

PREPARING YOUR FAMILY FOR EMERGENCIES

Extension Miscellaneous 8736 • Revised January 2002

Floods. Earthquakes. Winter storms. Fire. Hazardous spills. Public safety issues. Disasters can strike quickly and without warning. They 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 for an indefinite period? 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. It's in your best interest to be self-sufficient for up to 3 days. This publication will help you create your family disaster plan. Knowing your responsibility and what to do is your best protection during an emergency.

Learn Local Plans

Check your local phone book and contact your state or local emergency management offices or local American Red Cross chapter. Ask questions and take notes. Important questions to ask include:

- What types of disasters are most likely to happen in this area? Request information on how to prepare for each.
- What are our community's warning signals? Learn what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them.
- How best can we help elderly or disabled persons (if needed)?

- What about animal care? In most communities, animals are not allowed inside emergency shelters because of health regulations. Learn the options in your community.

- What are the disaster plans at my workplace, our children's school or day care center, and other places where we spend time?

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 to work together.

- Discuss the types of disasters that are most likely to happen. Explain what to do in each case.

- Pick two places to meet. First, right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, such as a fire. Second, a place outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Everyone must know the address and phone number of that location.

- Ask an out-of-state friend to be your "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance than to call locally. 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.

- Plan how to take care of your pets.

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION SERVICE

Compiled from American Red Cross and Oregon Department of Administrative Services by Evelyn Engel Liss, Extension publishing specialist, Oregon State University.

FOR PREPARING YOUR FAMILY EMERGENCIES

Put Your Plan into Action

- Post emergency telephone numbers (fire, police, ambulance, etc.) by every phone.
- Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local emergency medical services number for emergency help.
- Show all responsible family members how and when to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at the main switches. Keep necessary tools near gas and water shut-off valves.
- Check whether you have adequate insurance coverage.
- Purchase a basic fire extinguisher(s). Check with your local fire department to see if it provides training on how to use the extinguisher. It's important that each family member knows how to use the extinguisher and where it is stored.
- Install smoke detectors on each level of your home especially near bedrooms.
- Identify and fix potential hazards (for example, anything that can move, fall, break, or cause a fire—such as a water heater or bookshelf). Inspect your home for hazards at least once a year.
- Stock emergency food and water supplies.
- Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit; consider making a smaller kit for each car.
- Take a CPR and first-aid class.
- Determine the best escape routes from your home. Each family member should know two ways out of each room.
- Identify the safe places in your home for each type of disaster.

Maintain Your Plan

- Quiz everyone in your household every 6 months so they remember what to do.
- Conduct family fire and emergency evacuation drills.
- Replace stored water and food every 6 months.
- Test and recharge your fire extinguisher(s) according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Test your smoke detectors monthly and change the batteries at least once each year. A

good time to do this is when switching from daylight savings to standard time (or vice versa).

- Work with your neighbors, homeowner association, or a crime watch group to introduce disaster preparedness. Learn if there are medical or technical experts in your neighborhood. Determine how best to help those with special needs, such as disabled and elderly persons. Make plans for childcare in case parents can't get home.

In Case of Evacuation

- Have a battery-powered radio so you can listen 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 have time (rely on instructions from local officials):
 - Shut off water, gas, and electricity before leaving.
 - 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 3 days. There are six basics you should stock for your home—water, food, first-aid supplies, clothing and bedding, tools and emergency supplies, and special items. Don't forget to include food and water for your pets.

Consider keeping vehicle fuel tanks full so you can evacuate by car if instructed. Also keep a credit card or some cash on hand, and have at least one plug-in phone or a cellular phone (cordless phones often don't work without electricity).

Keep the items you would most likely need during an evacuation in an easy-to-carry container such as a backpack, duffel bag, or covered trash container:

- A 3-day supply of water (1 gallon per person per day). Store water in plastic containers such as soft drink bottles.

- A 3-day supply of food that won't spoil. Select foods that require no refrigeration, preparation, or cooking, little or no water and that are compact and lightweight (such as ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits, and vegetables).
- A change of clothing, sturdy footwear, and rain gear for each person.
- One blanket or sleeping bag per person.
- 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.
- Toilet paper, soap, liquid detergent, and personal hygiene items.
- Special items for infant, elderly, or disabled family members.
- An extra pair of glasses for those requiring eye glasses.
- First-aid kit.

Suggested First-Aid Kit

- One-week supply of prescription medications taken regularly
- Sterile adhesive bandages in assorted sizes
- Assorted sizes of safety pins
- Cleansing agent/soap
- Latex gloves (2 pair)
- Sunscreen
- Sterile gauze pads (4-6 pads each in 2- and 4-inch widths)
- Triangular bandages (3)
- Sterile roller bandages (3 rolls each, 2- and 3-inch widths)
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Needle
- Moistened towelettes
- Antiseptic
- Thermometer
- Tongue blades (2)
- Tube of petroleum jelly or other lubricant

Assemble Important Documents

It's important to have easy access to certain family documents after a disaster. You may want to store important family documents in a portable, waterproof container as part of your Disaster Supplies Kit. Documents to consider include:

- Wills, insurance policies, contracts, deeds, stocks, bonds.
- Passports, Social Security cards, immunization records.
- Bank account numbers.
- Credit card account numbers and company names.

You also may want to include an inventory of valuable household goods, important phone numbers, and family records such as birth, marriage, and death certificates.

When a Disaster Occurs

1. Remember to remain calm and patient.
2. Put your family's plan into action.
3. Give first aid and get help for seriously injured people.
4. Listen to your battery-powered radio for news and instructions.
5. Evacuate, if advised to do so.

Check for damage in your home:

1. Use flashlights; do not light matches or turn on electrical switches.
2. 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.
3. Shut off any damaged utilities (you will need a professional to turn on the gas).
4. Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline, and flammable liquids immediately.
5. Confine or secure your pets.

Your last steps:

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

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For More Information

American Red Cross. The alphabetical listing in local phone books can point you to the local chapter of the American Red Cross. The agency's Web site includes information and materials in English and Spanish (<http://www.redcross.org/>).

Emergency Management. To reach your county's emergency management unit, go to "County Government" in the front of your local phone book. Listings vary by county (look for it under Sheriff or Health departments, Emergency Management services, Civil Defense, Public Works, or related units).

Extension Service. To check with your local county office of the OSU Extension Service, go "County Government" in your phone book, or visit the Oregon State University Extension Web site (<http://osu.orst.edu/extension/>).

Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN). This site provides a listing of resources developed in other states about floods; drought; snow, ice, and wind damage; animal emergencies; and general disaster (<http://www.agctr.lsu.edu/eden>, then "Extension on-line" and "Other on-line sources").

Emergency Animal Rescue Service (EARS).

This site provides disaster preparedness tips for animal owners and links to emergency shopping lists for owners of dogs, cats, birds, horses, reptiles, and amphibians (<http://www.uan.org/ears/index.html>).

Federal Emergency Management Agency

(FEMA). The online library offers publications and videos in English and Spanish. It includes materials specifically developed for children (<http://www.fema.gov>).

Oregon Emergency Management (OEM).

Affiliated with the Oregon State Police, this Web site links to earthquake and tsunami information, describes Oregon's warning system, lists disaster recovery resources, answers questions about chemical storage sites, and offers other emergency-related information (http://www.osp.state.or.us/oem/oem_home.htm).

Social Security Online. The official site of the Social Security Administration, this site links to 240 publications in 21 languages and provides information on survivor benefits and programs (<http://www.ssa.gov/>).

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Published April 1999, revised January 2002.