Emergency Preparedness Plan – Quick Tips



Technology and experience have provided many tools to help make forecasting natural disasters more accurate. Satellites, radar and historical data all contribute to increased accuracy and more reliable forecasts. While forecasting is fairly accurate at predicting what may happen, it isn't an exact science. Occasionally, the actual event is less severe than the forecast; other times, it can be much worse.

Unfortunately, natural disasters are no longer the only type of emergency or disaster we may experience. Influences from political, economic or religious views can contribute to unpredictable man-made events that are nearly impossible to predict. The result can be very similar to those created by nature. One significant difference is that man-made disasters are typically unexpected.

No matter what type of emergency or disaster occurs, an emergency preparedness plan can make a difference between life and death. While there are federal, state and local police and fire department resources set up to provide assistance, personal preparedness is also essential.

While no one can fully anticipate what kinds of emergencies or disasters may occur, an emergency preparedness plan can make a difference in the days that follow. Collecting supplies and planning and preparing for your personal needs are best done before warnings are issued or after something happens. This way, there is no rush and supplies are plentiful.

With any disaster or emergency, there are basic survival needs to consider. At a minimum, water, food and shelter are absolute necessities. Depending on the nature of the event, clean, breathable air and additional supplies may also be needed. Keep everything in a container or some other device that provides protection, portability and ease of access.

Water

For drinking and sanitation, plan on having at least one gallon of potable water per person per day for at least three days:

- Children, nursing mothers and sick people may need more water
- If you live in a warm weather climate, more water may be necessary
- Store water in tightly sealed clean plastic containers such as soft drink bottles
- In an emergency, you can use standard household chlorine bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) to treat cloudy tap water by using 1/4 teaspoon of regular household liquid bleach per gallon of water. Do not use scented or color-safe

bleaches or bleaches with added cleaners

Water Storage

Containers for Water Storage

Food-grade plastic or glass containers are suitable for storing water. Any plastic or glass container that previously held food or beverages—such as soda bottles, or water, juice, punch or milk jugs—may be used. Stainless steel containers can be used to store water that has not been or will not be treated with household bleach.

Use hot soapy water to thoroughly clean used containers and lids. Then rinse them with water and sanitize them by rinsing with a solution of four teaspoons of household bleach per gallon of water. Leave the containers wet for two minutes and then rinse again with water. Remember to remove the paper or plastic lid liners before washing the lids. It is very difficult to effectively remove all residues from many containers, so carefully clean hard-to-reach places like the handles of milk jugs. To sanitize stainless steel containers, place the container in boiling water for 10 minutes. Never use containers that previously held chemicals of any kind.

Do I Need to Treat Water?

Once you properly clean containers, fill them with potable drinking water. All public water supplies are already treated and should be free of harmful bacteria. However, as an additional precaution, it is suggested that you add 1/8 teaspoon of standard household bleach per gallon of clear tap water stored to help protect against any lingering organisms in storage containers that may have been inadvertently missed during the cleaning process.

Where to Store Water

Clearly label all drinking water containers with the current date. Store the water in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight and heat sources. Do not store it near gasoline, kerosene, pesticides or any hazardous substance.

Properly stored potable water should have an indefinite shelf life; however, it’s a good idea to use and replace the stored water every 6 to 12 months. If you have freezer space, storing some water in the freezer is a good idea. If you lose electricity, the frozen water will help keep foods in your freezer frozen until the power is restored. Make sure you leave 2 to 3 inches of space in containers because water expands as it freezes.

Emergency Sources of Water

In an emergency, if you have not previously stored water and commercial or public sources of water are unavailable, drain water from your plumbing system. Unless you are advised that the public water supply has been contaminated and is not safe, open the drain valve at the bottom of the water heater and salvage the water stored in the heater. A typical water heater holds 30 to 60 gallons of water. Discard the first few gallons if they contain rust or sediment. Let the water heater cool before draining water from the heater to avoid being scalded. Turn off the electricity or gas to the water heater to prevent the heater from operating without water. Once water has been drained into clean, sanitized containers, add 1/8 teaspoon of plain, unscented standard household bleach per gallon of water, and stir or shake the solution to mix it. Let it set 30 minutes before use.

When and How to Treat Water for Storage

In an emergency, if you do not have water that you know is safe, it’s possible to purify water for drinking. Start with the cleanest water you can find and then purify it by boiling. Times may vary from state to state, depending on altitude. If you plan to store the boiled water, pour it into clean, sanitized containers and let it cool to room temperature. Then add 1/8 teaspoon of standard household bleach per gallon of water. Stir or shake the solution to mix it. Cap the containers and store them in a cool, dry place.

Well Water

Contact your public health and environment agency for advice on treatment and storage of well water.

Food

Collect at least a three-day supply of nonperishable food.

