

Ask the US Embassy

Print date: January 27, 2010

Question: I live in Jamaica, but I am an American citizen. After witnessing what is happening in Haiti, I would like to know what I should do, and if the U.S. Embassy would assist me if there were a natural disaster in Jamaica?

Answer: The U.S. Embassy has no greater priority than to assist American citizens. At this time, the American embassies in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and even our embassy here in Jamaica are working to assist American citizens who were victims of the earthquake.

What should I do?

Natural disasters can happen at any time, which is why the key for anyone living or traveling overseas is emergency preparedness. You should ensure that your passport is valid, store all vital documents in a secure location, and keep photocopies of all important documents separate from the originals. If you are traveling, leave your itinerary and contact information with family or friends back home.

Most importantly, all American citizens in Jamaica should register their trip or overseas residence with the U.S. Embassy. Whether you are a resident or just visiting, registering gives embassy personnel key information regarding your whereabouts, as well as contact information that will facilitate effective assistance in an emergency. The process is very easy and can be completed online; American citizens in Jamaica can register online at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/>.

Once you have registered, you will also be able to receive important information from the U.S. Embassy in the event of an emergency through the Embassy's warden network. The warden network is a system, which allows the U.S. Embassy to maintain communication with, and disseminate information to, the American community in Jamaica. While the warden network is used primarily in times of crisis or emergency, the network can also be used to pass more routine information of interest to U.S. citizens in Jamaica, such as urgent or emergency messages from family or friends in the U.S.

What sort of assistance does the Embassy provide?

In an emergency situation, there are a range services that the Embassy will provide to American citizens. In the event of a natural disaster, the relevant services would include, but are not limited to:

- conducting welfare and whereabouts checks on the location and condition of American citizens;
- providing assistance in finding medical help;
- arranging emergency financial assistance;
- processing emergency passports;
- reporting the death(s) of American citizens abroad; and
- responding to inquiries from family and friends in the U.S.

In emergencies, the Embassy can assist private citizens with locating American citizen friends or relatives who are in Jamaica and, if necessary, can relay messages to them. With the permission of American citizens, we can also relay information back to friends or family in the United States. When you register with the Embassy, you can also provide instruction regarding what to do if we receive a personal inquiry.

If an American citizen is injured during a disaster and needs medical attention, the Embassy may be able to assist by contacting friends or relatives in the U.S., by directing the American to a nearby health care facility, or by helping to arrange a medical evacuation (medevac) to the United States. In the unfortunate event that an American citizen dies here in Jamaica, the Embassy can assist the family in making arrangements for return of the remains to the United States, if necessary, or for burial or cremation in Jamaica.

In cases where American citizens finds themselves destitute and without resources in Jamaica, the Embassy can assist family or friends with wiring funds through a company like Western Union, through a bank to bank transfer, or through a trust account set up by the Department of State. In severe circumstances, when family and friends are unable to provide financial assistance, temporary emergency loans may be available through the Department of State.

Non-emergency Services

Please note that, beginning February 1, 2010, all *non-emergency* American citizen services relating to the issuance, renewal, or replacement of passports, and reports of birth abroad will require an appointment with the American Citizen Services Unit. To schedule an appointment, American citizens should e-mail the Embassy at Kingstonpassport@state.gov, and include the following information: name, date of birth, contact phone number, type of service needed, and possible appointment dates on which the person is available. After receiving your email, the American Citizen Services Unit will respond to you by phone or email within two business days to confirm an appointment date and time. The staff will also include in their response instructions about what documentation to bring with you to your appointment.

The American Citizens Services Unit will continue to process emergency passport applications and provide emergency services on a same-day basis when possible. However, individuals in need of non-emergency services, such as passport renewals, will be asked to email the Embassy to schedule an appointment.