

Family Disaster Plan

Why talk about a Family Disaster Plan?

Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. It can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. What would you do if basic services, such as 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 and the other members of your household could be separated during a disaster. Having a plan will help you find each other.

Families can and do cope with disaster by preparing in advance and working together as a team. Knowing what to do is your best protection and your responsibility. Learn more about Family Disaster Plans by contacting your local emergency management office or local American Red Cross chapter.

What is a Family Disaster Plan?

A Family Disaster Plan is a personalized action plan that lets each member of a household know what to do in particular disaster situations and how to be prepared in advance. A functional Family Disaster Plan helps alleviate fears about potential disasters, makes actual disaster situations less stressful, and saves precious time in the face of disasters.

Be Prepared for Disasters: Make a Plan

For general preparedness, every household should create and practice a Family Disaster Plan and assemble and maintain a Disaster Supplies Kit. In addition, every household should take precautions specific to the types of disasters that could affect the local community and plan for and practice what to do if these disasters occur.

Find out what could happen to you. By learning what disasters could occur in your community and what your risks may be (for example, living in a floodplain), you can prepare for the disasters most likely to occur in your area. Learn more by contacting your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter. Be prepared to take notes. Ask the following:

- What types of natural disasters are most likely to happen in your community? What types of human-caused or technological disasters could affect your region? Ask about chemical emergencies, which can occur anywhere chemical substances are stored, manufactured, or transported.
- Find out if your home is in a floodplain. Check with your local emergency management agency.
- How should you prepare for natural and human-caused disasters?
- What can you do to protect your home and avoid or reduce the impact of the disasters that could occur where you live?
- Does your community have a public warning system? How will your local radio and television stations alert the community if there is an emergency? What do your community's warning signals sound like and what should you do when you

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are notified?

- If you care for young or elderly people or people with disabilities, how can you help them in a disaster situation? What might be some special needs to consider?
- What about animal care after a disaster? Pets (other than service animals) usually are not permitted in public shelters or other places where food is served. Where could you take your pets if you had to go to a public shelter? Contact your local emergency management agency to find out about emergency animal shelters in your community, in the event that you have nowhere else to go and need to go to public shelter with your animals.

Then, find out about the disaster plans at your workplace, your children's school or day care center, and other places where members of your family spend time. You should be prepared wherever you may be in case disaster Strikes and learn steps you can take to prevent or avoid disasters.

Create a Family Disaster Plan

Note: You can adapt the Family Disaster Plan to any household—couples, related or unrelated individuals, adults without children, adults with children. Even people who live alone should create a Family (Household) Disaster Plan.

- Once you know what disasters are possible in your area, have a household meeting to talk about how to prepare and how to respond if a disaster should occur. Plan to share responsibilities and to work together as a team.
- Know what to do in case household members are separated in a disaster. Disaster situations are stressful and can create confusion.
- Keep it simple.
- Pick two places to meet:
 1. Right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire.
 2. Outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home or are asked to leave your neighborhood.
- Pick two out-of-town contacts:
 1. A friend or relative who will be your household's primary contact.
 2. A friend or relative who will be your household's alternative contact.
- Both adults and children should know the primary and alternative contacts' names, addresses, and home and cell telephone numbers, or carry the information with them. In addition, include these contact numbers on your pet's identification tags, or use a national pet locator service that someone could call to report finding your pet.

