

Why Prepare for Disaster?

Every year, disasters disrupt hundreds of thousands of lives. Some can have long lasting effects- people are seriously injured or killed, property damage runs into the millions of dollars and long term emotional support may be necessary.

If a disaster occurs in your community, local emergency responders and disaster relief organizations will help. You and your family need to be ready, too, since local responders may not be able to reach you immediately, or they may need to focus their efforts elsewhere.

Being prepared and understanding what to do will reduce the fear, anxiety and losses that accompany most disasters. You understand the importance of making a family disaster plan and having emergency supplies on hand. You and your family should be ready for home evacuation, understand how and where to take refuge in emergency shelters and know how to care for your family's basic medical needs.

You can also reduce the impact of emergencies and disasters by making sure that your household's economic and health needs are protected with adequate insurance coverage.

In addition, you can mitigate the impact of disasters by practicing prevention – keeping your home up to housing codes, checking for hazards that might exist in and/or around your home and understanding the types of disasters that are likely to affect your community.

You should know how to respond in any disaster that could occur in your area—hurricanes, utility outages, extreme cold, extreme heat, severe storms or flooding, to name a few, and be ready to be self sufficient for at least three days. This may mean providing for your own shelter, first aid, food, water and sanitation.

This preparedness guide can help. It contains step-by-step guidance and instructions about how to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.

While the majority of the guide focuses on the physical impacts of disasters, there is also information about the emotional effects of losing a loved one, a home, or treasured possessions. When under stress, people can become tired, irritable, depressed, angry and withdrawn. Children and older adults are especially vulnerable to the psychological effects of a disaster.

Take the time to review this guide with all the members of your household and include everyone in the planning process. By including children in the process, you will teach them how to respond to emergencies and give them a sense of what to expect. Being prepared, understanding the impact of disasters and how you will respond will help you and your family to stay calm when you are faced with an emergency.

How to Get Started

- † Check with your local emergency management office to find out what types of disasters could strike your community. Ask for any information that might help you prepare and possibly reduce the risks you face.
- † Refer to the appropriate sections in this guide. Each section covers a specific hazard or special population and describes how to prepare and what to do when a disaster is pending or takes place.
- † Review the “General Preparedness”, “Emergency Supply Kits”, “Evacuation,” “Emergency Sheltering” and “Recovering From Disaster” sections to begin your planning process. These sections specifically address what you need to do to establish a basic emergency plan for your family.
- † Use this guide as your foundation for disaster preparedness and safety. Consider getting involved in local emergency preparedness and response activities by volunteering in your community. Contact your local American Red Cross to become trained in disaster response and take a CPR/First Aid course to become trained in these life-saving skills.