



Hospice of the Twin Cities

Hospice Insights

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Emergency Preparedness/Disaster Planning

*September is National Emergency Preparedness month.
Are you prepared?*

That is a frightening question, isn't it? The answer for most of us is probably a resounding "NO". How do you prepare? Do you prepare for every emergency in the same way? What are the possible disasters in our area? What if we need to evacuate? What do we do with our pets? What kind of disaster planning has my organization done? How has the government prepared? What can I do for my community? Where do I start?

The best thing all of us can do is prepare for ourselves and our families. When we know our families are taken care of, we can then think of the other areas of our life that may need preparation, as well.

Initially, it is necessary to define the different types of disasters. Natural disasters are the most common. They would include floods, tornadoes, blizzards, storms and major illness outbreaks, such as pandemic flu.

There are also unnatural disasters such as terrorist events (bombs, airplanes used as weapons, etc.) and bioterrorist events, which are intentional acts of destruction using biological warfare agents (anthrax, smallpox, botulinum, plague, and tularemia).

Now knowing what we are up against, it is time to initiate your own disaster plan. Where will your family be when disaster strikes? How will you find each other? Will you know if your children are safe? What will you do if your basic services are shut off (water, gas, electricity, telephones, etc.)? According to the *American Red Cross*, **knowing what to do is your best protection and your responsibility!**

The *American Red Cross* has done a beautiful job of helping people prepare for any disaster. After all, it is their business to care for those affected by disaster. They have published "**Four Steps to Safety**", a step by step process to help individuals prepare for disaster. They are as follows:

1. Find out what could happen to you.
 - a. What types of disaster are most likely to happen?
 - b. Learn about your communities warning signals.
 - c. Ask about animal care after disasters.

*"Do the right thing.
It will gratify some
people and astonish
the rest."
-Mark Twain*

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- c. Ask about helping the elderly or disabled.
 - d. Learn about disaster plans at your work, schools, or any other place your family spends time.
2. Create a disaster plan.
 - a. Discuss types of disasters and explain what to do in each case.
 - b. Pick two (2) places to meet.
 - i. Right outside the home.
 - ii. Outside of your neighborhood.
 - c. Ask an out-of-state friend to be your family contact person.
 - d. Discuss what to do in an evacuation.
 - i. Listen to a battery powered radio and follow the instructions of local emergency officials.
 - ii. Wear protective clothing & sturdy shoes.
 - iii. Take your Disaster Supplies Kit.
 - iv. LOCK YOUR HOME.
 - v. Use travel routes specified by local authorities.
 - vi. **If you have time**, shut off utilities, post a note telling others when you left and where you are going and make arrangements for your pets.
 - e. Plan how to take care of your pets.
 3. Complete This Checklist
 - a. Install smoke detectors on each level of your home.
 - b. Conduct a home hazard hunt.
 - c. Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit.
 - d. Take a Red Cross first aid and CPR class.
 - e. Determine best escape routes from your home (find two places in each room).
 - f. Find the safe spots in your home for each type of disaster.
 4. Practice and Maintain Your Plan
 - a. Quiz family members every six months so they remember what to do (especially children).
 - b. Conduct fire and emergency evacuation drills.
 - c. Replace stored water every three months, and stored food every six to twelve months (Tuna lasts 10 years).
 - d. Test and recharge your fire extinguisher(s) according to instructions.
 - e. Test your smoke detectors monthly and change batteries once a year.

Now that you have the steps to help you prepare, what do you do if disaster strikes?

- **Remain calm and patient. Put your plan into action.**
- Check for injuries and get help for those seriously injured.
- Listen to your battery-powered radio for instructions.
 - o Evacuate if told to.
 - o Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes.
- Check for damage in your home
 - o Use flashlights (do not use matches or electrical power).
 - o Check for fires, fire hazards or other household hazards.
 - o Sniff for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. If you smell gas turn it off at the main valve, open windows, and evacuate the house.
 - o Shut off any other damaged utilities.
 - o Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline, etc.
- **REMEMBER TO...**
 - o Confine/secure pets.
 - o Call family contact.
 - o Check on neighbors, especially elderly or disabled.
 - o Make sure you have an adequate water supply.

- o Stay away from downed power lines.

You may be at work when disaster strikes, so it is also very important for you to know your organization's/facility's disaster plan. If this is the case, you will be grateful you have already prepared your family. If you do not have an emergency preparedness plan at work, start the ball rolling. If you don't know where to start, there are thousands of resources on the web, probably more than you ever wanted to know about. It is also possible to hire a consultant to help you with your organizational emergency preparedness plan.

