

# Preparing for Disaster



FEMA



American  
Red Cross





# Where Will You or Your Family Be When a Disaster Strikes?

You 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?

Emergencies and disasters can strike quickly and without warning and can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. What would you do if basic services — water, gas, electricity, or telephones — were cut off?

Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away.

You can cope with disaster by preparing in advance and by working with your family as a team. Follow the steps listed in this booklet to be prepared.

1. Get informed
2. Make a plan
3. Assemble a kit
4. Maintain your plan and kit

Knowing what to do is your best protection and your responsibility.

# Four Steps to Preparedness

## 1. GET INFORMED

Contact your local emergency management office or local American Red Cross chapter to gather the information you will need to create a plan.

### Community Hazards

Ask about the specific hazards that threaten your community (e.g., hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes) and about your risk from those hazards. Additionally, hazard information for your local area can be obtained at [www.fema.gov/hazard/map.index.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/hazard/map.index.shtm).

### Community Disaster Plans

Learn about community response plans, evacuation plans, and designated emergency shelters. Ask about the emergency plans and procedures that exist in places you and your family spend time, such as places of employment, schools, and child care centers. If you do not own a vehicle or drive, find out in advance what your community's plans are for evacuating those without private transportation.

### Community Warning Systems

Find out how local authorities will warn you of a pending disaster and how they will provide information to you during and after a disaster. Learn about NOAA Weather Radio and its alerting capabilities ([www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov)).



## 2. MAKE A PLAN

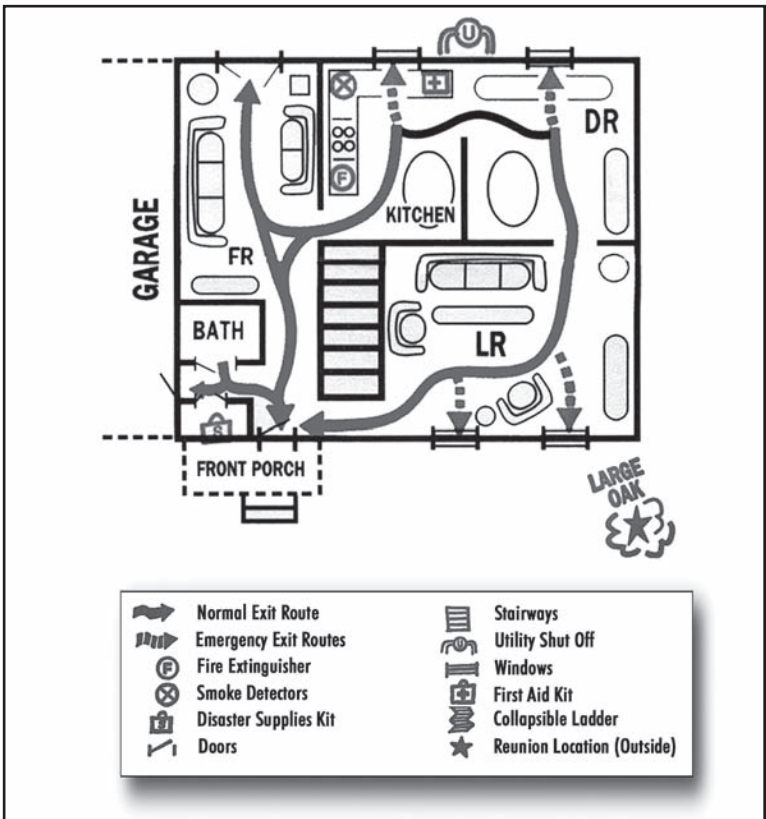
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- ♦ **Meet with Your Family Members.** Review the information you gathered about community hazards and plans. Explain the dangers to children and work with them as a team to prepare your family. Be sure to include caregivers in your meeting and planning efforts.
- ♦ **Choose an Out-of-Town Contact.** Ask an out-of-town friend or relative to be your contact. Following a disaster, family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know the contact's phone numbers. After a disaster, it is often easier to make a long distance call than a local call from a disaster area.
- ♦ **Decide Where to Meet.** In the event of an emergency, you may become separated from family members. Choose a place right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire. Choose a location outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home.
- ♦ **Complete a Family Communication Plan.** Your plan should include contact information for family members, work, and school. Your plan should also include information for your out-of-town contact, meeting locations, emergency services, and the National Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222). A sample form for recording this information can be found at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) or at [www.redcross.org/](http://www.redcross.org/). These websites also provide blank wallet cards on which contact information can be recorded and carried in a wallet, purse, backpack, etc. for quick reference. Teach your children how to call the emergency phone numbers and when it is appropriate to do so. Be sure each family member has a copy of your communication plan and post it near your telephone for use in an emergency.
- ♦ **Escape Routes and Safe Places.** In a fire or other emergency, you may need to evacuate on a moment's notice. Be ready to get out fast. Be sure everyone in your family knows the best escape routes out of your home as well as where the safe places are in your home for each type of disaster (i.e., if a tornado approaches, go to the basement or the lowest floor of your home or an interior room or closet with no windows).

