

Emergency Preparedness: Where do I start?

Does your family know where they would go or what to do in the event of a disaster? This is a good topic to discuss at any time and to work together to develop a family plan for the different types of severe weather that we experience in Northeast Iowa – tornadoes, flooding, and blizzards to name a few. Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another and review what you will do in different situations. Consider a plan where each family member calls, or e-mails the same friend or relative in the event of an emergency. An out-of-town contact is suggested as they will likely not be affected by the same disaster.

Building a good 72 hour kit is the best place to get started. If you watched the struggles of those burdened by other communities who experienced hurricanes, tornadoes and flooding, you saw what can happen to the unprepared. A home 72 hour kit filled with the basics of emergency preparedness is good insurance against the unknown.

Create a 72-Hour Kit

- Water—one gallon per person, per day
- Food—non-perishable, easy-to-prepare items. Make sure to have a non-electric can opener and some food that doesn't need to be cooked, just in case. Alco has a complete food kit you can purchase and it is good for 20 years. Some people purchase canned goods and rotate the food every 3 months.
- Flashlights and batteries (those cheap LEDs are awesome for this)
- A battery powered or hand crank emergency radio
- A good first aid kit
- Extra blankets or sleeping bag for each person
- Multi-purpose tool, wrench, etc to disconnect utilities if needed
- Sanitation and personal hygiene items
- If you have pets, don't forget about them!
- Activities to keep busy – puzzles, games, deck of cards, books, paper, pencil
- Whistle to signal for help
- Cell phone with chargers, inverter or solar charger
- Copies of personal documents (medication list and pertinent medical information, proof of address, deed/lease to home, passports, birth certificates, insurance policies)
- Family and emergency contact information

A kit like this will get you through most disasters. It won't be a lavish existence but as long as your home is still standing it should keep you out of a shelter. This would be considered the bare bones of emergency preparedness and the foundation to build upon.

For a more complete kit, you may want to consider adding:

- An extra supply of any medications you may be taking and personal hygiene supplies (toothbrush and paste, soap, towels, etc)
- Dust mask or cotton t-shirt to help filter contaminated air and plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- Local maps
- Cash or traveler's checks and change
- Emergency reference material such as a first aid book
- Complete change of clothing including a long sleeved shirt, long pants and sturdy shoes. Consider additional clothing if you live in a cold-weather climate.
- Household chlorine bleach and medicine dropper – When diluted, nine parts water to one part bleach, bleach can be used as a disinfectant. Or in an emergency, you can use it to treat water by using 16 drops of regular household liquid bleach per gallon of water. Do not use scented, color safe or bleaches with added cleaners.
- Fire extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Mess kits, paper cups, plates, paper towels and plastic utensils
- Baby supplies (bottles, formula, baby food, diapers)
- Two-way radios
- Extra set of car keys and house keys
- Rain gear
- Work gloves
- Extra clothing, hat and sturdy shoes
- Scissors

Create a Plan

Create a Personal Support Network: If you anticipate needing assistance during a disaster, ask family, friends and others to be part of your plan. Share each aspect of your emergency plan with everyone in your group, including a friend or relative in another area who would not be impacted by the same emergency who can help if necessary. Include the names and numbers of everyone in your personal support network, as well as your medical providers in your emergency supply kit. Make sure that someone in your personal support network has an extra key to your home and knows where you keep your emergency supplies. If you use a wheelchair or other medical equipment, show friends how to use these devices so they can move you if necessary and teach them how to use any lifesaving

equipment or administer medicine in case of an emergency. Practice your plan with those who have agreed to be part of your personal support network.

Inform your employer and co-workers about your disability and let them know specifically what assistance you will need in an emergency. Talk about communication difficulties, physical limitations, equipment instructions and medication procedures. Always participate in trainings and emergency drills offered by your employer.

Create a Plan to Shelter-in-Place: There are circumstances when staying put and creating a barrier between yourself and potentially contaminated air outside, a process known as sheltering-in-place and sealing the room can be a matter of survival. If you see large amounts of debris in the air, or if local authorities say the air is badly contaminated, you may want to shelter-in-place and seal the room. Consider precutting plastic sheeting to seal windows, doors and air vents. Each piece should be several inches larger than the space you want to cover so that you can duct tape it flat against the wall. Label each piece with the location of where it fits. Immediately turn off air conditioning, forced air heating systems, exhaust fans and clothes dryers. Take your emergency supplies and go into the room you have designated. Seal all windows, doors and vents. Understand that sealing the room is a temporary measure to create a barrier between you and contaminated air. Listen to the radio for instructions from local emergency management officials.

Create a Plan to Get Away: Plan in advance 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. Become familiar with alternate routes as well as other means of transportation out of your area. If you do not have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to. If you typically rely on elevators, have a back-up plan in case they are not working. Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together.

Consider Your Service Animal or Pets: Whether you decide to stay put or evacuate, you will need to make plans in advance for your service animal and pets. Keep in mind that what's best for you is typically what's best for your animals. If you must evacuate, take your pets with you, if possible. However, if you are going to a public shelter, make sure that they allow pets. Some only allow service animals.

Fire Safety: Plan two ways out of every room in case of fire. Check for items such as bookcases, hanging pictures or overhead lights that could fall and block an escape path.

If you have any questions, you may contact Howard County Healthcare Coalition members listed above or visit the websites below.

Resources

<http://www.ready.gov/kit>

<http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/get-kit>

<http://americanpreppersnetwork.com/2014/07/survival-kit.html>

<http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan>

<http://www.ready.gov/build-a-kit>