

# Emergency Preparedness

Unexpected disasters can strike at any time. While we hope you are never the victim of a disaster, this guide is intended to help you learn how to protect yourself and your family by planning ahead. Discuss these ideas with your loved ones and prepare an emergency plan. Knowing what to do in an emergency and being prepared is your best defense against disaster.

## Be Prepared

### Know the Risks

Take responsibility for your own and your loved ones' safety by learning about potential disasters that could occur in your area and the emergency notification systems in place to warn you. Begin by calling your local Emergency Management Office or Red Cross chapter and asking the following questions:

- Which disasters could occur in my area?
- How should I prepare for each disaster?
- How will I be warned of an emergency?
- What are my community's evacuation routes?
- Is special assistance available for children, elderly or disabled persons (if applicable)?

### In addition...

- If you work, ask your workplace about emergency plans.
- If you have children, or care for grandchildren, learn about emergency plans for their schools or day care centers.

- Learn about emergency plans for adult day care centers, senior centers, residential care facilities, etc. If you are a senior who lives in an assisted living facility or retirement home, ask the director about safety precautions and evacuation procedures.

### Know Your Emergency Alert Systems

Check with your state and local authorities about emergency alert systems used in your area to notify of an impending emergency. You should also inquire about alert and warning systems for workplace, schools and other locations. Many communities now have systems that will send instant text alerts or e-mails to let you know about bad weather, road closings, local emergencies, etc. You can usually sign-up by visiting your local Office of Emergency Management web site (visit [www.ready.gov/community-state-info](http://www.ready.gov/community-state-info) to locate).

While methods of getting your attention vary from community to community, the following systems are commonly used to warn you of an emergency:

- **Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)**—WEA sends free informational text messages to WEA-enabled cell phones within range of an imminent and dangerous local situation, severe weather event, or AMBER emergency. The WEA notification is designed to get your attention and notify you with a unique sound and vibration. Public safety officials use WEA to send you essential information whenever you are near the location of a life-threatening event.

- **The Emergency Alert System (EAS)**—EAS can address the entire nation on very short notice in case of a grave threat or national emergency. Ask if your local radio and TV stations participate in EAS.
- **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio (NWR)**— NOAA Weather Radio is a nationwide network of radio stations broadcasting continuous weather information directly from a nearby National Weather Service office to specially configured NOAA weather radio receivers. Determine if NOAA Weather Radio is available where you live. If so, consider purchasing a NOAA weather radio receiver. NOAA radio receivers can be purchased at most retail outlets that sell electronic merchandise.
- **National Weather Service**—The National Weather Service provides information about severe weather, such as thunderstorms, winter storms, hurricanes, floods and tornadoes. Listen to a radio, watch television or check online for these terms:
  - **Watch:** Severe weather is threatening and may occur in your area. Continue to listen or watch for more information.
  - **Warning:** Severe weather is happening now, is imminent or has been seen on weather radar. Protect yourself immediately.
- **Door-to-door warning from local emergency officials**—If officials come to your door to warn you of potential emergencies, listen carefully and follow their instructions.

*Note*—Since emergencies can happen quickly, watches and warnings may not be issued or you may miss them. Always pay attention to the weather and take action if you suspect severe weather is moving into your area, even if you have not heard an official warning.

## Disaster Precautions

This section details precautionary steps you can take to safeguard yourself and your family in the event of an emergency.

### Create an Emergency Plan

It's important to have an emergency plan in the event of a disaster. Determine how you will respond to potential disasters, but try not to scare or alarm loved ones. Reassure them that, while disasters rarely occur, it is always best to be prepared. Talk to children and/or elderly loved ones about the dangers of fire, severe weather, earthquakes and other emergencies. Make sure they know how to recognize danger signals, including what smoke detectors, fire alarms and local community warning systems sound like.