Use a blank sheet of paper to draw floor plans of your home. Show the location of doors, windows, stairways, large furniture, your disaster supplies kit, fire extinguisher, smoke alarms, collapsible ladders, first aid kits, and utility shut-off points. Show important points outside such as garages, patios, stairways, elevators, driveways, and porches. See illustration below.

Indicate at least two escape routes from each room, and mark a place outside of the home where household members should meet in case of fire. If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, make all exits from your home wheelchair accessible.

Practice emergency evacuation drills at least two times a year, but as often as you update your escape plan.





- ◆ **Plan for those with Disabilities and Other Special Needs.** Keep support items in a designated place, so they can be found quickly. For those who have home-health caregivers, particularly for those who are bed-bound, it is essential to have an alternate plan if the home-health caregiver cannot make it to you. In advance, provide the power company with a list of all power-dependent life support equipment required by family members. Develop a contingency plan that includes an alternate power source for the equipment or relocating the person.
- ◆ **Plan for Your Pets.** Take your pets with you if you evacuate. However, be aware that pets (other than service animals) usually are not permitted in emergency public shelters for health reasons. Prepare a list of family, friends, boarding facilities, veterinarians, and pet-friendly hotels that could shelter your pets in an emergency.
- ◆ **Prepare for Different Hazards.** Include in your plan how to prepare for each hazard that could impact your local community and how to protect yourself. For instance, the actions you would take to protect yourself from a tornado are different from those you would for a fire. Reference the websites listed on the back cover to learn more about the different actions required for different hazards.



## Action Checklist — Items to Do Before a Disaster

### Utilities

Know how and when to turn off water, gas and electricity at the main switches or valves and share this information with your family and caregivers. Keep any tools you will need near gas and water shut-off valves. Turn off the utilities only if you suspect the lines are damaged, you suspect a leak, or if local officials instruct you to do so.

*(Note: Gas shut-off procedure — As part of the learning process, do not actually turn off the gas. If the gas is turned off for any reason, only a qualified professional can turn it back on. It might take several weeks for a professional to respond. In the meantime, you will require alternate sources to heat your home, make hot water, and cook.)*

### Fire Extinguisher

Be sure everyone knows how to use your fire extinguishers (ABC type) and where they are kept.

### Smoke Alarms

Install smoke alarms on each level of your home, especially near the bedrooms. Individuals with sensory disabilities should consider installing smoke alarms that have strobe lights and vibrating pads. Follow local codes and manufacturer's instructions about installation requirements. Also, consider installing a carbon monoxide alarm in your home.

### Insurance Coverage

Check if you have adequate insurance coverage. Homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage and may not provide full coverage for other hazards. Talk with your insurance agent and make sure you have adequate coverage to protect your family against financial loss.

### First Aid & CPR/AED (Automated External Defibrillation)

Take American Red Cross first aid and CPR/AED classes. Red Cross courses can accommodate people with disabilities. Discuss your needs when registering for the classes.



