

What We Can Do to Save Our Lives

Preparedness information for seniors, written by seniors

Dear Friends,

We are a group of older adults who experienced a two-week power outage when a massive ice storm hit the Greater Rochester, New York, area. We were unprepared for such a disaster. If we had only taken a few simple steps to prepare ourselves for such an event, we could have eliminated many of the hardships we had to endure.

We are just like many of you. Some of us are in good health but aren't quite as agile as we used to be; some of us have hearing or vision problems; others use a cane or wheelchair. Whatever our limitations, however, we need to be prepared. We can be prepared.

For six months we have researched and discussed disasters and preparedness with the American Red Cross. To avoid getting caught unprepared, we urge you to immediately review the enclosed information and fill in the appropriate local emergency numbers. Be sure to keep this helpful reference tool in a handy place for quick reference.

Sincerely,

Vi, Melvin Q., Julia L., Nancy C., Marion V., Jam, Dorothy M., Janet H., Fran, Roger H., Mary S., and LaVinia

Take responsibility

Prepare NOW; disasters can strike quickly and without warning. Even if you have physical limitations, you can still protect yourself. Local officials and relief workers will not be able to reach everyone right away, so take responsibility. Keep in touch with your neighbors; look out for each other and be aware of anyone who may need special help. Knowing what to do is your best protection.

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How you may be notified of a possible emergency

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio — These special radios provide the earliest warning with an alarm that will alert you in case of anticipated bad weather. To learn more, call your local National Weather Service office.

- Commercial radio and television stations — Know your designated Emergency Alert System stations (EAS). My EAS Radio Station is: _____ My EAS Television Station: _____
- Door-to-door warning from local emergency officials — Strictly follow their instructions.

Family Disaster Plan

By planning ahead, you can avoid waiting in long lines for critical supplies, such as food, water and medicine. Remember to review your plan regularly. Use the following checklist to get started:

- Assemble a disaster supplies kit
- Arrange for someone to check on you
- Plan and practice the best escape routes from your home
- Plan for transportation if you need to evacuate to a Red Cross shelter
- Find the safe places in your home for each type of emergency
- Have a plan to signal the need for help
- Post emergency phone numbers near the phone
- If you have home health care service, plan ahead with your agency for emergency procedures
- Teach those who may need to assist you in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment; be sure they will be able to reach you

Medical Emergency Supplies

For your safety and comfort, have at least three days' worth of emergency supplies (both medical and general) packed and ready in an easy-to-carry container, such as a backpack or duffel bag. Make sure your bag has an ID tag and label any equipment, such as wheelchairs, canes or walkers that you need. Use the following checklist to get your emergency supplies started:

- First-aid kit
- Prescription medicines, list of medications and dosages, list of allergies
- Extra eyeglasses and hearing-aid batteries
- Extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen
- List of the style and serial numbers of medical devices, such as pacemakers
- Medical insurance and Medicare cards
- List of doctors, relatives or friends to notify if you are injured
- Battery-powered radio and flashlight with extra batteries for each
- Change of clothing, rain gear, and sturdy shoes
- Blanket or sleeping bag
- Extra set of keys
- Cash, credit cards, change for the pay phone
- Personal hygiene supplies
- Phone numbers of local and non-local relatives or friends
- Insurance agent's name and phone number

It may not be necessary to evacuate, or you may be ordered to stay in your home. If this happens, you will need in addition to the above items:

- One gallon of water **per person per day**. Remember, plan for at least 3 days. Store water in sealed, unbreakable containers that you are able to handle. Identify the storage date and replace every six months.
- Non-perishable food supply (including any special foods you require). Choose foods that are easy to store and carry, nutritious and ready-to-eat. Rotate them regularly.
- Manual can opener you are able to use
- Non-perishable food for any pets

Shelter In Place

In a chemical emergency, you may be told to "shelter in place." This means staying where you are and making yourself as safe as possible until the emergency passes or you are told to evacuate. In this situation, it is better to remain indoors than to go outside where the air may be contaminated. If you are told to shelter in place:

- Close all windows in your home
- Turn off all fans, heating, and air conditioning systems
- Close the fireplace damper
- Go to an above-ground room (not the basement) with the fewest windows and doors
- Take your disaster supplies kit with you
- Wet some towels and jam them in the crack under the doors
- Tape around doors, windows, exhaust fans and vents, preferably with duct tape
- Use plastic garbage bags to cover windows, outlets and heat registers
- If you are told there is danger of explosion, close the window shades, blinds or curtains. To avoid injury, stay away from the windows
- Stay in the room and listen to your radio until you are told all is safe or you are told to evacuate

Red Cross shelters may be opened if a disaster affects a large number of people, or if the emergency is expected to last several days. All American Red Cross emergency services are provided free of charge, including food, temporary shelter and basic first aid. To learn about Red Cross shelters serving your area, listen to your battery-powered radio or check with your local Red Cross chapter.

