

DISASTER AWARENESS

Preparing for a disaster can reduce the fear, anxiety and losses that disasters cause. A disaster can be a **natural disaster**, like a hurricane or tornado. It might also be **man-made**, like a **terrorist attack or chemical spill**. You should know the risks and danger signs of different types of disasters. You should also have a disaster plan. Be ready to evacuate your home, and know how to treat basic medical problems.

No matter what kind of disaster you experience, it causes **emotional distress**. After a disaster, recovery can take time. Stay connected to your family and friends during this period.

Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to plan in advance: how you will contact one another; how you will get back together; and what you will do in different situations.

Family Emergency Plan

- It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an **out-of-town contact** may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members.
- Be sure every member of your family **knows the phone number** and has **coins** or a **prepaid phone card** to call the emergency contact.
- **You may have trouble getting through** or the telephone system may be down altogether, **but be patient**.

Emergency Information

Find out what kinds of disasters, both natural and man-made, are most likely to occur in your area and how you will be notified. Methods of getting your attention vary from community to community. One common method is to broadcast via **emergency radio** and **TV broadcasts**.

Emergency Plans

You may also want to **inquire about emergency plans** at places where your family spends time: **work**, and **your child's school**. If no plans exist, consider volunteering to help create one. Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together in the event of an emergency. You will be better prepared to

safely reunite your family and loved ones during an emergency if you think ahead and communicate with others in advance.

Neighborhoods and Apartments

A community working together during an emergency makes sense.

- **Talk to your neighbors** about how you can **work together** during an emergency.
- **Find out if anyone has specialized equipment** like a power generator, or expertise such as medical knowledge, that might help in a crisis.
- Decide who will **check on elderly or disabled neighbors**.
- **Make back-up plans** for children in case you can't get home in an emergency.
- Sharing plans and **communicating in advance** is a good strategy.



DECIDING TO STAY OR GO

Staying Put

Whether you are at home, work or elsewhere, there may be situations when it's simply best to stay where you are and avoid any uncertainty outside.

There are other circumstances when staying put and creating a barrier between yourself and potentially contaminated air outside, a process known as "sealing the room," is a matter of survival. Use available information to assess the situation. If you see large amounts of debris in the air, or if local authorities say the air is badly contaminated, you may want to take this kind of action.

The process used to seal the room is considered a temporary protective measure to create a barrier between you and potentially contaminated air outside. It is a type of sheltering in place that requires preplanning.

To "Shelter in Place and Seal the Room"

- Bring your family and pets **inside**.
- **Lock** doors, **close** windows, air vents and fireplace dampers.
- **Turn off** fans, air conditioning and forced air heating systems.
- **Take your emergency supply kit** unless you have reason to believe it has been contaminated.
- **Go into an interior room** with few windows, if possible.
- **Seal** all windows, doors and air vents with plastic sheeting and duct tape. Consider measuring and cutting the sheeting in advance to save time.
- Be prepared to **improvise** and use what you have on hand to **seal gaps** so that you create a barrier between yourself and any contamination.
- Local authorities may not immediately be able to provide information on what is happening and what you should do. However, you should **watch TV, listen to the radio or check the Internet often for official news** and instructions as they become available.

Learn how and when to turn off utilities:

If there is damage to your home or you are instructed to turn off your utilities:

- Locate the electric, gas and water shut-off valves.
- Keep necessary tools near gas and water shut-off valves.
- Teach family members how to turn off utilities.

- **If you turn the gas off, a professional must turn it back on. Do not attempt to do this yourself.**

Evacuating

There may be conditions under which you will decide to get away, or there may be situations when you are ordered to leave. Plan how you will assemble your family and anticipate where you will go. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency.

Create an evacuation plan:

- **Plan places** where your family will meet, both within and outside of your immediate neighborhood.
- If you have a car, keep a **half tank of gas** in it at all times in case you need to evacuate.
- Become familiar with **alternate routes** and other means of transportation out of your area.
- If you **do not have a car**, plan how you will leave if you have to.
- **Take your emergency supply kit** unless you have reason to believe it has been contaminated.
- **Lock** the door behind you.
- Take your **pets** with you, but understand that only service animals may be permitted in public shelters. Plan how you will care for your pets in an emergency.
- If you find suspicious packages near your house, or in public transportation vehicles, alert the proper authorities or call 911.