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- Separation is particularly likely during the day when adults are at work and children are at school. If household members are separated from one another in a disaster, they should call the primary contact. If the primary contact cannot be reached, they should call the alternative contact. Remember, after a disaster, it is often easier to complete a long distance connection than a local call.
- Make sure that adults and children know how to tell the contact where they are, how to reach them, and what happened or to leave this essential information in a brief voice mail.
- Discuss what to do if a family member is injured or ill.
- Discuss what to do in the rare circumstance that authorities advise you to shelter-in-place.
- Discuss what to do if authorities advise you to evacuate. Learn about public shelter locations in your community. Make "in-case-of-evacuation" arrangements for a place to stay with a friend or relative who lives out of town or with a hotel, motel, or campground you are familiar with that can be reached by an evacuation route you would expect to take.
- Be familiar with evacuation routes. Plan several evacuation routes in case certain roads are blocked or closed. Remember to follow the advice of local officials during evacuation situations. They will direct you to the safest route; some roads may be blocked or put you in further danger.
- Plan how to take care of your pets. Pets (other than service animals) usually are not permitted in public shelters or other places where food is served. Plan where you would take your pets if you had to go to a public shelter where they are not permitted. Many communities are developing emergency animal shelters similar to shelters for people. Contact your local emergency management agency to find out about emergency animal shelters in your community, in the event that you have nowhere else to go and need to go to public shelter with your animals.
- Post emergency numbers (fire, police, ambulance, etc.) by telephones. You may not have time in an emergency to look up critical numbers.
- Teach all responsible members of the household how and when to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at the main switches or valves. Turn off utilities only if you suspect a leak or damaged lines, or if you are instructed to do so by authorities. If you turn the gas off, you will need a professional to turn it back on. Become familiar with the location and operation of shut-off valves. Do not actually turn any valve unless it is a real emergency. Place a tag on shut-off valves to make them easier to identify.
- Attach a shut-off valve wrench or other special tool in a conspicuous place close to the gas and water shut-off valves.
- Check if you have adequate insurance coverage. Homeowners' insurance does not cover flood losses. Ask your insurance agent to review your current policies to ensure that they will cover your home and belongings adequately. If you are a renter, your landlord's insurance does not protect your personal property; it protects only the building. Renters' insurance pays if a renter's property is damaged or stolen. Renters' flood insurance costs less than \$15 a month in

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most areas of the country. Contact your insurance agent for more information.

- If you are especially vulnerable to floods, consider relocating.
- Be sure to have working smoke alarms and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in your home. Smoke alarms cut nearly in half your chances of dying in a home fire. For new homes, interconnected smoke alarms are required on every level of the home, outside each sleeping area, and inside each bedroom. Although this approach is ideal for all homes, as a minimum, existing homes should have smoke alarms on every level and outside each sleeping area. Install CO alarms following the manufacturer's instructions. It is especially important to have a CO alarm near sleeping areas. Use only CO alarms with labels showing they meet the requirements of the latest safety standards for CO alarms (UL 2034, IAS 6-96, or CSA 6.19.01). Test and maintain the smoke and CO alarms according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Consider equipping your home with alternative heating sources, such as fireplaces, wood- or coal-burning stoves, or space heaters. Be sure all heating sources are installed according to local codes and permit requirements and are clean and in working order.
- Get training from the fire department in how to use your fire extinguisher (A-B-C type), and show household members where extinguishers are kept. Different extinguishers operate in different ways. Make sure that responsible members of the household know how to use your particular model. There is no time to read directions during an emergency. Only adults should handle and use extinguishers.
- Conduct a home hazard hunt. During a disaster, ordinary objects in your home can cause injury or damage. Anything that can move, fall, break, or cause a fire is a home hazard. For example, during an earthquake or a tornado, a hot water heater or a bookshelf could turn over or pictures hanging over a couch could fall and hurt someone. Look for electrical, chemical, and fire hazards. Contact your local fire department to learn about home fire hazards. Inspect your home at least once a year and fix potential hazards. In your hazard hunt, include your barns, outbuildings, or any other structures that house animals. Be aware of hazards at nose and paw or hoof level, particularly debris, spilled chemicals, fertilizers, and other substances that may not seem to be dangerous to humans. Make sure your fences are sound and positioned to allow grazing animals to move to high ground in the event of flooding.
- Consider your need to add physical protection measures to your home. Add a "wind safe" room and tie your roof to the main frame of your house securely with metal straps for protection in case of hurricanes or tornadoes; bolt your house to the foundation to reduce earthquake damage; or take other measures you may find on www.fema.gov. Ensure that access and evacuation are manageable for elderly members of your household or those with disabilities.
- Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit and stock emergency supplies. Keep readily accessible in a portable container supplies that would meet your needs for at least three days. You can use these if you shelter at home or if you evacuate. Also, stock enough food and water for up to two weeks in your home. Keep an emergency kit in your vehicle.
- Keep a portable, battery-operated radio or television and extra batteries in your Disaster Supplies Kit. Maintaining a communication link with the outside is a