### In addition:

- Post emergency numbers near all telephones.
- Teach children how and when to call 911, police and fire departments.
- Draw a floor plan of your home indicating escape routes. (For more information, see the section "Escape Plans" later in this guide.)
- Learn how to turn off the main switches for water, gas and electricity in your home in case you need to evacuate.
- Discuss what to do about power outages and personal injuries.
- Instruct household members on how best to obtain emergency information (online, television, radio, etc.).
- Pick one out-of-state and one local friend or relative to call if your family is separated by disaster (it is often easier to call out-of-state than within an affected area).
- Teach children how to make long-distance telephone calls.
- Teach family members how to use text messaging (also known as SMS or Short Message Service). Text messages can often get around network disruptions when a phone call might not be able to get through.

- Be sure every member of your family knows the phone number and has a cell phone, coins or a prepaid phone card to call the emergency contact. If you have a cell phone, program that person(s) as “ICE” (In Case of Emergency) in your phone. If you are in an accident, emergency personnel will often check your ICE listings in order to get a hold of someone you know. Make sure to tell your family and friends that you’ve listed them as emergency contacts.
  - Pick two places to meet in the event of a disaster: a place near your home, and a place outside your neighborhood, in case you cannot return home.
  - Take basic first aid and CPR classes.
  - Keep copies of important documents such as personal and financial records in a waterproof—and fireproof—container or store your important documents in a password-protected area in the Cloud or a secure flash or jump drive that you can keep readily available. This flash drive can be kept on a key ring so it can be accessed from any computer, anytime, anywhere. Remember to include copies of information such as as personal and property insurance, identification (driver’s license/passport) for you and family members and banking information.
  - Download phone applications and bookmark online resources that can help during emergencies. Visit [www.ready.gov/get-tech-ready](http://www.ready.gov/get-tech-ready) for recommendations.
  - If you must evacuate, take your pets with you if possible. However, if you are going to a public shelter, it is important to understand that animals may not be allowed inside. Plan in advance for shelter alternatives that will work for both you and your pets. Store your pet’s veterinary medical records documents online and keep a current photo of your pet in your online kit to aid in identification if you are separated. Consider an information digital implant (microchip).
  - Make a back-up emergency plan in case you can’t care for your animals yourself. Develop a buddy system with neighbors, friends and relatives to make sure that someone is available to care for or evacuate your pets if you are unable to do so. Be prepared to improvise and use what you have on hand to make it on your own for at least three days, maybe longer.
- If you are elderly or disabled, you may need to take additional precautions. Consider the following tips:
- Plan emergency procedures with trusted friends, home health care agencies or workers.
  - Learn about emergency shelters in the area; often shelters are set up exclusively for the elderly and people with special needs. Contact your city or county government’s emergency information management office. Many local offices keep lists of people with disabilities so they can be located quickly in a sudden emergency.
  - Plan how you will evacuate or signal for help if necessary.
  - Tell others where you keep your emergency supplies. (See supplies list that follows).
  - Label equipment like wheelchairs, canes or walkers. Plus, know the size and weight of your wheelchair, in addition to whether or not it is collapsible.
  - Wear medical alert tags or bracelets to help identify your disability.
  - If you are dependent on dialysis or other life sustaining treatment, know the location and availability of more than one facility.

### **Prepare a Disaster Supplies Kit**

Having a disaster supplies kit can be a lifesaver in an emergency, particularly if you are forced to evacuate your home. By assembling some essential supplies, you can protect yourself and your loved ones, and avoid waiting in lines for food, water, medicine or other critical supplies.

Assemble enough supplies to last for at least three days. Store them in an easy-to-carry container, such as a backpack or duffel bag, with an ID tag. Be sure to include:

- A supply of water (one gallon per person per day). Store water in clean, sealed, unbreakable containers. Identify the storage date and replace every six months.
- A supply of non-perishable packaged or canned food and a manual can opener
- A first aid kit
- A whistle to signal for help
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- Flashlights, a battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert and extra batteries
- A dust mask to help filter contaminated air and plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers, inverter or solar charger

