

7 Disaster Planning Steps You Can Take at Home

In many ways, creating the family disaster plan is the most important part of your preparations. If you know what options you have in a dangerous situation and have made some of the choices ahead of time, you won't panic and all of you will be moving in the same direction.

Each plan will be unique, just like the family that makes it. Here are some tips for constructing your emergency preparedness plan:

Plan with your family. Call a family meeting and involve everyone in the process. The more involved they are, the more likely they are to provide good ideas or notice gaps in the plan.

Plan for each type of disaster. Consider each calamity you may have to deal with. Begin with fire. Plan your escape routes, where your meeting place will be when you get out of the house and how you will get there. Move on to disasters that will require you to remain in your home, such as a tornado, and those that may require evacuation, such as flooding. Choose what room or rooms will be best for a shelter at home and what routes and methods you will take if you have to leave. Decide where you will seek medical attention if necessary, and how you will deal with injuries if medical personnel aren't immediately available.

Plan for wherever you will be. Some members of your household may be at school, work or other sites away from the home. Be sure you discuss how you will handle being separated, and make sure you know what the disaster plans at those locations are so you can adapt your family plan accordingly.

Plan in writing. Write down the basics of your plan. This will not only aid memory, it will make it available for you to review periodically. Make a list of emergency supplies.

Plan to be flexible. The basics of your plan should be firm, but leave room for changing conditions and common sense. Surprises should allow you to change your mind, not derail you.

Plan for special needs and special skills. Account for any family members who will need extra assistance or special items. Know who will help them and how you will attend to their needs. If you have medical training, trade skills or language skills you can use to help yourselves or your community, consider how you will put them into practice. Consider taking courses in first aid and CPR.

Plan to communicate. A family communication plan is crucial. No matter how bad things are, being able to locate your loved ones will be a major stress reliever, save time and perhaps save a life.

The good news? It only takes three simple steps:

1. List each person's name, important personal information (such as allergies and medical conditions), email address and cell phone number.
2. List the workplaces, schools and other places they frequent. Each listing should have an address, main phone number, the separate extension of your loved one if they have one, and the location that the school or business will evacuate to in a disaster.
3. Add the contact information for a person out of town you can all contact as well as a place you can



meet in your neighborhood and a place you can meet in the region if your neighborhood is in danger. Add the police non-emergency phone number, the numbers of your doctors, pharmacist, religious leaders, insurance companies, restoration company and veterinarian and/or kennel. Include the address of Safe and Well (www.safeandwell.org), a website where you can post a message letting friends and family know you're OK.

Give a copy of this list to each member of the family. Keep one in an easily accessible spot in your home and place one in each of your emergency kits. Give one to a trusted neighbor or friend in case of fire.

Image courtesy of Stuart Miles / FreeDigitalPhotos.net