- Select foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking and little or no water
- Pack a manual can opener and eating utensils
- Avoid salty foods, as they will make you thirsty
- Choose foods your family will eat
    - Ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits and vegetables
    - Protein or fruit bars
    - Dry cereal or granola
    - Peanut butter
    - Dried fruit
    - Nuts
    - Crackers
    - Canned juices
    - Nonperishable pasteurized milk
    - High energy foods
    - Vitamins
    - Food for infants
    - Comfort/stress foods

Supplies

- Battery-powered or hand-crank NOAA weather radiowith tone alert and extra batteries for both
- Flashlightand extra batteries
- Whistleto signal for help
- First aid kit

First Aid Kit

In any emergency, a family member or you yourself might sustain cuts, burns or other injuries. Keep basic first aid supplies on hand. Remember, many injuries are not life threatening and may not require immediate medical attention. Knowing how to treat minor injuries can make a difference in an emergency. Consider taking a first aid class, but simply having the following things can help you stop bleeding, prevent infection and assist in decontamination.

Things you should have:

- Disposable gloves
- First aid dressingsand first aid tape to stop bleeding
- Cleansing agent/soapand antimicrobial towelettes to disinfect

- Antibiotic ointmentto prevent infection
- Burn ointmentto prevent infection
- Adhesive bandagesin a variety of sizes
- Eyewash solutionto flush the eyes or as general decontaminant
- Thermometer
- Prescription medications you take every day such as insulin, heart medicine and asthma inhalers; you should periodically rotate medicines to account for expiration dates
- Prescribed medical supplies such as glucose and blood pressure monitoring equipment and supplies

Things it may be good to have:

- Cell phone and extra charged batteries
- Duct tape
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Tube of petroleum jellyor other lubricant

Nonprescription drugs:

- Aspirin or non-aspirin pain reliever
- Anti-diarrhea medication
- Antacid (for upset stomach)
- Laxative

Emergency Shelter

Many people think shelter is the same as their home. It’s important to realize that what you consider to be shelter may not always be in or near where you live. Where you live may be in the area that is at risk, and shelter can only be found by evacuation to another location.

Federal, state or local agencies will typically broadcast directions on what to do or where to go. News broadcasts on TV or radio may also give directions. Instructions could be to seek shelter in a room within your home or to evacuate to another area.

Staying where you are is often the best thing to do. You may be given instructions to move to an interior room, away from doors and windows.

There are circumstances when you need to create a barrier between yourself and potentially contaminated air outside. This is a process known as sealing the room and is a matter of survival. Use available information to assess the situation. If you see large amounts of debris in the air, or if local authorities say the air is badly contaminated, you may want to take this kind of action.

To shelter in place and seal the room:

- 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 kitunless you have reason to believe it has been contaminated
- Go to an interior room with as few windows as possible
- Since local authorities may not immediately be able to provide information on what is happening and what you should do, you should watch TV, listen to the radio or check the internet often for official news and instructions as they become available

If there is damage to your home or you are instructed to turn off your utilities:

- Locate and shut off the electric circuit(s), gas and water shut-off valves
- Keep necessary tools near gas and water shut-off valves
- Teach family members how to turn off utilities, and mark positions for ON and OFF
- If you turn the gas off, a professional must turn it back on (do not attempt to do this yourself)

Emergency Evacuation

There may be conditions under which you decide to get away, or there may be situations when you are ordered to leave. Ensure your emergency preparedness plan outlines how you will assemble your family and anticipate where you will go. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency.

In general, it is best to evacuate at right angles to the direction of the threat. For example, if a storm is approaching from the west, it is best to evacuate toward the north or south.

Create an evacuation plan:

- Plan places where your family will meet, both within and outside of your immediate neighborhood
- Keep vehicles filled with a half tank of gas at all times in case you need to evacuate
- Become familiar with alternate routes and other means of transportation out of your area
- If you don’t have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to
- Take your emergency supply kit unless you have reason to believe it has been contaminated
- Lock the door behind you
- Take your pets with you (but understand that only service animals may be permitted in public shelters) and plan how you will care for your pets in an emergency.

If time allows:

- Call or email the out-of-state contact in your family communications plan and tell them where you are going
- 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
- Check with neighbors who may need a ride

Air

There are many possibilities or combinations of contaminants that can pollute the air. Some examples are vapors, dusts, smoke and airborne organisms like mold and viruses.

Respirators are devices worn to protect against the inhalation of contaminants. A respirator can be something as simple as a handkerchief tightly fitted across the nose and mouth. Some are single use and disposable, while others allow you to customize the protection by using replaceable, disposable cartridges that filter, scrub or absorb contaminants from the air.

Unfortunately, there is no one device that can remove all the possible air

contaminants. The best filter for particulate contaminants is a P100 filter, which is oil proof and removes 99.97% of particles down to 0.3 microns. A chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) respirator adds a broad spectrum of chemical protection beyond a particulate-only-filter. While a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) contains its own air supply, it is not practical for use longer than 30 to 60 minutes.

Sources

Department of Homeland Security
Ready.gov
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Preparedness Resources

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