### ❑ **Inventory Home Possessions**

Make a record of your possessions to help you claim reimbursement in case of loss or damage. Store this information in a safe deposit box or other secure (flood/fire safe) location to ensure the records survive a disaster. Include photographs or video of the interior and exterior of your home as well as cars, boats, and recreational vehicles. Also, have photos of durable medical equipment and be sure to make a record of the make and model numbers for each item. Get professional appraisals of jewelry, collectibles, artwork, or other items that may be difficult to evaluate. Make copies of receipts and canceled checks showing the cost for valuable items.

### ❑ **Vital Records and Documents**

Vital family records and other important documents such as birth and marriage certificates, Social Security cards, passports, wills, deeds, and financial, insurance, and immunizations records should be kept in a safe deposit box or other safe location.

### ❑ **Reduce Home Hazards**

In a disaster, ordinary items in the home can cause injury and damage. Take these steps to reduce your risk.

- ◆ Have a professional repair defective electrical wiring and leaky gas connections.
- ◆ Place large, heavy objects on lower shelves and hang pictures and mirrors away from beds.
- ◆ Use straps or other restraints to secure tall cabinets, bookshelves, large appliances (especially water heater, furnace, and refrigerator), mirrors, shelves, large picture frames, and light fixtures to wall studs.
- ◆ Repair cracks in ceilings and foundations.
- ◆ Store weed killers, pesticides, and flammable products away from heat sources.
- ◆ Place oily rags or waste in covered metal cans and dispose of them according to local regulations.
- ◆ Have a professional clean and repair chimneys, flue pipes, connectors, and gas vents.

### 3. ASSEMBLE A DISASTER SUPPLIES KIT

In the event you need to evacuate at a moment's notice and take essentials with you, you probably will not have the opportunity to shop or search for the supplies you and your family will need. Every household should assemble a disaster supplies kit and keep it up to date.

A disaster supplies kit is a collection of basic items a family would probably need to stay safe and be more comfortable during and after a disaster. Disaster supplies kit items should be stored in a portable container(s) as close as possible to the exit door. Review the contents of your kit at least once per year or as your family's needs change. Also, consider having emergency supplies in each vehicle and at your place of employment.

- ◆ Three-day supply of non-perishable food and manual can opener
- ◆ Three-day supply of water (one gallon of water per person, per day)
- ◆ Portable, battery-powered radio or television and extra batteries
- ◆ Flashlight and extra batteries
- ◆ First aid kit and manual
- ◆ Sanitation and hygiene items (hand sanitizer, moist towelettes, and toilet paper)
- ◆ Matches in a waterproof container
- ◆ Whistle
- ◆ Extra clothing and blankets
- ◆ Kitchen accessories and cooking utensils
- ◆ Photocopies of identification and credit cards
- ◆ Cash and coins
- ◆ Special needs items such as prescription medications, eyeglasses, contact lens solution, and hearing aid batteries
- ◆ Items for infants, such as formula, diapers, bottles, and pacifiers
- ◆ Tools, pet supplies, a map of the local area, and other items to meet your family's unique needs.

If you live in a cold climate, you must think about warmth. It is possible that you will not have heat during or after a disaster. Think about your clothing and bedding needs. Be sure to include one set of the following for each person:

- ◆ Jacket or coat
- ◆ Long pants and long-sleeve shirt
- ◆ Sturdy shoes
- ◆ Hat, mittens, and scarf
- ◆ Sleeping bag or warm blanket

Supplies for your vehicle include:

- ◆ Flashlight, extra batteries, and maps.
- ◆ First aid kit and manual.
- ◆ White distress flag.
- ◆ Tire repair kit, booster/jumper cables, pump, and flares.
- ◆ Bottled water and non-perishable foods such as granola bars.
- ◆ Seasonal supplies: Winter — blanket, hat, mittens, shovel, sand, tire chains, windshield scraper, fluorescent distress flag; Summer — sunscreen lotion (SPF 15 or greater), shade item (umbrella, wide-brimmed hat, etc.).