**In addition to these basic supplies, you should also consider including:**

- A change of clothing, rain gear and sturdy shoes
- Blankets or sleeping bag
- Prescription medications, including instructions, dosages and any allergies. Replace medicines regularly, as some have expiration dates
- Credit cards, cash and/or traveler's checks
- An extra set of car keys
- Important family documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records in a waterproof, portable container or on a flash drive

- Infant care items, if applicable (e.g., diapers, blankets, baby formula/food, bottles, medication, etc.)
- Pet care items, if applicable (e.g., food and water, collar, leash, sturdy carrier, identification, license, proof of vaccination, etc.)
- Emergency contact information. (For your convenience, we have included an Emergency Contact Information form for you to fill out at the end of this guide.)
- Household chlorine bleach and medicine dropper. Do not use scented, color safe or bleaches with added cleaners
- Fire extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Feminine supplies, personal hygiene items
- Mess kits, paper cups, plates, paper towels and plastic utensils
- Paper and pencil

**Additional Supplies for the Elderly and Disabled:**

- List of prescription medications including dosage, health history, allergies and list of doctors
- Extra eyeglasses and hearing-aid batteries
- A light weight manual wheelchair, extra wheelchair batteries and other special equipment
- Copies of medical insurance and Medicare cards
- List of doctors and emergency contacts
- A list of the style and serial number of medical devices
- A laminated personal communication board, if you need assistance being understood

### **Prepare an Emergency Car Kit**

- **You may not always be at home when disaster strikes. In case of a road emergency, keep a kit in the trunk of your car that includes:**
- **Jumper cables**
- **Flashlights and extra batteries**
- **First aid kit and necessary medications**
- **Non-perishable, high protein food items and a manual can opener**
- **Water for each person and pet**
- **AM/FM radio to listen to traffic reports and emergency messages**
- **Cat litter or sand for better tire traction, shovel and ice scraper**
- **Warm clothes, gloves, hat, sturdy boots, jacket and an extra change of clothes**
- **Blankets or sleeping bags**
- **A fully-charged cell phone and charger**
- **Baby formula and diapers if applicable**

**Be prepared for an emergency by keeping your gas tank full and your cell phone fully charged. If you find yourself stranded, be safe and stay in your car, put on your flashers, call for help and wait until it arrives.**

### **Home Safety**

In addition to creating an emergency plan and preparing a disaster supplies kit, there are specific precautionary measures you can take in your home to protect yourself during an unexpected emergency. *Note*—If you are elderly and live alone, have someone help you with these tasks.

#### **Identify Home Hazards**

In a disaster, ordinary household items can cause injury or damage. Anything that can move, fall, break or cause a fire is a potential hazard. Reduce the potential for disaster by using the following suggestions:

- Have defective electrical wiring and leaky gas connections repaired by a professional.
- Fasten shelves securely.
- Place large, heavy objects on lower shelves.
- Hang pictures and mirrors away from beds.
- Brace overhead light fixtures.
- Secure the water heater by strapping it to wall studs, if necessary.
- Repair cracks in ceilings or foundations.
- Store weed killers, pesticides and flammable products away from heat sources.
- Place items such as oily polishing rags or waste in covered metal cans.
- Clean and repair chimneys, flue pipes, vent connectors and gas vents.

### **Fire Safety**

Take precautions to prevent fires in your home—and educate household members on what to do in the event of a fire. If you are elderly, and live alone, have someone help you with these issues and consider purchasing an emergency response system that will immediately alert an emergency professional in the event of a fire or other emergency. If you live in an assisted living facility or retirement community, ask about fire safety precautions and procedures, and make sure you know how to react in the event of a fire. These tips will help you get started:

- Install smoke alarms throughout your home; clean and test them once a month and change batteries once a year.
- Plan two escape routes out of each room.
- Teach household members to stay low to the ground when escaping from a fire.
- Teach household members to feel doors with the palms of their hands. If a door is hot, instruct them not to open it, but to find another way out.
- Keep a whistle in each bedroom to awaken household members in case of fire.
- Check electrical outlets and make sure they are not overloaded.

- Purchase a fire extinguisher (10 lb., A-B-C type) and get training from your local fire department on how to use it.
- Have a collapsible ladder on each upper floor/room of your house.
- Consider installing home sprinklers.

