

## ***Disaster Preparedness -- Do Something About It!***

### **PLANNING FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY**

Disasters can happen anytime and anywhere, so it is important to be prepared before disaster strikes. Disasters can be natural or human-made. Natural disasters may come in the form of hurricanes, windstorms, snow storms, earthquakes or tornadoes. Some of these occur at specific times of year, while others can strike at any time. In today's world, disasters may also take the form of human-made events, such as a chemical or biological attack, which might require your family members to be confined for a period of time in their homes, schools or offices. The private individual can do a lot to prevent such events from turning into major catastrophes by assuming a heightened state of alert, especially at those times of year when natural disasters are most likely. By taking very simple precautions and planning for yourself and your family, you will be better prepared in case a disaster strikes. You will therefore be more able to cope during the emergency until help arrives.

### **HOW TO PREPARE A FAMILY DISASTER RESPONSE PLAN**

- Know what disasters are most likely to affect your community and how to prepare for each one.
- Know what form a warning will take (e.g. radio message, siren).
- Discuss all relevant information with your family.
- Plan how your family will stay in contact in case you get separated.
- Pick a meeting place in case your home cannot be reached.
- Arrange with an out-of-state friend or family member to act as a telephone contact point, in case local phone links are disrupted.
- Post emergency numbers next to all telephones.
- Know how to disconnect/switch off all utilities.
- Install smoke detectors and test them on a regular basis to ensure that they are working properly.
- Take a first aid course.
- Make plans for anyone in your family with special needs such as infants, seniors or people with disabilities.
- Make plans for your pets.
- Women in late months of pregnancy during the hurricane season should talk with their physicians about avoiding possible premature birth because of low barometric pressure in a storm.
- Prepare a disaster supply kit and keep it up-to-date by changing batteries regularly and rotating your food and water supplies. (See details below.)

### **STEPS TO TAKE IF THERE IS AN IMPENDING DISASTER**

- Be prepared to evacuate very soon after the order is given. The longer you wait, the more likely you are to get caught in heavy traffic. Your family should not return to the area until the announcement is given that it is safe to do so.
- Keep your car's gas tank full.
- Secure outdoor furniture and other items that could be lifted by wind.
- Take photos of your property and belongings. You can use these later for insurance purposes.
- Board all windows and reinforce doors.
- Have sufficient cash on hand to live for one-two weeks. Credit cards and checks may not be accepted in the aftermath of a disaster.
- When evacuating your home, turn off gas and electricity.
- If you leave your pets at home, put plenty of extra food and water out for them. Arrange your heavy furniture to give them a safer place to hide if the roof or other structure collapses.
- If you will remain at home, sterilize the bathtub with bleach, rinse it thoroughly and fill it with water.

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### **HAVE A FAMILY DISASTER SUPPLIES KIT**

#### **Checklist of Supplies You Will Need**

(It is a good idea to have sufficient supplies for at least 72 hours.)

- **Water:** Store water in plastic containers, 1 gallon of water per person for each day, allowing for up to 3 days. Remember to have extra water on hand for pets.
- **Food:** Store non-perishable food and ready-to-eat canned meats and vegetables, juices, soups, milk, sugar, vitamins, salt and pepper. Include high energy foods (e.g., peanut butter, jelly, crackers, granola bars, trail mix, nuts and dry cereals). Add comfort foods (candy, cookies, instant coffee and tea). Be sure to include foods for anyone who may be on a special diet (e.g. diabetics, seniors and infants). Remember food for pets.
- **First-aid kit:** Build a kit with bandages, adhesive tape, scissors, tweezers, needles, pins, antiseptic, moist towelettes, tongue depressors, petroleum jelly, a thermometer, latex gloves, cleaning agents and sunscreen. Also include all prescription and non-prescription medicine, aspirin and non-aspirin pain relievers, anti-diarrhea medicine, an antacid, a laxative and something to be used for poison control (e.g., syrup of ipecac or activated charcoal). Remember special needs such as supplies for dentures, contact lenses and eyeglasses. Include a first-aid book.
- **Tools and supplies:** Include a battery-operated radio and extra batteries, flashlight, tape, needles and thread, pliers, thick plastic sheeting, nails, boards, duct tape, paper and pencil, matches (in waterproof container), can opener, aluminum foil, plastic storage containers, disposable eating utensils, emergency cooking equipment (canned heat, etc.), fire extinguisher, garbage bags, signal flare, whistle, tire repair kit, disinfectant and chlorine bleach. Personal hygiene products, toilet paper, diapers and feminine supplies. Clothing, sturdy shoes, rain gear, towels, bedding or sleeping bags, hats, work gloves and sunglasses. Include a map of your intended destination for evacuation. It is helpful to include supplies for entertainment, such as games and books. Have a camera on hand (or buy a disposable one) to take photos of your property for insurance purposes.
- **Important family documents should be kept in a waterproof, portable container:** This includes wills, insurance policies, an inventory of valuable household goods, important telephone numbers, deeds, stocks, contracts, passports, social security cards, immunization records, bank account details and credit card information, as well as other family records such as birth, marriage and death certificates.

**REMEMBER: Maintain your disaster supplies kit.  
Rotate food and water and check batteries regularly.  
Store your kit in a convenient place and in an easy-to-carry bag.**

**Please check on friends or neighbors who might not be able to go out to get supplies.**

**If food, water or other supplies are needed in the aftermath of the disaster, check with local radio, TV and newspapers for information on location and timing of supply distribution.**

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### **ONGOING MEASURES TO HELP WITH PREPAREDNESS**

- Maintain your house in good repair. Check the soundness of roof supports. Repair or replace any cracked or weakened boards. Consider strengthening joints with metal clips. Check roof gables to ensure they are securely fastened to the roof supports. Replace any missing or loose shingles.
- Remove dead branches from trees, and keep shrubs trimmed.
- Keep materials on hand for boarding windows and reinforcing doors.
- Save your plastic milk jugs, clean them and store at least 3 per family member.
- Keep your car in reliable working condition. DO NOT store extra cans of gas in your home or auto.
- Review your insurance coverage and check to make sure you are covered for wind, flood, water and other disaster-related hazards.
- Take photos of your property and belongings.
- Make sure all family members keep their immunizations current (tetanus, typhoid and paratyphoid). Also, keep your pets up-to-date with shots.

**THE MORE YOU PLAN AND PREPARE, THE MORE EFFECTIVE YOUR RESPONSE WILL BE IF A DISASTER STRIKES.**