

Your Family Disaster Plan

Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. It 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.

Families can -- and do -- cope with disaster by preparing in advance and working together as a team. Follow the steps listed in this brochure to create your family's disaster plan. Knowing what to do is your best protection and your responsibility.

Four Steps to Safety

1. Find Out What Could Happen to You

- Contact your local Red Cross chapter or emergency management office -- be prepared to take notes:
- Ask what types of disasters are most likely to happen. Request information on how to prepare for each.
- Learn about your community's warning signals: what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them.
- Ask about animal care after disaster. Animals may not be allowed inside emergency shelters due to health regulations.
- Find out how to help elderly or disabled persons, if needed.
- Find out about the disaster plans at your workplace, your children's school or day-care center and other places where your family spends time.

2. Create A Disaster Plan

- Meet with your family and discuss why you need to prepare for disaster. Explain the dangers of fire, severe weather and earthquakes to children. Plan to share responsibilities and work together as a team.
- Discuss the types of disasters that are most likely to happen. Explain what to do in each case.
- Pick two places to meet:
 1. Right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire.
 2. Outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Everyone must know the address and phone number.
- Ask an out-of-state friend to be your "family 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 your contact's phone number.
- Discuss what to do in an evacuation. (See: Plan how to take care of your pets.)

3. Complete This Checklist

- Post emergency telephone numbers by phones (fire, police, ambulance, etc.).
- Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local Emergency Medical Services number for emergency help.
- Show each family member how and when to turn off the water, gas and electricity at the main switches.
- Check if you have adequate insurance coverage.
- Teach each family member how to use the fire extinguisher (ABC type), and show them where it's kept.
- Install smoke detectors on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms.
- Conduct a home hazard hunt.
- Stock emergency supplies and assemble a supplies Kit (See further "Your Family Disaster Supplies Kit").
- Take a Red Cross first aid and CPR class.
- Determine the best escape routes from your home. Find two ways out of each room.
- Find the safe spots in your home for each type of disaster.

4. Practice and Maintain Your Plan

- Quiz your kids every six months so. Test your smoke detectors monthly they remember what to do.
- Conduct fire and emergency evacuation.
- Replace stored water every three months and stored food every six months.
- Test and recharge your fire extinguisher(s) according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Test your smoke detectors monthly and charge the batteries at least once a year.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Working with neighbors can save lives and property. Meet with your neighbors to plan how the neighborhood could work together after a disaster until help arrives. If you're a member of a neighborhood organization, such as a home association or crime watch group, introduce disaster preparedness as a new activity. Know your neighbors' special skills (e.g., medical, technical) and consider how you could help neighbors who have special needs, such as disabled and elderly persons. Make plans for child care in case parents can't get home.

Home Hazard Hunt

During a disaster, ordinary objects in your home can cause injury or damage. Anything that can move, fall, break or cause a fire is a home hazard. For example, a hot water heater or a bookshelf can fall. Inspect your home at least once a year and fix potential hazards.

Contact your local fire department to learn about home fire hazards.

Evacuation

- Evacuate immediately if told to do so:
- 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.
- Lock your home.

- Use travel routes specified by local authorities don't use shortcuts because certain areas may be impassable or dangerous.

If You're Sure You Have Time:

- Shut off water, gas and electricity before leaving, if instructed to do so.
- Post a note telling others when you left and where you are going.
- Make arrangements for your pets.

Emergency Supplies

Keep enough supplies in your home to meet your needs for at least three 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 back-packs, duffle bags or covered trash containers. Include:

- A three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and food that won't spoil.
- One change of clothing and footwear per person, and one blanket or sleeping bag per person.
- A first-aid kit that includes your family's prescription medications.
- Emergency tools including a battery-powered radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries.
- An extra set of car keys and a credit card, cash or traveler's checks.
- Sanitation supplies.
- Special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members.
- An extra pair of glasses.
- Keep important family documents in a waterproof container. Keep a smaller kit in the trunk of your car.

Utilities

- Locate the main electric fuse box, water service main and natural gas main. Learn how and when to turn these utilities off. Teach all responsible family members. Keep necessary tools 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. If you turn the gas off, you will need a professional to turn it back on.

If Disaster Strikes

Remain calm and patient. Put your plan into action.

- Check for injuries
- Give first aid and get help for seriously injured people.
- Listen to your battery-powered radio for news and instructions
- Evacuate, if advised to do so. Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes.

Check for damage in your home ...

- Use flashlights -- do not light matches or turn on electrical switches, if you suspect damage.
- 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. (You will need a professional to turn gas back on.)
- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline and other flammable liquids immediately.

Remember to . . .

- Confine or secure your pets.
- Call your family contact -- do not use the telephone again unless it is a life-threatening emergency.
- Check on your neighbors, especially elderly or disabled persons.
- Make sure you have an adequate water supply in case service is cut off.
- Stay away from downed power lines.

Source: "Worldwide Disaster Aid and Information via the Internet www.disasterrelief.org