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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HOME BUILDERS

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NATURAL DISASTER PREPARATIONS

[Normal View](#)

We often forget what a real emergency is until we are reminded by a disaster such as a hurricane, flood or fire. Emergencies and disasters can occur anytime, anywhere. Some are primarily seasonal and allow for certain preparations; others occur swiftly and without warning.

Planning ahead and making provision for your family's needs can make a big difference in your ability to cope with emergencies. Communications, transportation, utilities and other essential services could be disrupted by disasters, forcing you to rely initially on your own resources for food, water, first aid, transportation, and shelter.

Following is general information from FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, for personal and family emergency preparedness for a variety of natural and man-made disasters and emergencies.

- [Be Informed](#)
- [Develop a Family Plan](#)
- [Stockpile Food and Supplies](#)
- [Be Prepared to Evacuate](#)
- [After the Emergency](#)

Combining these tips, with specific instructions at the time of the disaster will help you be better prepared for any problems.

Be Informed

Your key to surviving any emergency is to be prepared for it. You can lessen an emergency's impact by knowing what to do before, during, and after one occurs. Although our community could be vulnerable to a variety of hazards, there are certain basic actions you can take now to help you in any emergency.

- Learn to recognize the warning signals. Make sure you know what the signals are, what they mean, how they will be used, and what you should do when you hear them.
- Listen to local radio and television stations for forecasts and emergency instructions. Post the dial/channel listings of these stations for easy access.
- Keep phone lines open to notify local authorities of fires, flash floods, tornado sightings, injuries or damage. Do not use the telephone to obtain emergency information.
- Learn your children's school and/or day care center emergency plans.
- Learn your worksite's emergency plans.
- Post all emergency plans/phone numbers in a prominent place.
- Learn your community's evacuation routes, as some hazards may force you to leave your home. This is especially important for those in low-lying areas where flood waters could make roads impassable.
- Learn first aid. Professional medical assistance may not be immediately available.

Develop a Family Plan

Conduct family meetings and discuss hazards that may affect our area. Talk about what each family member should do in each of these emergencies. Put the plan in writing and see that everyone in the family has a copy. Parents should carefully explain safety rules to their children.

- Teach family members about smoke detectors and how to maintain them. Select a predesignated place to meet outside if a sudden emergency like a fire forces you out of the house. Conduct evacuation drills periodically.
- Go from room to room and imagine what would happen to furniture, appliances, fixtures, and objects during disasters. Identify "safe" areas in each room such as in doorways or under sturdy tables in earthquakes, or interior bathrooms or closets on the lowest floor for tornadoes. Identify all potential exits for each room. Check for frayed electrical cords or overloaded circuits. Don't keep rags or paper goods near electrical equipment or flammable materials.
- Teach responsible family members how to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at main switches.
- Decide on an alternate location at which to meet if an emergency happens while your family is away from the home and they cannot return.
- Select someone outside your immediate area to act as a central point of contact for your relatives and friends who may try to call you following a disaster, as you may not have telephone service. As soon as some means of communication becomes available, get word of your situation to the contact person.

Stockpile Food and Supplies

An emergency could isolate you in your home for several days. Make sure you have on hand at least a five-day supply of food and water for each family member. Store water in sealed, unbreakable containers.

Since refrigeration and cooking facilities may not be available, foods should be non-perishable goods such as canned or sealed-package items. Rotate foods into your regular pantry supplies and replace stored water every few months.

Other items you may want to keep stocked for emergency use:

- Special medicines or foods required by family members -- such as insulin, prescription medicines, baby food, or food required for special or limited diets.
- Battery-powered radio and flashlight and extra batteries for each.
- A first aid kit and manual. Your local fire department, rescue squad, or local American Red Cross chapter can offer advice about items you should include in your kit.
- Fire-fighting equipment to suppress small fires, including an all-purpose, 5-lb. fire extinguisher (rated A-B-C).
- Fuel heating device. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and make sure there is adequate ventilation to avoid build-up of hazardous fumes.

Be Prepared to Evacuate

Keep a listing of family members' prescribed medications, giving generic names and prescribed dosage. Also list the name and telephone number of your doctor. For those who rely on medical devices such as a pacemaker, the style, serial number, and other pertinent information should be carried with you at all times.

- Keep vital family records, such as mortgage papers, medical records, insurance policies, birth certificates, marriage licenses, wills, stock and bond certificates, tax records, and other irreplaceable items in one central location where they can easily be transported if you must leave the area quickly. Keep all papers in a water- and fire-proof container.
- Since you may be advised to evacuate your home or workplace temporarily:
 - Keep your car fueled.
 - Listen to the radio or television for local emergency instructions. Follow the instructions given. If you are advised to evacuate, do so promptly.
 - Shut off your water, gas, or electricity as directed in an emergency.
 - Use travel routes that are specified or recommended rather than trying to find short-cuts of your own. This is especially important during flooding when certain low-lying routes may become impassable.

- Once in a safer area, stay there until authorities tell you it is safe to return home.

After the Emergency

Listen to local radio or television stations for continuing advisories on ways to help recover from the emergency. Here is more advice to follow after an emergency:

- Use extreme caution when entering buildings that may have been damaged by the disaster. Buildings can collapse without warning.
- Check for leaking gas pipes in your home. Do this by Smell Only -- don't use matches or candles. If you smell gas 1) immediately open windows and doors; 2) turn off the main gas valve; 3) leave the house; 4) go to another location and notify the gas company and/or fire department. Don't re-enter the house until you are told it is safe to do so.
- If any of your electrical appliances are wet, first turn off the main power switch in your house, then unplug the wet appliances, dry them out, and check for visible damage. If none, reconnect the appliances and turn on the main power switch. CAUTION --Don't do any of these things while you are wet or standing in water. If fuses blow when power is restored, turn off the main power switch again and then inspect for short circuits in your home wiring, appliances, and equipment. Call the utility company for help.
- Use only battery-powered lanterns or flashlights to examine your home for damage, as flammables may be inside.
- Check food and water supplies before using them. Foods that require refrigeration may be spoiled if electric power has been off for some time. Don't eat fresh food that has come in contact with flood water. Be sure to follow the broadcasted instructions concerning the use of food and water supplies.
- Check to see that sewage lines are intact before flushing toilets.
- Report damaged water, sewage, and gas lines to the proper authorities.
- If you must use your car, drive carefully along streets and avoid debris. Avoid loose, dangling, or broken wires, and report them to the fire department or utility company.
- Don't visit the disaster area, as you may hamper rescue efforts.
- Notify your insurance agent or broker if your property was damaged.