

Emergency Preparedness for Individuals and Families

Being prepared for emergencies is not just a job for the professionals, such as law enforcement, firefighters, and others. All individuals and families should begin a process of learning about potential threats, so they are better prepared to react.

While there is no way to predict what will happen, or what your personal circumstances will be, there are simple things you can do now to prepare yourself and your family. The following are three key steps, recommended by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), that individuals and families should take to be properly prepared for unexpected emergencies:

Assemble an Emergency Kit

All of us should be able to survive comfortably on our own for at least a three-day period. That is the amount of time you may need to remain in your home until the danger from a biological, chemical, or radiological attack has passed. You will need:

- A change of clothes.
- Sleeping bags.
- Food and water. A gallon of water per person per day should be enough. Canned and dried foods are easy to store and prepare.

DHS offers advice to start by gathering basic emergency supplies - a flashlight, a battery-powered radio, extra batteries, a first-aid kit, prescription medicines, and toilet articles. Duct tape and heavy-duty plastic garbage bags can be used to seal windows and doors. Make sure all household members know where the kit is kept. You should also consider bringing a disaster supply kit to work or leave one in your car. Lastly, having some cash, in small bills on hand for emergency purchases is advisable, since credit card processing may be inhibited during emergencies.

Make a Family Communication Plan

Your family may not be together at home when an emergency occurs. Make sure everyone knows contact numbers and how to get in touch. Consider the following:

- It may be wise to have everyone call an out-of-state friend or relative.
- Keep a list of emergency numbers near the phone.
- Select a "safe-room" where everyone can gather. The best choice is an interior room aboveground with few windows and doors.

Learn More about Readiness

Planning helps - if your family knows what to expect, they will be calmer in the aftermath of an emergency. For example, you should find out where to turn for instructions, such as local broadcasting networks. Local authorities will broadcast information as quickly as possible concerning the nature of the emergency and what you should do next. Be sure to keep listening for updates. There are other ways to plan ahead:

- Take a first aid and CPR class so that you can provide emergency medical help.
- Review your insurance policies to reduce the economic impact of a potential disaster.
- Remember to arrange for elderly family members and neighbors or those with special needs.
- Try to arrange for pets not allowed in public shelters.

More emergency preparedness guidance is available from DHS on the website, *Ready.gov* (www.ready.gov/). The website provides information on different types of emergencies and preparing for them.