The Federal government, under Homeland Security, also has a plan. Homeland Security states "In case of a terrorist attack or other emergency we must have the tools and plans in place to make it on our own" and "prepare for the unexpected". This is more reinforcement for getting your own plans in place. Homeland Security has other advice for preparing for emergencies:

- **Get a Kit** of emergency supplies.
 - o Enough supplies for at least three (3) days [seven days is better].
 - o Consider two (2) kits – one for home and one to take with you if you must evacuate.
 - o One (1) gallon of water per person/per day.
 - o Three (3) day supply of non-perishable food.
 - o If living in a cold climate, have warm clothes and a sleeping bag for each member of the family.
 - o If terrorists release biologicals in the air:
 - Create a barrier between yourself and any contamination by having something available that covers your mouth and nose.
 - Two (2) to three (3) layers of a cotton t-shirt, handkerchief, or towel.
 - Filter masks.
 - Remember, barrier **MUST FIT SNUGLY** so air you breathe comes through the barrier, not around it.
 - Include duct tape and heavy-weight garbage bags or plastic sheeting to seal windows and doors.
- **Make a Plan**
 - o Develop a Family Communications Plan
 - Each family member calls, or emails the same person in the event of an emergency (an out of town friend or relative is best).
 - First consideration may be "if you stay put or get away". Have a plan for both scenarios.
 - Watch TV and listen to the radio for official instructions as they become available.
 - o Create a Plan to Shelter-in-Place
 - Create a barrier between you and the outside.
 - If you see debris in the air, or local authorities say the air is contaminated, you may want to shelter-in-place and seal the room.
 - Bring everyone inside, including pets, lock doors, close windows, air vents and fireplace dampers. Turn off air conditioning, forced air heating systems, exhaust fans and clothes dryers.
 - Take emergency supplies to the room you have designated as your shelter.
 - Seal all windows, doors and vents.
 - Watch TV, listen to the radio, check internet for instructions.
 - o Create a Plan to Get Away
 - Plan in advance how you will assemble your family and where you will go.
 - Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options.
 - Become familiar with alternate routes and other means of transportation out of your area.

- Take your emergency kit with you.
 - Lock the door behind you.
 - Take pets with you if you are to evacuate (they may not be allowed inside a shelter)
 - Drive with windows and vents closed, keep air conditioning and heater off if the air is contaminated and listen to radio for instructions.
- Know Emergency Plans at Day Care, School, and Work
 - How will they communicate with families?
 - If an employer, make sure you have an emergency preparedness plan.
 - Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together.
- **Be informed** about what might happen.
 - There are significant differences in preparing for a biological, chemical, explosive, nuclear and radiological attack and you must prepare differently for each.
 - Go to www.ready.gov for information about potential terrorist threats, or call
 - **1-800-237-3239** ~ be prepared to adapt this information to your circumstances and follow instructions received from authorities on the scene.
- **Get Involved** in preparing your community.
 - After preparing self and family, prepare your community. Join *Citizen Corps*.

Resources:

- American Red Cross
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - www.cdc.gov/business
- Department of Health and Human Services - www.pandemicflu.gov
- Minneapolis Emergency Preparedness - communications@ci.minneapolis.mn.us
- MVNA - mvna.org
- US Department of Homeland Security - www.ready.gov
- Medical Emergency Reserve Corps - www.medicalreservecorps.gov
- MDH—infection control guidelines (i.e. some prevention ideas):
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/avian/hcp/ic.html
- MDH/CDC—posters/flyers to place around the workplace in a variety of languages:
www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/covercough.htm
- CDC link—"Healthy Habits" posters/flyers for adults and "Germ Stopper" posters for children:
www.cdc.gov/germstopper/materials.htm
- ECHO—(Emergency and Community Health Outreach) exists to ensure that people with limited English proficiency receive life-saving health and safety information: www.echominnesota.org
- MN state plan—healthcare role section; also info about state mortuary plan, etc.:
 - www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/pandemic/plan/6healthcare.pdf (should be DMORT assisting the state and local funeral homes.)
 - www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/pandemic/plan/plan.html (link to whole state flu plan—the technical sections talk about roles & responsibilities.)



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We're on the Web!
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Mission Statement

Hospice of the Twin Cities' mission is to enhance the quality of the lives of our patients and their families by providing respectful care based on maintaining dignity, alleviating physical, psychosocial, and spiritual suffering, advocating for fundamental rights, and affirming the sacred value of life.