### Fire Escape Plan

In a fire or other emergency, you may need to leave your home at a moment's notice. In order to get out quickly and safely, develop an escape plan by drawing a floor plan of your residence.

Use a separate piece of paper for each floor. Use a black or blue pen to show the location of doors, windows, stairways and large furniture. Indicate the location of emergency supplies such as fire extinguishers, smoke alarms, collapsible ladders, first aid kits, utility shut off points and the disaster supplies kit. (The symbols below may be helpful in marking important locations.) Next, use a different colored pen to draw a broken line charting at least two escape routes from each room. Finally, mark a place outside of the home where household members should meet in case of an emergency.

Be sure to include important points outside your home such as garages, patios, stairways, elevators, driveways and porches. Practice emergency evacuation drills with all household members at least twice a year.

*Note*—If you live in an assisted living facility or retirement home, they should already have emergency plans documented. Be sure you know how to respond within your community.

### Mass Evacuations

If your area faces imminent danger, authorities may ask you to evacuate your home. Listen to emergency alerts for evacuation instructions and keep the following tips in mind:

- Check emergency resources for the location of emergency shelters.
- If you have a car, keep a full tank of gas in it if an evacuation seems likely. Keep a half tank of gas in it at all times in case of an unexpected need to evacuate.
- Use recommended evacuation routes. Familiarize yourself with alternate routes and means of transportation. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency.
- Leave early enough to avoid being trapped by severe weather.
- Be alert for road hazards. Do not drive into flooded areas.
- If you do not have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to.
- Take your disaster supplies kit.
- Take your pets if possible, but understand that only service animals may be permitted in public shelters. Implement your alternative plan if you cannot take your pets.
- If you are elderly or disabled, contact your city or county government's emergency information management office for assistance with transportation and information on shelters for the elderly and those requiring special needs.

**Draw a floor plan of your home and use the following symbols to mark important locations:**

 Normal exit route

 Disaster supplies kit

 Stairways

 Emergency exit route

 Doors

 Utility shut off

 Fire extinguisher

 Collapsible ladder

 Windows

 Smoke detectors

 Meeting location (outside)

 First aid kit

### **If you are sure you have time...**

- Shut off water, gas and electricity, if instructed to do so and if you know how. *Note*—If you turn the gas off, it must be turned back on by a professional.
- Call or e-mail the out-of-state contact in your family communications plan. Tell them where you are going.
- Lock your home's doors and windows.
- Unplug smaller electrical devices such as radios, televisions and small appliances. Leave freezers and refrigerators plugged in unless there is a risk of flooding. If there is damage to your home and you are instructed to do so, shut off water, gas and electricity before leaving.
- Leave a note telling others when you left and where you are going.
- Wear sturdy shoes and protective clothing.

### **Shelters**

Your community may open shelters if a disaster affects a large number of people, or if the emergency is expected to last several days. Even though mass care shelters often provide water, food, medicine and basic sanitary facilities, you should plan to take your disaster supplies kit with you so you will have the supplies you require. To learn about shelters serving your area, check with authorities or your local Red Cross chapter.

*Note*—All Red Cross emergency services are provided free of charge.

### **Going to a Shelter**

You should be prepared to go to a shelter if:

- Your area is without electrical power
- There is a chemical emergency affecting your area
- Flood water is rising
- Your home has been severely damaged

- Police or other local officials tell you to evacuate
- If you are elderly or disabled, contact the local police or health care workers for assistance in getting to the shelter.

