

## **Family/Individual Preparedness**

Emergencies such as terrorism, fire, hazardous materials spills, power outages or those caused by natural disasters such as tornadoes and winter storms can happen anywhere to anyone. Even disasters such as hurricanes and flash floods can affect most regions of the state.

Look around where you live. Are you near an interstate that could have a hazardous materials spill? Are you in a flood zone? Ask yourself what emergencies or disasters could occur in your area.

### **Find Out About Community Disaster Plans**

Find out about the disaster plans at your workplace, your children's school or daycare center, your community and other places where you or your family spend time.

### **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. A Personal Action Plan is an important part of this process because it gives you a chance to think through what you would do in a real event. The plan includes information such as your local Emergency Alert System radio or television station, evacuation assembly centers in your area, emergency phone numbers and pet care arrangements. The information should be posted on your refrigerator or in some other prominent spot as well as included in your disaster kit.

#### **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](http://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. [Read more about emergency preparedness for people with special needs.](#)

## 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.

## 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.
- 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 Told to "Shelter-in-Place" or to "Stay Put"**

- Local officials may ask residents to shelter-in-place during an 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.
- 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.

### **First Aid/CPR**

Take a Red Cross first aid and CPR class as a family.

### **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:**

- One gallon water per person per day
- Canned or packaged food
- Battery-powered radio
- First aid kit
- Flashlight
- Manual can opener
- Extra batteries
- Toiletries
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Prescription medications
- Special items for infant, elderly or disabled members of the household
- 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.

Ask one person to be responsible for replacing water every three months and food every six months. Batteries should also be replaced on a regular basis. Tape the call letters and frequency numbers of your emergency alert radio stations (EAS) on the radio and make sure everyone knows how to work the radio and put in fresh batteries. Also tape the channel number of the television emergency broadcast stations on your TV.

**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.