

## Disaster can strike quickly and without warning: Make a plan

During an emergency, the more you have planned ahead of time, the calmer and more assured you and your family will be. These six steps will help you through the process: :

**Talk, Plan, Learn, Check Supplies, Tell, Practice.**

### Talk

Talk with your family about disasters that can happen where you live.

Talk with your family about why you need to prepare for these events. Calmly explain the potential dangers, and plan to share responsibilities and work together as a team. Make sure every family member knows their particular responsibilities. Designate an alternate in case a person is not there at the time.

### Plan

Plan where to meet after a disaster. Choose two places:

- Right outside your home, in case of a sudden emergency such as a fire.
- Outside your neighborhood, in case you cannot return home or are asked to evacuate your neighborhood.

After determining your meeting places, you should also:

- Determine the best escape routes from your home.
- Find two ways out of each room. Also, determine the best two escape routes out of your neighborhood/community.
- Ask an out-of-town friend to be your "family contact". After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Other family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know your contact's phone number.
- Find out how to care for your pets. Many shelters do not allow them because of health regulations. For more information on how to care for your pets, visit our Animal Safety section on [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).

### Learn

Each responsible family member should learn how and when to turn off utilities such as electricity, water and gas. Ask someone at the fire department to show you how to use the fire extinguisher you store in your home.

- Learn about your community's disaster warning signals: what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them.
- Learn where the safe spots are in your home for each type of disaster.
- Learn about the disaster plans at your business, your child's school or daycare center, or other places where you and your family spend time.

### Check supplies

- Review your disaster supplies and replace water and food every six months.
- Visit the Build a Kit page for more information.
- Check batteries in smoke alarms every year and make sure one is installed on each level of your home.
- Check if you have adequate insurance coverage for each disaster.

## **Tell**

Tell everyone in the household where emergency contact information is kept. Make copies for each member of the family to carry with them. Be sure to include an out-of-town contact. It may be easier to call out of the area if local phone lines are overloaded or out of service.

Tell your children how and when to call 911 or your local Emergency Medical Services number for help. Post emergency telephone numbers by phones.

Complete the information on an Emergency Contact Card and make copies for each member of your family to carry with them. Be sure to include an out-of-town contact on your Contact Card. You may be able to reach someone out of town when local phone lines are out of service or overloaded.

## **Practice**

Conduct fire drills and practice evacuating your home twice a year. Drive your planned evacuation route and plot alternate routes on a map in case main roads are impassible or gridlocked. Practice earthquake and tornado drills at home, school and work. Commit a weekend to update phone numbers, disaster supplies and review your plan with everyone.

## **Chemical or Airborne Hazards**

When there is concern about a potential exposure to a chemical or other airborne hazard, local officials will advise you to "shelter-in-place." This is unrelated to taking shelter on the lowest level of your home in case of a natural disaster like a tornado. To shelter-in-place:

1. Close and lock all windows and exterior doors.
2. Turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems.
3. Close the fireplace damper.
4. Get your disaster supplies kit and make sure the radio is working.
5. Go to an interior room without windows that is above ground level. In the case of a chemical threat, an above-ground location is preferable because some chemicals are heavier than air, and may seep into basements even if the windows are closed.
6. Using duct tape, seal all cracks around the door and any vents into the room.
7. Listen to your radio or television for further instructions. Local officials may call for evacuation in specific areas at greatest risk in your community.