

# Home Emergency Planning

Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. It can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. Where will your family be when disaster strikes? They could be anywhere - at work, at school or in the car. How will you find each other? Will you know if your children are safe?

Families can cope with disaster by preparing in advance and working together as a team. Knowing what to do is your best protection and your responsibility. NHOEM, the National Weather Service, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the American Red Cross urge every family to develop a family disaster plan. The key to preparedness is having a plan. Here are the steps to follow to create and implement a family disaster plan:

- Gather information about hazards in your area. Also, find out about the disaster plans at your workplace, your children's school and other places where your family spends time.
- Meet with your family to create your own plan. Plan to share responsibilities and work together as a team.
- It is a good idea to pick two places to meet: right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire, and outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home. Everyone, including small children, should know your address and phone number.
- Ask an out-of-state friend to be your "family contact" for everyone to call if the family gets separated. After a disaster, it is often easier to call long distance.
- Have a plan for your pets - pets are not allowed in American Red Cross shelters. Other arrangements should be secured beforehand.
- Once you have created a family disaster plan, it is time to implement the plan so that it may be activated when it is needed. Teach your children how and when to call 911. Have your family learn basic safety measures, such as CPR and First Aid. Show each family member 1) how and when to turn off water, gas and electricity at the main switches, and 2) how to use a fire extinguisher. Conduct a home hazard hunt in which you inspect your home for items that can move, fall, break or cause a fire, and correct them. Stock emergency supplies and assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit (see below). Determine the best escape routes from your room and find the safe spots in your home for different types of disasters.

Your kit should include enough supplies to meet your needs for at least three days. Store these supplies in sturdy, easy to carry, water-resistant containers, such as backpacks or duffle bags. It is a good idea to keep a smaller kit in the trunk of your car. Your disaster supplies kit should include:

- A three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and food that will not spoil.
- A first aid kit, including prescription medicines.
- Emergency tools, including a battery-powered radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries.
- Special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members.

Practice and maintain your plan. Test and recharge your fire extinguisher according to manufacturer's instructions. Check smoke alarms monthly and change batteries at least once a year.

By becoming aware of possible disasters in your area and planning accordingly, your family is taking a giant step toward protecting themselves during any emergency.

*(This is an edited version of an article written by Chris Floyd, Disaster Services Director of the Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross in Florida. Floyd writes frequently on emergency management and disaster preparedness.)*