

## Creating a Disaster Plan

Every family should have an emergency plan in place and all family members should be familiar with the plan and know how to react in the case of an emergency. Disaster can strike at any time and we all need to be prepared.

The first step is to find out what types of disasters are most likely to occur in your area. Your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter can provide you with information on the types of disasters most common to your area as well as how to prepare for each type of disaster.

With this information in hand you are now ready to sit down with all the members of your household to discuss ways you can prepare.

- Designate a friend or relative living outside of the state to be your “family contact” after a disaster. It is often easier to make a long distance call than a local one following a disaster. Be sure everyone knows the contact person’s phone number. After a disaster, all family members should contact this person and let them know where they are. It may be a good idea for children to keep the emergency contact phone number on a piece of paper in their backpack.
- Discuss what to do in an evacuation. Draw a floor plan of your home and determine the best escape routes from your home. Mark two ways out of each room. Also look for the safe spots in your home.
- Select two emergency meeting locations -- one right outside of your home and one outside of your neighborhood in case you can’t return home.
- Plan how to take care of your pets in case of an evacuation. Pets are not allowed in public emergency shelters for health and safety reasons.
- Prepare an emergency supply kit. You should have enough supplies to meet the needs of your household for at least three days. These items should be stored in sturdy, easy-to-carry containers such as backpacks, duffle bags or covered trash containers. Your emergency supplies kit should contain:
  - A 3-day supply of water (1 gallon per person per day) and food that won’t spoil.
  - Water purifying tablets or household bleach.
  - Non-breakable eating and drinking utensils. Bottle and can openers.
  - Heating source, such as a camp stove or canned heat stove, and extra fuel.
  - One change of clothing and footwear per person, and one blanket or sleeping bag per person. Protective clothing (boots, gloves, rain gear) may also be necessary.
  - A first aid kit that includes your family’s prescription medications and a first aid book.
  - 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. (A garbage can or bucket with a tight-fitting lid can function as an emergency toilet. Use plastic garbage bags to line toilet. After each use, pour or sprinkle a small amount of regular household disinfectant, such as chlorine bleach, into the container to reduce odors and germs)
- Special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members.
- An extra pair of glasses.
- ◆ Prepare an emergency supply kit for your car.
- ◆ Teach all responsible household members how to turn the utilities off (gas, electric, and water). But remember, do NOT turn off the utilities unless 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.)
- ◆ Post emergency telephone number by telephones. Teach children how to call 911 in case of an emergency. Be sure children know how to call your out-of-state emergency contact person.
- ◆ Take a Red Cross first aid and/or CPR class.

It is also a good idea to talk to employers and school officials about their emergency response plans. Find out about your community's flood evacuation routes and where to find high ground.

Having a disaster plan in place can save you a lot of grief when a disaster strikes. Remember to review your plan at least twice a year. Quiz your kids to make sure they remember what to do. One way to test your children's memory of correct emergency actions is to conduct an emergency evacuation drill. Take the time to discuss how the drill went, what worked and what didn't. Make any necessary corrections to your disaster plan and then practice it again until everyone is comfortable with the plan.