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step that can mean the difference between life and death. Make sure that everyone knows where the portable, battery operated radio or television is located, and always keep a supply of extra, fresh batteries.

- Consider buying a NOAA Weather Radio with a tone-alert feature. NOAA Weather Radio is the best way to receive warnings from the National Weather Service. The National Weather Service recommends a NOAA Weather Radio that has both a battery backup and a Specific Area Message Encoder (SAME) feature, which automatically alerts you when a watch or warning is issued for your county.
- Take an American Red Cross first aid and CPR class and have other household members take one too. You will learn basic safety measures and skills that can be indispensable in an emergency. These classes can be fun for older children.
- Plan home escape routes. Determine the best escape routes from inside your home in case a fire or other emergency requires you to leave the house quickly. Find two ways out of each room.
- Find the safe places in your home for shelter during different types of disaster. Certain disasters require specific types of safe places. While basements are appropriate for tornadoes, they could be deadly in a hazardous materials emergency. In this guide, safe places recommended for a particular type of disaster are discussed in the chapter covering that disaster.
- Make a complete inventory of your home, garage, and surrounding property. The inventory can be written or videotaped. Include information such as serial numbers, make and model numbers, physical descriptions, and what you paid (receipts, if possible). This inventory could help you prove the value of what you owned if your possessions are damaged or destroyed and can help you claim deductions on taxes. Do this for all items in your home, on all levels.
- Keep the originals of important documents in a safe deposit box, if possible, and make two copies of each document. Keep one set of copies in a waterproof, fire-resistant, portable container in your home and give the other set of copies to an out-of-town relative or friend. Important documents include:
 - Wills, insurance policies, contracts, deeds, vehicle titles, stocks and bonds
 - Passports, driver's licenses, work identification badges, social security cards, immunization records
 - List of bank account names and numbers and credit card names and numbers
 - Inventory of valuable household goods
 - Important telephone and cell phone numbers
 - Family records (birth, marriage, adoption, and death certificates)
 - For your pets, vaccination and veterinary records, photographs showing your pet clearly (best with you in the photos), and any other special records
- Practice and maintain your plan. Practicing your plan will help you respond appropriately and quickly during an actual emergency.
- Review your Family Disaster Plan and your Disaster Supplies Kit at least every six months. You may need to update them.
- Observe the expiration or "use by" date on stored food and water. If you have prepared your own containers of water, replace them every six months to ensure

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freshness.