Be prepared to go to a shelter if

- Your area is without electrical power
- There is a chemical emergency affecting your area
- Flood water is rising
- Your home has been severely damaged
- Police or other local officials tell you to evacuate

If you need to evacuate

- Coordinate with your home care provider for evacuation procedures
- Try to car pool if possible
- If you must have assistance for special transportation call the American Red Cross or your local officials
- Wear appropriate clothing and sturdy shoes
- Take your disaster supplies kit
- Lock your home

- Use the travel routes specified or special assistance provided by local officials. Don't take any short cuts, they may be unsafe
- Notify shelter authorities of any needs you may have. They will do their best to accommodate you and make you comfortable

In some communities, people who need help or transportation during an evacuation are asked to register that need with their local government. Call your local emergency management office for information and suggestions about what to do during an evacuation.

If you are sure you have enough time

- Shut off water, gas, and electricity if instructed to do so and if you know how. Gas must be turned back on by a professional
- Let others know when you left and where you are going
- Make arrangements for pets. Animals other than working animals may not be allowed in public shelters

Residential Fires

One emergency we could all face at any time is a home fire. Despite any physical limitations we may have, there are some things we can do to improve our safety.

Plan two escape routes out of each room. If you cannot use stairways, make special arrangements for help in advance. Never use elevators. Sleep with the bedroom door closed, as this gives you extra minutes of protection from toxic fumes and fire. Vacuum your smoke detector occasionally to remove dust, and test the battery regularly. As a reminder, change batteries on the same day each year.

In case of fire

- Remain calm.
- Drop to the floor and crawl. Most fire fatalities are due to breathing toxic fumes and smoke; the cleanest air is near the floor.
- Feel any door before you open it. If it is hot, find another way out.
- If your smoke detector goes off, do not waste time getting dressed or collecting valuables or pets. Get out of the house immediately.
- Do not try to fight the fire. Call for help from a neighbor's phone.
- Never go back into a burning building for any reason.
- If your clothes catch on fire, drop to the floor and roll to suffocate the fire. Do not run; this fans the flames and makes them worse.
- If you are in a wheelchair or cannot get out of your house, stay by the window near the floor. If you are able, signal the need for help.

Grandchildren's Safety

It is estimated that 3.4 million children live in a household headed by grandparents. Many children visit their grandparents often. To prepare a safe environment at home for children:

- Store matches and lighters up high, away from children.
- Move cleaning chemicals like cleansers, soap, drain cleaner, and other poisons to high cupboards OR install a child-proof lock if you must keep these items in low cabinets.

- Store prescription medicines and over-the-counter drugs like aspirin, cough medicines, and stomachache remedies in a cabinet out of reach of children.
- If children are playing outside or in a pool when skies grow dark or you hear thunder, ask them to come indoors right away.
- Install plastic covers over all exposed electrical outlets.

Children can help grandparents, too

Have children test each smoke detector in your home to make sure it is working by using a broom handle to push the test button. See that the battery is changed in each detector that doesn't work. Ask children to draw a floor plan of your home and show two ways out of every room in case of fire.

For More Information

If you would like more information on disaster planning or on the disasters likely to happen in your area, the following information is available:

- Emergency Preparedness Checklist
- Your Family Disaster Plan
- Your Family Disaster Supplies Kit
- Food and Water in an Emergency
- Are You Ready for a Tornado?
- Are You Ready for a Flood?
- Are You Ready for an Earthquake?
- Are You Ready for a Fire?
- Are You Ready for a Hurricane?
- Are You Ready for a Winter Storm?

The following may be ordered free from the U.S. Fire Administration:

Smoke Detectors and Fire Safety: A Guide for Older Americans
Pub. #L-126
FEMA/U.S. Fire Administration
P.O. Box 2012
Jessup, MD 20794-2012

NOAA Weather Radio information

NOAA Weather Radio
Stock #: NOAA PA 76015

Contact your local National Weather Service office for frequency information, type of information broadcast and where to obtain a NOAA Weather Radio.

The following may be ordered from FEMA:

Preparedness for People with Disabilities (earthquake)
Pub. # FEMA-75

Hurricane Awareness-Action Guidelines for Senior Citizens
Item #8-0440

FEMA
P.O. Box 2012
Jessup, MD 20794-2012

Emergency information may also be obtained from your utility company.

Emergency Phone Numbers

Local emergency services number: _____

Ambulance: _____

Nearest relative: _____

Local contact: _____

Out of state contact: _____

Doctors: _____

Local Red Cross Chapter: _____

Insurance Agent: _____

Other: _____