Safety Tips

THINK SAFETY FIRST

Natural Disasters & Summer Heat

The best way to survive a natural disaster is to property prepare for one. Every household should have an emergency survival plan in place. Properly preparing for the possibility of a natural disaster is a responsible step to take . An organized plan can save lives and ease trauma should the worst occur.

Survival Essentials

Each part of the world faces unique challenges in preparing for natural disasters. These differences will impact how you prepare. Your local Red Cross chapter can provide information about the types of disasters that may impact your location. But, no matter where you live, or what type of disaster you may encounter, every home should have a supply of five disaster necessities.

1. **Water**: People can live for long periods of time without food, but water is essential for survival. Every home should have an emergency supply of water. Properly store a minimum of 6 gallons per family member in non-breakable containers.
2. **Food**: Store a supply of nonperishable food items such as canned goods and packaged food that doesn't require cooking. This food might be the only nourishment your family receives during the aftermath of a disaster so choose a wide variety of items. Remember to pack some manual can openers along with your food supply. By keeping food safe, you will avoid possible infection and health risks.
3. **Survival Kit**: Every home should have a waterproof tote full of important items, such as flashlights, radios, new batteries, extra clothing and various tools. Put together a disaster survival kit or purchase a ready-made package.
   - In addition to an emergency kit, create a "Go Bag" that holds basic supplies such as clothes, cash and important papers. This bag will be used if you ever have to evacuate your home quickly.
4. **First-aid Kit**: Make sure you have a fully updated first-aid kit in your home at all times. These kits should have a wide variety of bandages, aspirin, gauze and antibiotic cream.
5. **Medications**: Be sure to have an emergency supply of your important medications. Keep at least a 3-5 day supply and check the expiration dates regularly. If you have complicated medical issues, discuss an emergency plan with your doctor.

Prepare Your Home and Family

Every household will face unique issues and concerns when creating a family disaster plan. Creating a cohesive family plan can be accomplished by understanding the specific dynamic and needs of your family and your home.

Prepare for medical emergencies: Hold regular family meetings and assign duties to each member of the household. Train all responsible family members in CPR. Teach young children how to dial 911.

Utilities: Make sure every adult family member knows how to turn off the gas, electricity and water in your home. In addition, everyone should be able to use a fire extinguisher.

Fix home hazards: Search for hazards around your home to identify and fix potential dangers such as defective wiring, leaks and ceiling cracks.

Safe spots: Identify safe locations in your home should a disaster such as a tornado or earthquake occur.

Contact numbers: Post a list of emergency contact numbers in every room of your house. Make sure your local hospital, fire department, work phone numbers, family numbers, doctors and neighbors are all listed.

Meeting places: Choose two locations to meet up with your family: one close to home and a second in a different area.

Take care of special needs: Seniors and people with disabilities often have physical challenges that make disaster planning more difficult. It's important to establish a plan that addresses individual needs.

Protect your pets: Make sure you create a pet disaster kit that includes food, water, licenses and current photos of your pet. Speak to your veterinarian about your pet's individual needs.

Prepare at Work

A natural disaster can strike at any time. Once you've prepared your home and family, focus on changing a few things at work.

- Speak with your office's safety officer to get a copy of the company's evacuation plan;
  - If your office doesn't have a person monitoring safety, ask that one be appointed;
- Get a copy of the building map and highlight all exits and stairways;
- Find out where the fire extinguishers are located;
- Make sure all first-aid kits are up-to-date;
- Keep some water and nonperishable food items at your desk;
- Carry identification information and current contact numbers in your wallet or purse; and
- Be sure to update emergency contact information with your Human Resources representative anytime there's a change.

Prepare Your Car

Given how much time we spend on the road, you should also prepare your car for the worst.

- Always keep your tank at least half-full.
- Perform regular maintenance so your car is in good shape.
- Keep a supply of food and water in the trunk.
- Keep a first aid kit in the car.
- Have a flashlight in the car.

Insurance and Emergency Funds

Although you may have to make sacrifices to put aside money and buy policies, knowing you can financially weather a disaster can provide peace of mind.

- Check your homeowners' policy to see what coverage you already have.
  - If you have an apartment, consider buying renters' insurance.
- If your location may experience events not covered by your policy, such as floods or earthquakes, consider buying supplemental coverage.
- To find the better rates, Consumer Reports suggests accepting a higher deductible.
- Take an inventory of your possessions to document their value. This list will help you if you need to file an insurance claim.
- Make sure your policy reflects the real replacement costs of your home and possessions.
- As you most likely will not have immediate access to your insurance, also set up an emergency fund.
  - An account at a financial institution with multiple branches means you'll have access to your money even if local banks are closed.

Heat Tips for Seniors and Other at Risk Individuals

Senior people (that are aged 65 years and older) are more prone to heat stress than younger people for several reasons:

- Senior people do not adjust as well as young people to sudden changes in temperature;
- They are more likely to have a chronic medical condition that upsets normal body responses to heat; and
- They are more likely to take prescription medicines that impair the body's ability to regulate its temperature or that inhibit perspiration.

You can follow these prevention tips to protect yourself from heat-related stress:

- Drink cool, nonalcoholic, non-caffeinated beverages. (If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask him how much you should drink when the weather is hot. Also, avoid extremely cold liquids because they can cause cramps.);
- Rest;
- Take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath;
- If possible, seek an air-conditioned environment;
- If you don't have air conditioning, consider visiting an air-conditioned shopping mall or public library to cool off;
- Keep warm areas ventilation if not cooled. Proper ventilation will promote adequate sweat evaporation to cool the skin;
- Wear lightweight clothing
- If possible, remain indoors in the heat of the day;
- Do not engage in strenuous activities;
- Sunblocks and sunscreens with a protection factor of 15 (SPF 15) can be very helpful when one is exposed to extreme direct sunlight.

What You Can Do to Help Protect Senior Relatives and Neighbors

If you have senior relatives or neighbors, you can help them protect themselves from heat-related stress:

- Visit older adults at risk at least twice a day and watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke;
- Take them to air-conditioned locations if they have transportation problems;
- Make sure older adults have access to an electric fan whenever possible.

What You Can Do for Someone With Heat Stress

If you see any signs of severe heat stress, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the affected person. Do the following:

- Get the person to a shady area;
- Cool the person rapidly, using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the person in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the person with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously;
- Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101˚–102˚F;
- If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions;
- Do not give the person alcohol to drink;
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature: the body's temperature rises rapidly, the body loses its ability to sweat, and it is unable to cool down. Body temperatures rise to 106 ˚F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes.

Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

Signs and Symptoms of Heat Stroke

Warning signs vary but may include the following:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103˚F);
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating);
- Rapid, strong pulse;
- Throbbing headache;
- Dizziness; and
- Nausea.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids.

Signs and Symptoms of Heat Exhaustion

Warning signs vary but may include the following:

- Heavy sweating;
- Paleness;
- Muscle Cramps;
- Tiredness;
- Weakness;
- Dizziness;
- Headache;
- Nausea or vomiting;
- Fainting;
- Skin: may be cool and moist;
- Pulse rate: fast and weak; or
- Breathing: fast and shallow.

Community Service Unit officers work in partnership with community members, community groups, schools, businesses, other governmental departments and agencies to help bring all available resources to address crime and disorder problems. For more information about our Community Service Unit, call the COP's Program Supervisor, Corporal Allison Dugas, at (301) 927-8126, or stop by the office at 5012 57 Avenue A3, Bladensburg, MD.