- Conduct fire and emergency evacuation drills at least twice a year.
 - At home, practice escaping from various rooms, particularly bedrooms, and meeting at the place you have selected right outside your home.
 - Have each driver actually drive evacuation routes so each will know the way. Select alternative routes and familiarize drivers with them in case the main evacuation route is blocked during an actual disaster.
 - Mark your evacuation routes on a map and keep the map in your Disaster Supplies Kit. Remember to follow the advice of disaster officials during an evacuation. They will direct you to the safest route, away from roads that may be blocked or put you in further danger.
- Include your pets in your evacuation and sheltering drills. Practice evacuating your pets so they will get used to entering and traveling calmly in their carriers. If you have horses or other large animals, be sure that they are accustomed to entering a trailer. Practice bringing your pets indoors, into your safe room, so that if you are required to shelter-in-place, they will be comfortable.
- Use the test button to test your smoke alarms once a month. The test feature tests all electronic functions and is safer than testing with a controlled fire (match, lighter, or cigarette). If necessary, replace batteries immediately. Vacuum cobwebs and dust from the mechanisms once a month. Make sure your children know what your smoke alarm sounds like.
- Replace batteries at least once a year in battery-powered smoke alarms. (Replace the batteries in your CO alarms at the same time you replace your smoke alarm batteries.) Some agencies recommend that you replace batteries when the time changes from standard to daylight savings time each spring and then back again in the fall: "Change your clock, change your batteries." Replacing batteries this often certainly will not hurt; however data show that fresh batteries will last at least a year, so more frequent replacement is not necessary unless the smoke alarm begins to chirp. Also, Arizona, Hawaii, the eastern portion of Indiana, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and Guam do not use daylight savings time. Pick an easy-to-remember anniversary, such as your birthday or a national holiday, as the day to change the batteries each year.
- Replace your smoke alarms every 10 years. That is the recommendation of the National Fire Protection Association and the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Smoke alarms become less sensitive over time.
- Look at your fire extinguisher to ensure that it is properly charged. Fire extinguishers will not work properly if they are not properly charged. Use the gauge or test button to check that there is proper pressure. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for replacing or recharging fire extinguishers. If the unit is low on pressure, damaged, or corroded, replace it or have it professionally serviced.

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For People With Disabilities

If you have a disability or a mobility problem, you should consider adding the following steps to the usual preparations:

- Create a network of relatives, friends, or co-workers to assist in an emergency. If you think you may need assistance in a disaster, discuss your disability with relatives, friends, or co-workers and ask for their help. For example, if you need help moving or help getting necessary prescriptions, food, or other essentials, or if you require special arrangements to receive emergency messages, make a plan with friends or helpers. Make sure they know where you keep your Disaster Supplies Kit. Give a key to a neighbor or friend who may be able to assist you in a disaster.
- Maintain a list of important items and store the list with your Disaster Supplies Kit. Give a copy to another member of your household and a friend or neighbor. Important items might include:
 - Special equipment and supplies, for example, hearing aid batteries.
 - Current prescription names, sources, and dosages.
 - Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of doctors and pharmacists. If you get prescriptions by mail, confirm where you will be able to get them locally in an emergency.
 - Detailed information about the specifications of your medication or medical regimen, including a list of things incompatible with medication you use, for example, aspirin.
- Contact your local emergency management office now. Many local emergency management offices maintain registers of people with disabilities and their needs so they can be located and assisted quickly in a disaster.
- Wear medical alert tags or bracelets to identify your disability in case of an emergency. These may save your life if you are in need of medical attention and unable to communicate.
- Know the location and availability of more than one facility if you are dependent on a dialysis machine or other life-sustaining equipment or treatment. There may be other people requiring equipment, or facilities may have been affected by the disaster.
- If you have a severe speech, language, or hearing disability:
 - When you dial 9-1-1 (or your local emergency number), tap the space bar to indicate a TDD call.
 - Store a writing pad and pencils to communicate with others.
 - Keep a flashlight handy to signal your whereabouts to other people and for illumination to aid in communication.
 - Remind friends that you cannot completely hear warnings or emergency instructions. Ask them to be your source of emergency information as it comes over the radio. Another option is to use a NOAA Weather Radio with an alert feature connected to a light. If a watch or warning is issued for your area, the light would alert you to potential danger.
 - If you have a hearing ear dog, be aware that the dog may become

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confused or disoriented in an emergency. Store extra food, water, and supplies for your dog. Trained hearing ear dogs will be allowed to stay in emergency shelters with their owners. Check with local emergency management or American Red Cross officials for more information.

