

# Creating a Home Safety Plan

No matter where you live in the United States, preparing your home for a disaster is a good idea. Even if your area doesn't normally have floods, hurricanes or other natural disasters, you should have a safety plan for events such as a fire in your home. The best way to deal with a disaster is to be ready before it strikes. By following these steps, your family can handle any disaster together, calmly and safely.

## Find Out What Could Happen

Contact your local chapter of the American Red Cross or emergency management office. Have a pen and paper ready so you can take notes. Ask what types of disasters are most likely to happen. Ask for information on how to prepare for each one.

Learn what your community's warning signals sound like. Learn how your community warns residents of a disaster. Many areas sound a warning signal such as a loud alarm heard throughout the area. Once you know what the signals are, find out what you should do if you hear them.

Ask about care for your pets if there is a disaster. You may not be able to take them with you to an emergency shelter.

Find out how to help elderly or disabled individuals.

Find out if there are disaster plans where you work. Also ask about plans at your child's school or daycare center and other places your loved ones spend a lot of time.

## Create a Plan

Hold a meeting with individuals who live in your house. Talk about the need to be ready; explain the dangers of fire, bad weather and earthquakes to any children; and plan to work as a team.

Pick two places to meet if a disaster happens. The first place should be right outside your house, in case of an emergency within the home, like a fire. The second should be a place outside of your neighborhood, in case you are not able to get home. Make sure everyone knows the address and phone number of that second meeting place.

Ask a friend or family member who lives in another state to be your family contact. During a disaster, it can be easier to complete long-distance phone calls to areas not affected by the problem. Make sure everyone knows the contact's phone number — if family members become separated, everyone should call the family contact to check in.

Create an evacuation plan, including how to take care of pets.

## Complete a Checklist

- ✓ Place emergency phone numbers near the phone, and teach children how and when to call 911.
- ✓ Show all who live with you how and when to turn off utilities such as water, gas and electric at the main switches in your home.
- ✓ Check with your insurance agent to be sure you have enough insurance

The purpose of this patient education handout is to further explain or remind you about a medical condition. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, be sure to discuss them with your healthcare provider. This handout may be reproduced for distribution to patients.

for your home and all the items in it.

- ✓ Make sure everyone knows how to use the fire extinguisher, and put smoke detectors on every level of your home.
- ✓ Once a year, look for items that could easily fall and cause damage during a disaster, such as a hot water heater or book shelf. Fix potential hazards before a disaster occurs.
- ✓ Keep emergency supplies and prepare a disaster kit.
- ✓ Take a first aid and CPR class from a community organization or the American Red Cross.
- ✓ Figure out the best ways to escape from your house, and also find two ways to escape from each room.

## The Basics

Your disaster supplies kit should include seven basics:

**Water** — one gallon per person, per day; keep a 3-day supply

**Food** — a selection of ready-to-eat, high-energy foods such as peanut butter, jelly, crackers and granola bars, plus comfort foods like cookies and coffee to help ease stress

**First aid kit** — bandages, gauze pads, soap, gloves and non-prescription drugs to relieve pain and an upset stomach

**Tools and supplies** — battery-operated radio and flashlight; batteries; personal hygiene items such as contact lens supplies, denture needs and feminine products; and a compass

**Clothing and bedding** — sturdy shoes, rain gear, blankets, thermal underwear

**Special items** — baby formula, diapers, prescription medications, eye glasses, family documents

**Important family documents** — Keep records such as wills, insurance policies, deeds, passports, social security cards and birth, marriage and death certificates in a waterproof, portable container.

These are just some of the items you should have in your disaster kit. For a complete list, visit the resources below. Remember to check your disaster kit at least once a year.

## Practice, Practice, Practice

- Quiz children about your disaster plans every 6 months.
- Conduct trial emergency evacuations.
- Replace water and food from your emergency stock every 6 months.
- Test and recharge your fire extinguisher.
- Test smoke detectors each month, and change the batteries at least once a year. ■

## Resources

The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the American Red Cross. (2004). *Family disaster planning*. Retrieved Oct. 25, 2004 from the World Wide Web: [http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0\\_601\\_,00.html](http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_601_,00.html)

The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the American Red Cross. (1997, April 28). *Your family disaster supplies kit*. Retrieved Oct. 25, 2004 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.redcross.org/disaster/safety/fdsk.pdf>

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