

Family Preparedness

Disasters can strike at any time. Is your family prepared?

We cannot control the weather or prevent disasters from happening, but there are steps you and your family can take to help minimize risks from known hazards. Planning now can help save lives later. Here's what you and your family can do:

1. Get informed.

Texas is prone to disasters of all kinds – from severe weather events to industrial accidents. Terrorism also is a threat. Find out what hazards are common where you live. Is your community susceptible to wildfire, drought, flooding, tornadoes, ice storms or hurricanes? What about hazardous materials incidents or other types of accidents?

When severe weather threatens, tune in to local radio, television or get information online from the National Weather Service about NOAA Weather Radio. Learn the difference between a watch and a warning. A watch means that dangerous weather is possible. A warning means it's about to happen; seek shelter now.

2. Make a family disaster plan.

All families are different, so make a plan that fits your family. Each member needs to understand the plan and know which tasks he or she will be asked to do. Here are some things to consider:

- **Escape routes:**

You need to know escape routes from each room in your house as well as from your neighborhood.

To establish escape routes from your home, draw up a floor plan. Each room should have two exits. Select a meeting site where everyone will gather after they've left the house. Be sure to conduct a practice drill with all members of the household.

To establish escape routes from the neighborhood, draw a map that shows all the streets and their names so that when authorities provide evacuation instructions, you will know where to go.

- **Family communication**

It's important to plan how family members will contact one another if they are separated during an emergency. Click this link for a page of emergency contact cards. Complete a card for each family member listing the phone number of an out-of-town contact and other important numbers. Everyone should keep a card in a wallet, purse or backpack.

Communication with emergency personnel: If you are injured because of an accident or disaster, you may be unable to speak with emergency medical technicians. In these cases, paramedics and other emergency response personnel often turn to a victim's cell phone for clues to his or her identity and emergency contact.

You can make their job much easier by adding an entry in the contacts list of your cell phone: ICE.

ICE stands for "In Case of Emergency." Add an entry, label it ICE, and enter the name and phone number of the person the emergency services should call on your behalf. Adding this entry takes only a few moments, but it can save time for the emergency personnel who can contact your loved ones quickly. Paramedics know what ICE means, and they look for it immediately.

- ***Utility shut-off and safety:***

For some types of disasters, you may need to disconnect utility services to your home. Natural gas leaks are the number one cause of fires after a disaster.

Be sure that responsible family members can turn off the gas, electricity and water supplies. Contact your local utility company for proper shut-off procedures and to find the location of shut-off valves and switches.

CAUTION!: Never turn gas service back on by yourself. Service should be restored only by a trained professional.

- ***Insurance and vital records:***

Make photocopies of your important documents and secure them in a safe place away from your home. Here's a list of some documents you might want to copy:

- List of medications
- Insurance policies
- Driver's license, passport or other photo ID
- Bank account information
- Credit card information

- Financial records
- Inventory of home possessions
- Cash and travelers checks

- ***Prepare a disaster supplies kit.***

If you are forced to shelter in place or evacuate your home, you may not have time to gather all the necessities for keeping your family safe and comfortable. Assemble a kit now with enough supplies to take care of each family member for at least three days.

It's best to store your supplies in air-tight, portable containers but something as simple as plastic trash bags or a backpack will work. Be sure to check your kit regularly and replace items that expire such as batteries and food. A basic kit should include:

- **Water:** Pack enough bottled water to last three days. Each person requires one gallon of water a day.
- **Food:** Choose foods that you know your family will eat and that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking. Examples include protein or fruit bars, dried fruit, nuts, peanut butter, crackers and canned juices. Also pack a hand-operated can opener and disposable eating utensils.
- **Clean air items:** If there is an explosion, you may need to create a barrier between yourself and the airborne contamination. Pack nose and mouth protection masks (N-95 rating), plastic sheeting and duct tape.
- **Extra clothing:** Gather one complete change of clothes, a pair of sturdy shoes and a blanket for each person.
- **First aid kit:** Include two pairs of sterile gloves, sterile gauze, soap,

- antibiotic towelettes, antibiotic ointment, burn ointment, adhesive bandages, thermometer, prescription medications and prescribed medical supplies.
- **Emergency items:** Pack a battery-powered radio, flashlights, extra batteries, a whistle, shovel, basic tools, baby wipes, garbage bags, toilet paper and a state map.

Special needs items:

- If there is a baby in the family, you will need to pack formula, diapers, bottles, powdered milk, medications, baby wipes and diaper rash ointment.
- For adults with special needs, consult with the doctor about storing prescription medications such as heart and high blood pressure medicines, insulin and other prescription drugs.
- Include supplies for dentures and contact lenses.
- Include emergency supplies for your pet. Have medical and current vaccination records, pet medications, first aid kit, leash and carrier/crate, 3-day supply of food and water, current photos in case you are separated, pet beds and toys, cat litter and box, paper towels, plastic bags and bleach to properly handle pet waste.