

Where Will You or Your Family Be When an Emergency or Disaster Strikes? Emergencies and disasters strike quickly and without warning and can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. What would you do if basic services — water, gas, electricity or telephones — were cut off? Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away. If disaster strikes, you need to know how to take care of yourself and your family. This self-reliance is important because local officials and relief workers on the scene won't be able to reach everyone right away. People can cope with disaster by preparing in advance and with families working together as a team. Preparing for a disaster or emergency is a responsibility that begins with each individual. We can't control all the emergencies that will occur in our lives, but we can be ready to face them by knowing what to do and taking action to prepare. Two things that will always help you in an emergency or disaster are **clear thinking** and **quick reactions**. If you can stay calm in a crisis, you'll be better able to make the right decisions. Once you decide the best action to take in a particular situation, do it! There's no room for hesitation in a disaster or emergency.

Knowing what to do is your best protection and your responsibility!

Create an Emergency/Disaster Plan

Meet with Your Family Discuss the types of disasters and emergencies that are most likely to happen and what to do in each case. Explain the dangers to children and plan to share the responsibilities, working as a team. If you have in-home childcare, include the caregiver in your plan.

Determine Where to Meet

- A place right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire.
- A location outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Make wallet cards, so everyone will know the address and phone number of the place where you are to meet. For older children, select a "safe house" in areas they frequent — until it is safe to meet.

Have an "Out-of-Town" Contact Ask an out-of-town friend or relative to be your contact. After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Other family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know the contact's phone number, and cell phone number if they have one. Note: If telephones are not working, try e-mail. Sometimes e-mail gets through when calls cannot. Be aware that cell phones are often overloaded during and immediately after an emergency, so it is important to know "land line" phone numbers as well. Check www.vaemergency.com for up-to-date emergency information.

Have an Emergency Plan for the Mobility-Impaired Keep support items in the same place, so they can always be found quickly. For those who have home-health caregivers, particularly for those who are bed-bound, it is essential to have an alternate plan if the home-health caregiver cannot make it to you.

What to Do if an Emergency/Disaster Strikes

- If the disaster occurs near you, be prepared to give first aid and get help for seriously injured people.
- If the emergency occurs while you are at home, check for damage using a flashlight. Do not light matches or candles or turn on electrical switches.
- Check for fires, electrical and other household hazards. Be aware that spilled bleaches, gasoline and other liquids may produce deadly fumes when chemicals mix, or be a fire hazard. Get advice from the local fire department on how to clean up spilled liquids, especially if there are noxious fumes.
- Sniff for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open windows and get everyone outside quickly.
- Shut off any other damaged utilities. Know in advance how to shut off all utility valves and the electricity.
- Make plans for your pets if you need to evacuate. Do not leave them outside. If you do not need to evacuate, confine or secure your pets (they're frightened, too, and may run away or bite someone).

- Check on your neighbors, especially those who are elderly or disabled.
- Call your family contact — do not use the telephone again unless it is a life-threatening emergency.

If Children are in School During a Disaster or Emergency Check the local media for announcements about changes in school openings and closings. Parents can always pick up their children during the school day, but sometimes the safest place might be the school itself. For older children who self-transport, ask them to follow the instructions of authorities.

Look to Your Neighbors Working with neighbors can save lives and property. Know your neighbors' skills (i.e., medical, technical) and consider how you can help neighbors with special needs, such as disabled or elderly persons. Make plans for childcare in case parents can't get home.

Know What to Do:

In an Evacuation

- Listen to your battery-powered radio and follow the instructions of local emergency officials.
- Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes.
- Take your Disaster Supplies Kit. You will put this together in Step 3 below.
- Listen to your battery-powered radio or car radio and use travel routes specified by local authorities - don't use shortcuts because certain areas may be impassable or dangerous.
- If you do not own a vehicle or drive, learn in advance what your community's arrangements are for those without private transportation.

If Told to "Shelter-in-Place"

Local officials may ask residents to shelter-in-place during a chemical or hazardous materials emergency. This means you must remain in your home or office and protect yourself there.

- Lock all windows and exterior doors and close vents and fireplace dampers. Turn off all fans and heating and air conditioning systems.
- Get your disaster supplies kit and make sure the battery-powered radio is working.
- Go to an interior room without windows that is above ground level. Some chemicals are heavier than air and may seep into basements.
- Using duct tape, seal all cracks around the door and any vents into the room. Include spaces around pipes.
- Listen to the radio or television until you are told all is safe or you are told to evacuate.

Have an Emergency Plan for Your Pets Due to health regulations, animals are not allowed inside emergency shelters. Make arrangements for your pets, either securing them in your home or transporting them to a safe place.

The Preparedness Checklist: What You Need to Know

Emergency Numbers Post emergency numbers by all your phones (fire, police, ambulance, your physician, etc.). Teach your children how to call these numbers and when it is appropriate to do so. Include emergency numbers for water/sewer, electricity, gas and the National Poison Control Center, 1-800-222-1222.

