

Planning for Emergencies During Times of War and World Uncertainty

Overview

Ways to prepare for the possibility of a threat near home.

- Learn about local help and resources
- Make an emergency plan with family and close friends
- Create a neighborhood plan
- If you hear news that an emergency has occurred

A war with Iraq raises worries for all of us about the possibility of loss of life abroad and potential acts of terrorism at home. One helpful and productive way to deal with this concern is to gather information and resources. It can also help to make plans to protect yourself and the people you love in the unlikely event of an emergency.

Learn about local help and resources

Think about emergency planning as a way of protecting yourself and the people you love -- by gathering information and resources that you will probably never need to use.

- *Think about what could happen in an emergency situation.*
 - What if electricity is discontinued?
 - What if water isn't available or is contaminated?
 - What if there is a fire?
 - A biological threat?
 - A chemical threat?
 - What if the TV and Internet are not available to provide important information?
 - Do you know what to do or where to go if there is a disaster or crisis in your area?

Write down a list of questions to ask about each of these issues. For example: If there is no electricity, do I have the provisions I need to take care of myself, such as a flashlight, candles, etc.? How will I get news and information and stay informed without a TV or computer? Do I have a transistor radio?

- *Find answers to these questions from reliable sources and gather the resources you need to be prepared.* Find out who can help. Call your local police station, hospital, or local Red Cross. Another possible source of help is the local health authority in your area (it may be the Department of Health or Public Health) that will be linked with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under emergency conditions. This local phone number can be obtained by calling the U.S. CDC at 888-246-2675. Another informative Web site is www.ready.gov.
- *Learn about local health agency resources.* Each community will have its own way of providing emergency information. Your local health agency is likely to be the group that can be counted on to work closely with fire, police, and hospitals if an

emergency occurs. If you live in a large metropolitan area, an Office of Emergency Management may serve this function. When calling, be sure to verify that you have the right phone number and the right agency for emergency information and guidelines. Find out about any plans to inform the public about handling emergencies that could arise as a result of terrorist activity.

- *If you want to know more about chemical and biological threats, go to the government Web site www.bt.cdc.gov. This is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control Web site. Read about these issues now, and call with questions. Sometimes descriptions of certain types of emergencies can be very frightening. Remember that the chances of your being affected are very remote. But it helps to be informed.*

Make an emergency plan with family and close friends

- *Post emergency phone numbers by your phones.* This includes police, fire, ambulance, hospital emergency room, rescue, and a poison control center. Explain to your children how to use these numbers and under what conditions.
- *Consider carrying a list of phone numbers for family and friends with you at all times.*
- *Talk as a family about your emergency plan.* Do this in a calm way that will not make children more anxious. You might say, “It’s important to talk about what we would do in an emergency, like a fire or flood or some other disaster. That way we can be prepared as a family.” If possible, give your children at least two phone numbers of family members or friends to contact in an emergency, even if these people live in another town or city. They may be able to help you stay in touch with each other if your home phone is not in service.
- *Choose a place where the whole family can meet in case of an emergency.* You may want to choose two places: one near your home to use in a sudden emergency, such as a fire, and a second place outside of your neighborhood in case people can’t get home.
- *Talk with other family members and close friends about your plan.* Let close relatives or friends know about personal papers or phone numbers you have entrusted with others in the event of an emergency.
- *Talk with your children’s school, child care center, or family child care provider about emergency plans.* Who will the school or center call if it closes? Do children need to remain in the building during an emergency? What provisions has the school or center made for a prolonged stay by the children? Who should the provider call? How will you get in touch with the school, center, or your provider if telephones are not working?
- *Make sure emergency supplies are packed or easily accessible.* They should include
 - a one-day supply for each person of clothes and a coat
 - first-aid supplies

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- necessary medications, toilet paper, contact lenses/eyeglasses
 - a battery-powered radio, flashlight, and extra batteries
 - blankets
 - booster cables
 - fire extinguisher
 - bottled water and nonperishable high-energy foods such as tuna lunch kits, granola bars, protein bars, and dried fruit
 - a shovel and flares
 - a tire repair kit and pump
- *Be sure your home emergency kit is in place now.*
 - *Talk with your manager about emergency procedures and provisions in your workplace.*
 - *Assemble personal papers in one place and be prepared to take them with you if necessary.* This includes personal identification cards, passports if you have them, and prescriptions. Keep in a safety deposit box other essential papers such as a copy of your will, a power of attorney, mortgage information, stocks and bonds, and insurance papers. Have some cash and credit cards on hand to take with you. You may wish to consider making copies of your personal papers and giving them to a trusted family member or friend for safekeeping.
 - *If you have time, learn CPR and other first-aid skills.* This can be invaluable to you and your family at any time and even in a non-emergency situation.
 - *Understand the conditions under which leaving home or staying home is the right thing to do.* Find out the facts and stay informed. Remember the following:
 - During certain types of chemical events, going outdoors might be dangerous.
 - There are ways to make the building safe where you are.
 - At home, you may want to choose a “safe” room with as few windows and doors as possible, with a water supply.
 - For chemical events, your “safe” room should be high up to avoid vapors that will sink.

Finally, keep in mind as you make emergency plans that people have different ways of reacting in a crisis. One person may be calm; another may be angry or upset. Try not to judge anyone’s feelings. It’s important to respect other people’s feelings and emotions, which may be heightened in an emergency situation. If someone becomes upset, remain as calm as possible yourself and gently reassure the other person that he or she is not alone. Maintaining the attitude that you will overcome any situation regardless of how difficult things are will help you focus on what needs to be done.

Create a neighborhood plan

A neighborhood plan is a way to stay connected with and help each other in a crisis. To create a neighborhood plan, talk with a small circle of neighbors. Consider choosing six to ten families whom you know somewhat or very well, and share ideas.

- *Share ideas on practical ways you can help each other in the event of an emergency.*
- *Create a phone tree and e-mail list to communicate with each other.*
- *Find out about special skills your neighbors may have (medical, mechanical, technical, etc.).*
- *Find out if anyone is disabled or frail and may need special help.*
- *Plan joint or backup child care arrangements together in case parents can't get home.*
- *Talk about whether you want to agree to evacuate together if it becomes necessary to leave your home or neighborhood.* For some people, forming a “pact” with neighbors or friends is reassuring and helpful.

If you hear news that an emergency has occurred

If an emergency has occurred in another city or town, stay tuned to local radio, television, or online news for reliable information. Don't tie up local emergency phone lines if the danger to your area is not imminent.

If the emergency has occurred in your town or very nearby, do the following:

- *Do your best to verify the facts.* Don't make decisions or act on the basis of rumor.
- *Call the emergency numbers you have posted near your phone.* Rely on the local health agency and fire or police to advise you.
- *Call family contacts to tell them how you are doing and about your plans.* You can be reassured by information your family and friends may have. This will help you stay calm.
- *Don't panic.* Stay calm and focus on your family's emergency plan. Be clear in your own mind about whether leaving your home is warranted. In many cases, the best plan will be to stay sheltered in your home.

Remember that the most helpful thing you can do today is to prepare your family's emergency plan and gather resources and information. Keep in mind that taking on this kind of emergency planning responsibility can be very stressful. Commit yourself to sharing the responsibility with your spouse or partner, family members and friends, and your neighborhood network.