## 4. MAINTAIN YOUR PLAN

**Quiz:** Review your plan every six months and quiz your family about what to do.

**Drill:** Conduct fire and emergency evacuation drills on a regular basis with your family.

**Restock:** Check food supplies for expiration dates and discard or replace stored water and food every six months.

**Test:** Read the indicator on your fire extinguisher(s) and follow the manufacturer's instructions to recharge. Test your smoke alarms monthly and change the batteries at least once a year. Replace alarms every 10 years.

### Plan Maintenance Chart

Check off task and enter date performed:

	6 months	1 year	18 months	2 years
Review plan and quiz <i>Date</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hold fire and emergency evacuation drills <i>Date</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Replace stored food and water <i>Date</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check fire extinguishers and recharge <i>Date</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Smoke Alarm Maintenance Chart

Check off task and enter date performed:

Test monthly	Date	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change batteries	Date	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Replace alarms	Date	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### **If Disaster Strikes**

**If you are instructed to take shelter immediately, do so at once.**

**If you are instructed to evacuate**

- ♦ Listen to the radio or television for the location of emergency shelters and for other instructions from local emergency officials.
- ♦ Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes.
- ♦ Take your disaster supplies kit.
- ♦ Use travel routes specified by local authorities and don't use shortcuts because certain areas may be impassable or dangerous.

**After a disaster**

- ♦ Administer first aid and get help for seriously injured people.
- ♦ If the emergency occurs while you are at home, check for damage using a flashlight. Do not light matches or candles or turn on electrical switches.
- ♦ Check for fires and electrical and other household hazards. Spilled bleaches, gasoline, and other liquids may produce deadly fumes when chemicals mix, or be a fire hazard. Contact your local fire department for information on how to clean up spilled chemicals.
- ♦ Sniff for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open windows, and get everyone outside quickly.
- ♦ Shut off any damaged utilities.
- ♦ Check on your neighbors, especially those who are elderly or disabled.

- ◆ Call your out-of-town contact — do not use the telephone again unless it is a life-threatening emergency.
- ◆ Stay away from downed power lines.
- ◆ Listen to local radio and TV for information about where you can get disaster relief assistance.

### **If electrical power is lost**

- ◆ Call your local power company.
- ◆ Use a flashlight or battery-operated lantern. Do not use candles for emergency lighting. Candles and kerosene lanterns are fire hazards.
- ◆ Turn off all major appliances. They could overload electric lines when power is restored, causing a second outage.
- ◆ Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. Food can be kept cold for a day or two if the doors are kept closed.
- ◆ Use portable generators cautiously. Make sure they are operated only out-of-doors in a well-ventilated area. Refuel a generator only after it has cooled. Do not connect a generator to your home's electrical system except through an approved transfer switch installed in compliance with local electrical code.
- ◆ In cold weather, drain pumps, supply lines, water heaters, and boilers can freeze when the power is lost. Traps in drains of tubs, sinks, commodes, washing machines, and dishwashers can also freeze. To avoid burst pipes, close the main water valve and open the spigots and supply lines and drain them.



# Learn More

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Community and Family Preparedness Program and American Red Cross Community Disaster Education are nationwide efforts to help people prepare for disasters of all types.

For more information, please contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter. This booklet and the preparedness materials listed below are online at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) and [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org). Other preparedness materials are available at these sites, as well as at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

These publications are also available by calling FEMA at 1-800-480-2520, or writing:

**FEMA**  
**P.O. Box 2012**  
**Jessup, MD 20794-2012**

Publications are available from your local American Red Cross chapter.

- ◆ Are You Ready? An In-depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness (IS-22)
- ◆ Helping Children Cope with Disaster (FEMA 478) (Red Cross 658619)
- ◆ Preparing for Disaster for People with Disabilities and other Special Needs (FEMA 476) (Red Cross 658618)
- ◆ Food and Water in an Emergency (FEMA 477) (Red Cross 658613)

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