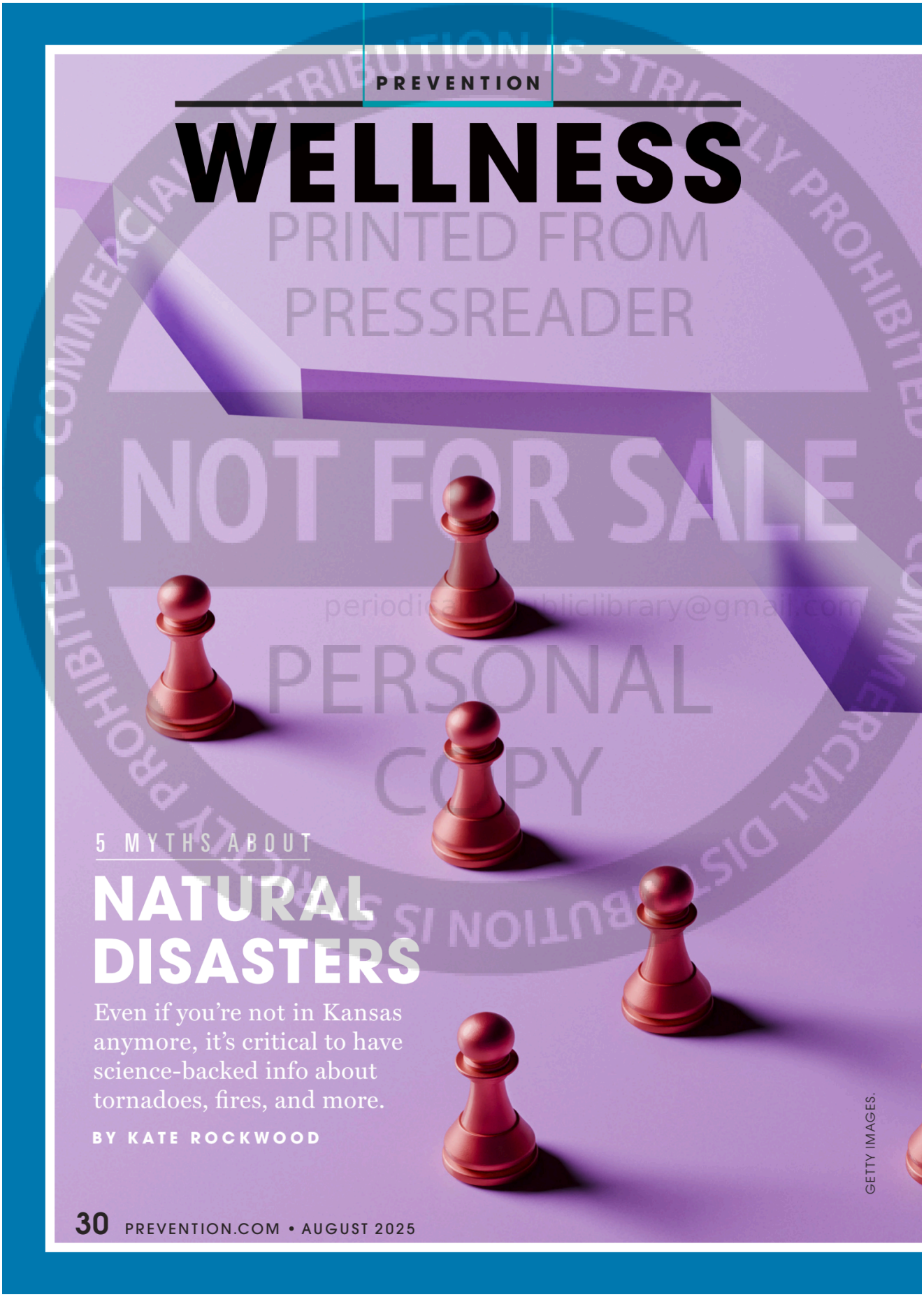
- Natural disasters



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1

MYTH:

You should stand in a doorway during an earthquake.

MYTHBUSTER

Nope, that's old advice. This myth stems from the fact that doorways of old adobe homes remained standing after earthquakes, "but in modern buildings, doorways offer no extra protection," says Krista Houk, director of planning and preparedness for IEM International, Inc., a disaster-recovery and emergency-management organization. Also, standing puts you at risk of being hit with flying objects, she adds. The best thing to do is drop, cover yourself, and hold on. Crawl under a sturdy table or desk and wait until the shaking stops. If you live in an earthquake-prone area, do a little prep: Secure cabinets, anchor heavy furniture, and use museum wax (a microcrystalline wax) to hold fragile items in place, Houk says, "and avoid hanging heavy objects over beds—they can become hazards while you sleep."