Utilities Know how and when to turn off water, gas and electricity at the main switches or valves and share this information with each family member. Keep any tools you will need near gas and water shut off valves. Remember, turn off the utilities only if you suspect the lines are damaged or if you are instructed to do so.

Do not turn off gas unless you suspect a leak or local officials advise to do so. If you turn the gas off, you will need a professional to turn it back on. It might take several weeks for a professional to respond. In the meantime, you may be unable to heat your home, make hot water or cook.

Fire Extinguisher Be sure everyone knows how to use your fire extinguishers (ABC type), and where they are kept.

Smoke Alarms Install smoke alarms on each level of your home, especially near the bedrooms. Follow local codes and manufacturer's instructions about installation requirements. Test monthly.

Escape Routes and Safe Spots Determine the best escape routes out of your home. Find two ways out of each room. Also, find the safe spots in your home for each type of disaster. (For example, if a tornado approaches, go to the lowest floor of your home or an interior room or closet with no windows.)

If Electrical Power is Lost

- Check to see if neighbors have power. If they are also without service, call your local power company.
- Use a flashlight or battery-operated lantern. Do not use candles for emergency lighting. Candles and kerosene lanterns are fire hazards.
- Turn off all major appliances. They could overload electric lines when power is restored, causing a second outage.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. Food can be kept cold for a day or two if the doors are kept closed.
- Use portable generators cautiously. Make sure they are outside in a well-ventilated area. Refuel a generator only after it has cooled.
- In cold weather, drain pumps, supply lines, water heaters and boilers - these can freeze when the power is lost. So can traps in drains of tubs, sinks, commodes, washing machines and dishwashers. In order to avoid burst pipes, close the main water valve and open the spigots and supply lines and drain them.
- In advance, provide your power company with a list of all life support equipment required by family members. Develop a contingency plan that includes an alternate power source for the equipment or relocating the person.

Inventory Home Possessions Make a visual or written record of your possessions to help you claim losses in the event of damage. Include photographs of cars, boats and recreational vehicles. Get professional appraisals of jewelry, collectibles, artwork or other items that may be difficult to evaluate. Also, photograph the exterior of your home. Include the landscaping that may not be insurable, but does increase the value of your property for tax purposes. Make copies of receipts and canceled checks for valuable items.

Stock Emergency Supplies and Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit

Keep enough supplies in your home to meet your needs and those of each family member for three to five days. Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit with items you may need in an evacuation. Store these supplies in sturdy, easy-to-carry containers such as backpacks, duffel bags or covered trash containers.

INCLUDE:

- Three- to five-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and food that won't spoil. Include a manual can opener.
- One change of clothing and footwear and one blanket or sleeping bag per person.
- A first aid kit that includes your family's prescriptions and medications. Include contacts or an extra pair of glasses.
- Emergency tools including a battery-powered radio, flashlights and plenty of extra batteries.
- An extra set of car keys and a credit card, cash (small denominations) or traveler's checks.
- Sanitation supplies including toilet paper, soap, plastic garbage bags and disinfectant.

- Special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members.
- Important family documents in a waterproof container. Keep the originals of all important financial and family documents in a safe place. You will need accessible records for tax and insurance purposes.

Insurance Coverage Check if you have adequate insurance coverage. Homeowners insurance does not cover floods and some other major disasters. If you are in an area that can flood, talk with your insurance agent about getting flood insurance.

Emergency planning for people with special needs

If you have a disability or special need, you may have to take additional steps to protect yourself and your household in an emergency. If you know of friends or neighbors with special needs help them with these extra precautions. Examples include:

! Hearing impaired may need to make special arrangements to receive a warning.

! Mobility impaired may need assistance in getting to a shelter.

! Households with a single working parent may need help from others both in planning for disasters and during an emergency.

! Non-English speaking people may need assistance planning for and responding to emergencies. Community and cultural groups may be able to help keep these populations informed.

! People without vehicles may need to make arrangements for transportation.

! People with special dietary needs should have an adequate emergency food supply.

1. Find out about special assistance that may be available in your community. Register with the office of emergency services or fire department for assistance, so needed help can be provided quickly in an emergency.
2. Create a network of neighbors, relatives, friends and co-workers to aid you in an emergency. Discuss your needs and make sure they know how to operate necessary equipment.
3. Discuss your needs with your employer.
4. If you are mobility impaired and live or work in a high-rise building, have an escape chair.
5. If you live in an apartment building, ask the management to mark accessible exits clearly and to make arrangements to help you evacuate the building.
6. Keep extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen, catheters, medication, food for guide or hearing-ear dogs, or other items you might need. Also, keep a list of the type and serial numbers of medical devices you need.
7. Those who are not disabled should learn who in their neighborhood or building is disabled so that they may assist them during emergencies.
8. If you are a caregiver for a person with special needs, make sure you have a plan to communicate if an emergency occurs.