

Before An Emergency Strikes

An emergency can occur without warning, leaving little or no time for you and your family to plan what to do next. It is necessary for you to learn about the things you can do e prepared-before an emergency occurs. Two actions that will help you do this are to develop an emergency plan, and prepare an Emergency Go Kit.



Create an Emergency Plan

Before creating your household emergency plan, use this guide to learn about the types of emergencies that may affect your community, how you'll be notified of an event, and plans that may already be in place to deal with these events. In the District, we use the four-part Alert DC citizen notification system (see page 3). It is important that you listen to instructions. Emergencies may strike when your family members are away from home, so find out about plans at your workplace, school, or anywhere else you and your family spends time. After creating a household emergency plan you should take the time to review it with your family every six months. Steps to take in creating a household emergency plan include:

1. Meet with household members and discuss the dangers of possible emergency events, including fire, severe weather, hazardous spills, and terrorism.
2. Discuss how you and your family will respond to each possible emergency.
3. Discuss what to do in case of power outages or personal injuries.
4. Draw a floor plan of your home. Mark two escape routes from each room.
5. Teach adults how to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at main switches. **If for any reason you do turn off natural gas service to your home, call the gas company to restore service. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO RESTORE GAS SERVICE YOURSELF.***
6. Post emergency contact numbers near all telephones, pre-program emergency numbers into phones with auto dial capabilities.
7. Sign up your family for Text Alerts to receive emergency text messages, where available.
8. Teach children how and when to dial 9-1-1 to get emergency assistance.
9. Teach children how to make long-distance telephone calls.
10. Pick a friend or relative that all family members will call if separated (it is often easier to call out-of-state during an emergency than within the affected area).
11. Instruct household members to turn on the radio and tune to the emergency alert radio stations.

Things to think about...

If any members of your household have disabilities or are elderly, find out what services may be available to aid in their care or evacuation in the event of an emergency.

12. Pick two meeting places:
 - A place near your home.
 - A place outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home after an emergency.
13. Take a Basic First Aid and CPR Class. Contact American Red Cross for more information.
14. Keep family records in a water- and fireproof safe. Inexpensive models can be purchased at most hardware stores.



Prepare an Emergency Go Kit

1. Often during an emergency, electricity, water, heat, air conditioning, or telephone service may not work. Preparing an Emergency Go Kit ahead of time can save precious time in the event you must evacuate or go without electricity, heat, or water for an extended period of time. You can gather water, food, first-aid supplies, clothing, bedding, tools, and other essential items to store at any time. You should consider including the following items in an Emergency Go Kit:
2. At least a 3-day supply of water (1 gallon per person per day). Store water in sealed, unbreakable containers. Replace every 6 months.
3. A 3- to 5-day supply of non-perishable packaged or canned food and a non-electric can opener.
4. Rain gear, sturdy shoes, and a change of clothing. Blankets, bedding, or sleeping bags. A first aid kit and prescription medications (be sure to check the expiration dates).
5. An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses and solution (be sure to check the expiration dates).
6. A list of family physicians, important medical information, and the style and serial number of medical devices such as pacemakers.
7. Special items for infants, the elderly, or family members with disabilities. A battery-powered radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries.
8. Identification, credit cards, cash, and photocopies of important family documents including home insurance information.
9. An extra set of car and house keys.
10. Tools such as screwdrivers, cutters, and scissors; duct tape; waterproof matches; a fire compass; garbage bags; and regular household bleach.

If You Have Pets



Create a survival kit for your pet. This should include:

- Identification collar and rabies tag.
- Carrier or cage and leash.
- Any medications (be sure to check expiration dates).
- Newspapers and plastic trash bags for handling waste.
- At least a two-week supply of food, water, and food bowls.
- Veterinary records (most animal shelters do not allow pets without proof of vaccination).

In the event of an evacuation, you must take your pet with you. Make arrangements for pets in advance of an emergency.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Working with neighbors in an emergency can save lives and property. Meet with your community members to plan how you could work together until help arrives. If you are a member of a neighborhood organization, such as a home association or crime watch group, participate in emergency preparedness activities and planning for your community. Know your neighbors' special skills and consider how you could help those with special needs, such as people with disabilities and elderly persons.



After An Emergency Strikes

During and after an emergency, it is important to stay calm. Even after an event, there may still be many dangers. What seems like a safe distance or location may not be. Stay tuned to your local emergency station and follow the advice of trained professionals. Unless told to evacuate, avoid roads to allow emergency vehicles access. What you do next can save your life and the lives of others. Here are some recommendations:

If Your Power Goes Out

1. Remain calm, and assist family members or neighbors who may be vulnerable if exposed to extreme heat or cold.
2. Locate a flashlight with batteries to use until power comes back on. Do not use candles—this can cause a fire.
3. Turn off sensitive electric equipment such as computers, VCRs, and televisions.

4. Turn off major electric appliances that were on when the power went off. This will help to prevent power surges when electricity is restored.
5. Keep your refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep cold in and heat out.
6. Do not use the stove to heat your home-this can cause a fire or fatal gas leak.
7. Use extreme caution when driving. If traffic signals are out, treat each signal as a stop sign – come to a complete stop at every intersection and look before you proceed.
8. Do not call 9-1-1 to ask about power outage. Listen to the news radio stations for updates.