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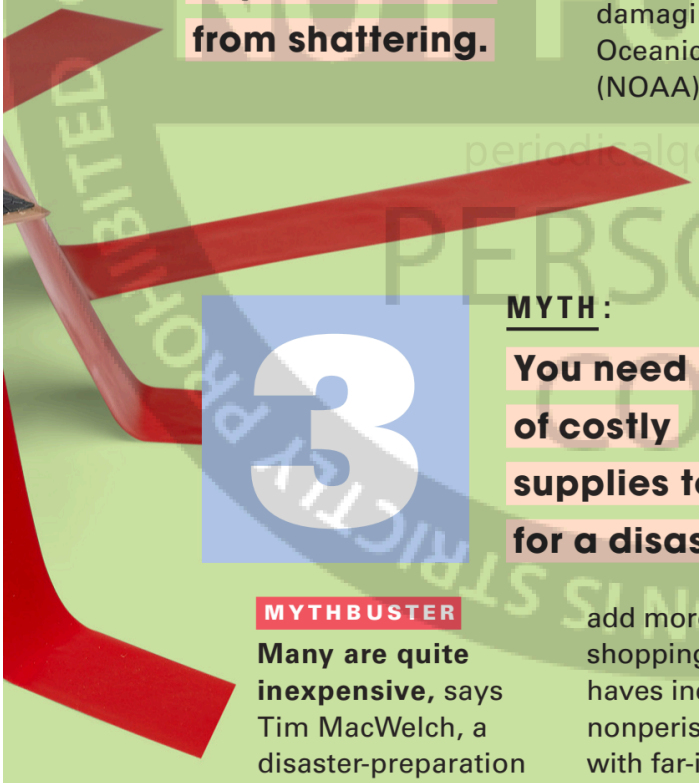
2

MYTH:

Before a tropical storm, tape your windows to prevent them from shattering.

MYTHBUSTER

Taping windows is ineffective and dangerous. "It creates a false sense of security and can cause larger, deadlier shards of glass to form if the window breaks," Houk says. "Using storm shutters or boarding up windows with plywood ahead of a storm is the best course if you have time to prepare." Shutters or plywood can prevent the dangers of broken glass and flying debris and also can help stop roofs and walls from collapsing by keeping damaging winds outside, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports.



GETTY IMAGES.

3

MYTH:

You need a lot of costly supplies to prepare for a disaster.

MYTHBUSTER

Many are quite inexpensive, says Tim MacWelch, a disaster-preparation expert and the best-selling author of *How to Survive Anything*. Look around for stuff you already own, he says, then gradually add more with each shopping trip. Must-haves include water, nonperishable food with far-in-the-future expiration dates, a manual can opener, a flashlight with extra batteries, a first aid kit, and a NOAA weather radio, Houk says. MacWelch also recommends water-purification tablets, matches or a butane lighter, heat-reflective blankets, and toiletries such as toilet paper, soap, and sanitary napkins. "Have enough food and water for each person in your household to last at least three days," he says, as well as everyone's medications. Finally, get to know your neighbors: A community is an excellent thing to have after a disaster.

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4

MYTH:

Outdoors during a tornado, the safest place to be is under a bridge or in an underpass.

MYTHBUSTER

Those are actually some of the worst places to be. In a tornado, bridges and underpasses act like wind tunnels, channeling high winds and flying debris, says MacWelch. And airborne debris causes the most injuries and deaths during a tornado, according to the National Weather Service. The ideal place to be is in the innermost part of a building on the lowest possible floor, but if you can't make it indoors, your best bet is to lie down in a low spot such as a ditch and cover your head, MacWelch says. "The idea is to have the winds go over you," he explains.

5

MYTH:

Rubber tires protect you in an electrical storm.

MYTHBUSTER

Rubber can conduct electricity at high voltages, says Christopher S. Baird, Ph.D., an associate professor of physics at West Texas A&M University. That said, a car is good for shelter if you can't get indoors, but that's due to its metal frame and roof. "When lightning strikes a car, the electric current travels along the outside surface of the metal frame," Baird says, keeping you safe on the inside. Make sure you don't touch interior metal surfaces along the conducting path (such as the ignition), and leave the windows rolled up. And sticking your arm out the window or touching the outside of the car when there's lightning is definitely dangerous, says Baird: "You're no longer completely within the metal frame and you could be electrocuted as the lightning bolt passes through the car."



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