
5 WAYS TO ... to prepare for disaster

Karen Klages

September 3, 2006

We're not talking oxygen masks and underground shelters in the back yard. September may be National Preparedness Month, but we're focusing on the simple things you can do to make your home and your family a bit more prepared, in the event of a natural or manmade disaster. Ideas come from Amy Trager, a Des Plaines-based professional organizer, and Citizen Corps, an organization that helps coordinate volunteer activities in emergency situations and is coordinated nationally by the Department of Homeland Security.

--Karen Klages, kklages@tribune.com

1. Family plan. Sit down with your family and organize a communication plan. Designate one person who does not live in your city as an out-of-town contact. Make sure everyone in the family has that phone number with them at all times. In the event of an emergency and the family is not together, everyone should contact that person to let them know where they are.

2. Evacuation. Do a run-through evacuation of your home and area. Think about what you would take and include items that are comforting to your children -- one or two favorite books, stuffed animals, etc. Likewise, know the disaster plan at your children's schools. And at work, run through that evacuation as well, especially if you work in a high-rise. Know where the exits are and try walking down the stairs just to see how long it takes you and if you're capable of doing it.

3. Be neighborly. If you have elderly neighbors or others who need help and you are capable of giving it, include them in your evacuation plan -- and let them know about it. If they don't have a car, plan on taking them to some point.

4. Assemble it yourself. Put together a family survival kit and keep it somewhere that is "accessible to everyone but wouldn't be confused with everyday goods," says Trager, noting the basement or laundry room as possible sites. Include:

- Enough water for everyone in the family for three days -- figure a gallon a person a day.
- Keep a three-day supply of non-perishable food, such as canned fruits and vegetables, tuna, granola bars, raisins.
- Don't forget food and water for pets.

- And remember to include a can opener.

Also include: rubber gloves, bandages, ointments, scissors, tweezers, aspirin and other over-the-counter medications, prescription medicine, blankets, garbage bags, duct tape, masking tape, a whistle and a stash of money. Remember batteries for the battery-powered radio and flashlight. And maps of your area. In the event of a major disaster, the roads you are most familiar with may be impassable, and you might have to use alternative (and less familiar) routes.

5. Utility player. Make sure you know where the utility mains for your home (gas, electricity, water) are located. And then make sure you know how to turn them off manually.

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