### **Shelter in Place**

In certain emergency situations, you may be told to shelter in place. This means staying where you are and making yourself as safe as possible until the emergency passes or you are told to evacuate. In this situation, it is safer to remain indoors than to go outside where it may be unsafe. If you are told to shelter in place:

- Bring your family and pets inside.
- Lock doors, close windows, air vents and fireplace dampers.
- Turn off fans, air conditioning and forced air heating systems.
- Take your emergency supply kit unless you have reason to believe it has been contaminated.
- Go into an interior room with few windows, if possible.
- Seal all windows, doors and air vents with two to four mil. thick plastic sheeting and duct tape. Consider measuring and cutting the sheeting in advance to save time.
- Cut the plastic sheeting several inches wider than the openings and label each sheet.
- Duct tape plastic at corners first and then tape down all edges.
- Be prepared to improvise and use what you have on hand to seal gaps so that you create a barrier between yourself and any contamination.
- Local authorities may not immediately be able to provide information on what is happening and what you should do. However, you should watch TV, listen to the radio or check online resources often for official news and instructions as they become available.

## Special Preparations for Seniors and People With Disabilities

If you are a senior citizen and/or have a disability, additional steps may be needed in order to prepare for an emergency. Add the following provisions to your emergency plan:

- Contact your city or county government’s emergency information management office and work with them to use their emergency planning resources. Find out if your community offers an advance registration system. Advance registration systems are usually run by the city or town, and seniors and disabled individuals can register (usually at their local senior center, fire department or emergency management office) to have police and rescuers provide assistance in the event of an emergency.
- People with certain types of disabilities (e.g., deaf, blind) may need to make arrangements for alternative emergency alerts.
- If you anticipate needing assistance during a disaster, talk to family, friends and others who will be part of your personal support network.
- Write down and share each aspect of your emergency plan with everyone in your support network. Give them copies of your plan as well as lists of your prescriptions and dosages, orders for durable health equipment, allergy information, health history and a list of your doctors.
- Make sure everyone knows how you plan to evacuate your home or workplace and where you will go in case of a disaster.
- Make sure that someone in your local network has an extra key to your home and knows where you keep your emergency supplies.
- Teach those who will help you how to use any lifesaving equipment, administer medicine in case of an emergency.
- Practice your plan with those who have agreed to be part of your network.
- Arrange for someone to check on you regularly and in the event of an emergency.
- Include special items in your disaster supplies kit, such as necessary prescriptions, extra hearing aid batteries, wheelchair batteries, oxygen and Medicare cards.
- Keep contact information for local independent living centers and other disability services organizations in a safe and easy-to-access place. If you provide any organizations or service providers with information about your functional needs and what you may require in an emergency, keep that data up to date.
- If you use in-home support services or other support services, work with them to personalize emergency preparedness plans to meet your needs so you can keep in touch with them during and after an emergency. That contact may be your lifeline to other services in a disaster.
- Call authorities if you require special transportation. Work with caregivers and local transportation and disability services to plan ahead for accessible transportation if you may need that for evacuation or other reasons during a disaster.
- Notify shelter authorities of any special needs; they will do their best to accommodate you and make you comfortable.
- Develop back-up plans for personal assistance services or in-home assistance.
- If you attend a senior center or adult day care center, ask what emergency plans are in place.
- Know your limitations and set up alternate emergency plans. For example, most people take shelter in a basement during a tornado, but if you are elderly and/or disabled, the basement may be inaccessible. Decide in advance what your alternative shelter will be and how you will get there.

*Note*—If you are caring for an elderly or disabled loved one, remember that he or she may require special care and assistance, so plan ahead, take special precautions and practice emergency procedures.



## Emergency Contact Information

Fill in the information below and post copies of this form in key locations in your home. Include a copy in your disaster supplies kit.

### Out-of-State Contact

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (Home): \_\_\_\_\_ (Cell): \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### Local Contact

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (Home): \_\_\_\_\_ (Cell): \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### Nearest Relative

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (Home): \_\_\_\_\_ (Cell): \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### Family Work Numbers

Father: \_\_\_\_\_ Mother: \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Emergency Telephone Numbers

Police Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Fire Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital: \_\_\_\_\_ Poison Control Center: \_\_\_\_\_ Veterinarian: \_\_\_\_\_

*Note*—In a life-threatening emergency, dial 911 or the local emergency medical services system number.

### Family Physicians

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

### Meeting Locations

1. Right outside your home: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Away from the neighborhood, in case you cannot return home: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Route to try first: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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