shelter
- Make sure you have all necessary vaccinations
- Plan for the possibility that you will have to leave pets behind in case of evacuation
- Find out about other safety precautions e.g., [www.who.int](http://www.who.int), [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov), [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)
- Subscribe to an SMS alerts service: for every state there is an alert system in place: e.g., Alert DC and Maryland Emergency Management Agency, and identify the community warning system
- Learn what to do for a specific hazard

Crises can give rise to major material losses, so be sure to take the necessary precautions:

- Soliswiss insurance against loss of means of existence due to political crises <http://www.soliswiss.ch/>
- Building and contents insurance including disaster coverage (be sure to frequently update the inventory of contents!)
- Health, accident and/or travel insurance, including coverage for medical treatment abroad and repatriation, and/or membership in REGA rescue service ([www.rega.ch](http://www.rega.ch))
- Keep copies of important documents (passports, insurance policies, contracts, inventories, pension card, CV, etc.) in a safe place, e.g., with relatives in Switzerland
- It is also advisable to:
  - Take out life insurance
  - Grant power of attorney to your spouse or partner
  - Have your will kept in a safe place (e.g., deposited with an attorney in Switzerland)

### 4. How to Behave in a Crisis Situation

- Keep yourself informed about the situation by watching TV, listening to the local radio stations and via the Internet: [www.wtop.com](http://www.wtop.com); [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov); [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org). Keep calm, and do not pay too much attention to rumours.
- Keep in touch with the Swiss Embassy or consulate. General information and recommendations will be published on our website.
- Keep in touch with your relatives in Switzerland who will be worrying about you.
- Unrest: Stay in your house, office or hotel and be sure to securely close all doors and shutters. If you happen to be somewhere else (e.g., traveling), make your way home as quickly as possible. Keep away from windows and, if possible, remain in a protected room in the middle of the house and await further developments. As a rule, unrest tends to ease within one to three days.

- If you cannot avoid having to leave your house, office or hotel, keep away from large gatherings, congested roads and crossroads. Where possible, use a vehicle that does not attract attention and be sure to lock the doors and windows. Do not carry any valuables or objects/documents that might arouse suspicion. If you leave your house frequently, be sure to do so at different times of day and use a different route each time.
- Obey the instructions of law-enforcement officers immediately and without contradiction.
- Never resist someone who is armed. Avoid any form of provocation (sudden movements, eye contact or aggressive staring, mention of political topics), bring your family into play, play down your own importance, do not give an armed person any reason to punish you.
- In the case of hostage-taking, the best strategy is passive cooperation. Try to establish a rapport with the kidnappers. If you are held for a lengthy period of time, draw up a daily schedule with mental and physical exercises. Make a mental note of all your observations. Do not try to escape unless you are absolutely certain of success and are sure you will not endanger other hostages.
- Fire inside a building: If you are in a room full of smoke, keep your head as close to the floor as possible, do not open any doors if they feel hot, and never use an elevator.
- Earthquake: If you are inside a building, shelter beneath a solid table, bed, door frame or beside an interior support wall. If you are outside, keep well away from buildings, streetlights, electricity poles and tall trees, and avoid bridges and subways. If the house is damaged, switch off the heating, main gas feed and main power supply <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/>
- Tsunami: If you are near the coast and you feel an earth tremor or see the sea level rise or fall unexpectedly rapidly, hurry to high ground or to a safe location away from the coast and stay there until the all-clear has been given, though for at least an hour.
- Epidemic: Act in accordance with the recommendations of the local authorities, <http://www.nih.gov/>, the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health ([www.bag.admin.ch](http://www.bag.admin.ch)) and the World Health Organization ([www.who.int](http://www.who.int)).
- Help others if you do not put yourself in danger as a result.
- Be sure to notify the Swiss Embassy or your consulate if you intend to leave (or have left) your place of residence or the country.