- If you have a service animal:
 - Be aware that the animal may become confused or disoriented in an emergency. Disasters may often mask or confuse scent markers that are part of your service animal's normal means of navigation.
 - If you are blind or visually impaired, keep extra canes placed around your home and office, even if you use a guide dog.
 - If you have a guide dog, train the dog to know one or two alternate routes out of your home or office. A guide dog familiar with the building may help you and others find a way out when no one else can see.
 - Be sure your service animal has identification and your phone numbers attached to its collar, including emergency contact information through a national pet locator service.
 - Have a complete pet disaster kit with food and water, medical records and identification, bowls, extra leash, a favorite toy, and a pet first aid kit.
 - Trained service animals will be allowed to stay in emergency shelters with their owners. Check with your local emergency management agency or American Red Cross officials for more information.
- If you use a wheelchair:
 - Show friends how to operate your wheelchair or help you transfer out of your chair so they can move you quickly if necessary.
 - If you use a power wheelchair, make sure friends know the size of your wheelchair, in case it has to be transported, and know where to get a battery if needed.
 - Inquire about emergency equipment that would make it easier for others to help you get out if you live or work in a high-rise building and might have to evacuate via a stairwell. Make arrangements with others to be carried out, if necessary, and practice doing that.
- Listen to the advice of local officials. People with disabilities have the same choices as other community residents about whether to evacuate their homes and where to go when an emergency threatens. Decide whether it is better to leave the area, stay with a friend, or go to a public shelter. Each of these decisions requires planning and preparation.



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Plan for Your Pets

- Take your pets with you if you evacuate. If it is not safe for you, it is not safe for them. Leaving them may endanger you, your pets, and emergency responders.
- Plan in advance where you will go if you evacuate, as pets (other than service animals) are usually not allowed in public shelters. Some communities have established sheltering options for pets. Contact your local emergency management agency to see if there are any emergency animal shelters in your community or along your evacuation route.
- Contact hotels and motels outside your immediate area to check their policies on accepting pets and restrictions on the number, size, and species. Ask if "no pet" policies could be waived in an emergency.
- Ask friends, relatives, or others outside your area if they could shelter your animals. If you have two or more pets, they may be more comfortable if kept together, but be prepared to house them separately.
- Prepare a list of boarding facilities and veterinarians who could shelter animals in an emergency; include 24-hour telephone numbers. Ask local animal shelters if they provide emergency shelter or foster care for pets in a disaster situation. Animal shelters may be overburdened, so this should be your last resort unless you make such arrangements well in advance.
- Keep a list of "pet friendly" places, including their telephone numbers, with other disaster information and supplies. If you have notice of an impending disaster, call ahead for reservations. Hotels and motels with "no-pet" policies may waive these policies during a disaster, particularly if the pet is housed in a carrier. Contact establishments along your evacuation route to see if they will waive "no-pet" rules, and make sure you have adequate facilities and supplies for your pets.
- Carry pets in a sturdy carrier. Animals may feel threatened by some disasters, become frightened, and try to run. Being in its own carrier helps reassure a pet.
- Have identification, collar, leash, and proof of vaccinations for all pets. At some locations, you may need to provide veterinary records before boarding your pets. If your pet is lost, identification will help officials return it to you.
- Assemble a portable pet disaster supplies kit. Keep food, water, and any special pet needs in an easy-to-carry container.
- Have a current photo of your pets in case they get lost.
- Create a plan in case you are not at home during an emergency to ensure that someone takes care of your pets, even evacuating them if necessary. The plan should include these elements:
 - Give a trusted neighbor the key to your home and instructions, as well as your daytime (work or school) contact information.
 - Make sure the neighbor is familiar with your pets and knows the location of your pet emergency kit.
 - Make sure the neighbor listens to a local radio or television station for

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emergency information and puts your shelter-in-place or pet evacuation plan into action.

- Have a plan to communicate with your neighbor after the event. You will want to arrange a meeting place in a safe area so you can be reunited with your pets.
- Contact your local emergency management agency, humane society, and animal control agency to see if your community has sheltering options for animals and for families with pets. If not, learn more about emergency animal shelters and volunteer to include this option in local disaster preparedness efforts.
- Learn pet first aid and keep your pet first aid kit up to date.

COLLEGE STATION EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

A DIVISION OF THE COLLEGE STATION FIRE DEPARTMENT