Business Preparedness

Businesses are just as vulnerable to the effects of emergencies as ordinary citizens. There are basic steps that a business should take to prepare for an emergency. Some of these steps include:

- Prepare backups and store offsite all computer records (i.e. payroll, inventory records, etc.).
- Have an evacuation plan in place to evacuate staff and customers, and test this plan regularly.
- Maintain sufficient insurance coverage for your business.
- Identify critical business functions that absolutely must continue (i.e. shipping, inventory control, payroll) and come up with processes to ensure these will carry on.

Technological Hazards Emergencies

If you are notified or become aware of a technological hazards emergency such as a chemical, biological, or radiological emergency as well as a fire or explosion, *do not panic*. The best defense from any of these emergencies is education and awareness. In the unlikely event that there is a technological emergency, knowing how to respond will greatly reduce panic and fear. *If you need to get out of the surrounding area or are directed to evacuate, do so immediately and:*



1. Take your Emergency Go Kit.
2. Lock your home.
3. Travel on routes specified by local authorities.
4. Travel with car windows up and air vents, air conditioner, and heater turned off.
5. Head up-wind of the incident.

If you are sure you have time:

- Close and lock windows and doors and close all vents and fireplace dampers.
- Turn off all fans and heat or air conditioning.
- 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.

If you are instructed to stay inside and not to evacuate:



- Close and lock windows and doors.
- Turn off ventilation systems, water, and gas.
- Seal gaps under doorways and windows with duct tape.
- If you suspect chemical or biological agents have entered your house, move to a safe room in the interior of the house on a higher floor if possible. Many harmful agents that could enter a house will fall and accumulate at lower levels.
- If harmful vapors do enter the house, covering your nose and mouth with a cloth can provide minimal breathing protection.
- Stay inside until authorities say it is safe.

Natural Hazards Emergencies

This area is vulnerable to a variety of types of severe weather including thunderstorms, hurricanes, flash floods, snow storms, and tornadoes. Because of this, it is important for you to understand the difference between a watch and a warning for severe weather. A *severe weather watch* means that severe weather may develop. A *severe weather warning* means a storm has developed and is on its way-take cover immediately!

The safest place to ride out *any storm* is inside of a secure building or well built home. Even in a well built apartment building you should:

- Listen to weather updates and stay informed.
- Be ready to evacuate if necessary
- Keep away from windows and doors.
- Have your Emergency Go Kit handy.

Lightning is produced in all thunderstorms. In general, if you are close enough to a storm to hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck. Move inside as quickly as possible.



If caught outside:

- Try to get inside a building as quickly as possible.
- If a building is not available, move into a car with windows rolled up, if possible.
- In an open area or field, move to a low area such as a ravine or valley.
- In a group of people, spread out, keeping several yards apart from each other.

Tornadoes are dangerous because of their high winds and ability to lift and move heavy objects. If you receive a tornado warning, seek shelter immediately.

If you are in your car:

- STOP! Get out and lie flat face down in a low area.
- Cover your head and wait for the tornado to pass.

For additional information on severe weather conditions and precautions to take, visit the National Weather Service website at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov>.

If you are at home:

- Go to the basement or storm shelter, or rooms near the center of the house.

If you are in a high-rise or other public building:

- Move to the interior, preferably a stairwell or hallway.

Flash Flooding can be very dangerous because of strong, swift currents.

- Move immediately and quickly to higher ground. The force of 6 inches of swiftly moving water can knock people off their feet!
- If flood waters rise around your car, get out and move to higher ground immediately. Cars can be easily swept away in just 2 feet of moving water!



If You Need Clean Water

Flooding can cause contamination of water supplies. Bad water can contain microorganisms that cause diseases such as dysentery, typhoid, and hepatitis. If you think your water may be contaminated, you should purify it before using it. This includes water used for drinking, cooking, cleaning dishes, or bathing. The best way to purify water is to boil it.



Boiling is considered the safest method of purifying water. Bring water to a boil for 3-5 minutes, and then allow it to cool before drinking.

Emergency Food Supplies

It is possible for a healthy person to survive on half of their usual food intake for an extended period without any food for many days. It is also important to keep in mind that you do not have to go out and buy unfamiliar foods to prepare an emergency food supply. Here are some helpful tips:

Use canned foods, dry mixes and other staples you use everyday.

Foods that require no refrigeration, preparation, or cooking are best.

Make sure you have a manual can opener and disposable utensils in your emergency food supply.

Individuals with special diets and allergies will need to be considered as well as toddlers and elderly.

Don't forget nonperishable food for your pets.

Recovering from an Emergency

Recovery continues even after you return home, as you and your family face the emotional and psychological effects of the event. Reactions vary from person to person, but may include:



- Restless sleep or nightmares.
- Anger or wanting revenge.
- Numbness or lack of emotion.
- Needing to keep active, restlessness.
- Needing to talk about your experiences.
- Loss of appetite.
- Weight loss or gain.
- Headaches.
- Mood swings.

Crisis grief, and stress counseling is available for you or a family member suffering persistent emotional or psychological problems related to an emergency. To access counseling services call your local Department of Mental Health.

All of the above are normal reactions to stressful events, and it is important to let people react their own way. It may be helpful to:

- Talk with your family and friends about what happened and how you feel about it, and try to evaluate and plan for the chance it could happen again.
- Volunteer at a local shelter, blood bank, or food pantry to assist emergency victims.

- Spend time doing things other than watching or listening to news of the disaster.
- Consult your minister or other religious leader or spiritual advisor.

In particular, children may need reassurance and extra attention. It is best to encourage them to share their feelings, even if you must listen to their stories repeatedly-this is a common way for children to grasp what they've experienced. You may also want to share your feelings about the event with them.