



Facts About Evacuation During a Radiation Emergency

In the event of a radiation emergency, such as a nuclear power plant accident or the explosion of a radioactive “dirty bomb” (www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation/dirtybombs.asp), you may need to leave your home or the immediate area (evacuate). Depending on the direction the radioactive cloud or stream (called the plume) is moving from the incident site (the area where the accident or explosion took place), you may have to evacuate or go to an emergency shelter. This fact sheet will help you decide on the best actions to protect yourself and your family.

What you should do during a radiation emergency

If an incident occurs that involves radiation, whether accidental or intentional, you should listen for radio or television reports that will tell you if your area should be evacuated. It is important to wait until you are told to evacuate so that you will know which direction the radioactive plume is moving and how to avoid it.

What you should do if you are told to take shelter where you are

You may need to take shelter where you are until an evacuation order is given. Stay inside. Close and lock all windows and doors, and close fireplace dampers. Turn off fans, air conditioners, and forced-air heating units that bring air in from the outside. Go to a room in the middle of your home or workplace, or go to the basement, if possible. Your shelter should have as few windows as possible. For more information on sheltering, see the fact sheet, “Sheltering in Place During a Radiation Emergency” (www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation/shelter.asp) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How to know whether to evacuate

Local police officers, emergency coordinators, or government officials will alert you with radio and television messages if you need to evacuate. Each situation can be different, and local authorities will need to find out which direction the radioactive plume is moving before ordering people to evacuate. Local authorities will tell you when to go to an emergency shelter, where the shelter is located, and in which direction you should travel to avoid the radioactive plume.

Why you may be told not to evacuate

Some people may be safer staying in place than they would be evacuating. For example, your child in school may be miles away from the incident, and the wind may carry the radioactive plume away from the school. It may be safer for your child to remain at school than to come home to an area where there is a danger of exposure to the radioactive plume.

What to do if you’re told to evacuate

Act quickly and follow the instructions of local officials and emergency coordinators. Each situation can be different, so local officials will give you special instructions to follow that are particular to the situation. If you have time, turn off the air conditioner, heater, or ventilation system to your house. Close and lock all windows and doors if you have time.

In your car, keep the windows closed and the ventilation system turned off. If you do not have your own transportation, make plans in advance of an emergency with people who can give you a ride. Check with local officials to see what plans are in place to evacuate people who cannot or do not drive.

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What you should bring to the emergency shelter

Emergency shelters will have most of the supplies that people need. You should bring any medicines that you are taking and a change of clothes. Emergency coordinators will tell you any other supplies you should bring with you.

What you should do with your pets

If you are concerned about your pets, you should make plans before an emergency for taking them with you. Most emergency shelters will not accept pets (only service animals, such as dogs used by visually impaired people). You should contact friends or relatives in other areas to see if you may bring your pets to their homes in the case of an emergency. See the fact sheet "Pets and Disasters" (<http://www.fema.gov/library/petsf.shtm>) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for more information on what to do with pets during an emergency.

What to do if you live near a nuclear power plant

If you live within 10 miles of a nuclear power plant, learn the emergency warning systems for the power plant. If you do not know how the power plant has planned to alert your community, contact the utility company that operates the power plant. The utility company is required by law to have plans in place for contacting people in the community during an emergency. The utility company also must inform the community each year of its evacuation plans and routes.

Where you can get more information about evacuation

For more information about radiation and emergency response, see the CDC Web site at www.bt.cdc.gov or contact the following organizations:

You can contact one of the following:

- State and local health departments
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (www.fema.gov)
- American Red Cross (www.redcross.org)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - Public Response Hotline (CDC)
 - 800-CDC-INFO
 - 888-232-6348 (TTY)
 - Emergency Preparedness and Response Web site (www.bt.cdc.gov)
 - E-mail inquiries: cdcinfo@cdc.gov
 - Mail inquiries:
Public Inquire c/o BPRP
Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Planning
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Mailstop C-18
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

For more information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation, or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).

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