

# Be Prepared!

This guide will help you be better prepared for an emergency affecting the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

- Learn what to do before, during, and after an emergency.
- Create a family emergency plan.
- Prepare an Emergency Go Kit.

## Protective Actions

Protective actions are steps we take to protect our family members and ourselves from harm. The two most common forms of emergency protective actions are shelter-in-place and evacuation. During and after an event, stay tuned to your local emergency radio or television station or listen to emergency personnel to know which protective action you should use.

### Shelter-in-place

Shelter-in-place involves simply staying in your house or inside any other location. In the event of an emergency such as the release of a hazardous material, it is not always recommended to immediately evacuate. Leaving your house might expose you to harmful agents that have been dispersed into the air.

## Before an Emergency Strikes

It is necessary for you to learn about the things you can do to be prepared before an emergency occurs. Two actions that will help you do this are to develop an emergency plan, and Emergency Go Kit.

## Create an Emergency Plan

In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, we use the Emergency Alert System (EAS) during emergencies. When the decision is made to activate the EAS, original programming will be interrupted and an emergency message will be broadcast. It is important that you listen to instructions. Emergencies may strike when your family members are away from home, so find out about plans at your workplace, school, or anywhere else you and your family spend time. After creating a household emergency plan, you should take time to review it with your family at least every 6 months. Steps for creating a household emergency plan include:

- Meet with household members and discuss the dangers of possible emergency events, including fire, severe weather, hazardous spills, and terrorism.
- Discuss how you and your family will respond to each possible emergency.
- Discuss what to do in case of power outages or personal injuries.
- Draw a floor plan of your home. Mark two escape routes from each room.

- Teach adults how to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at main switches. If you do turn off natural gas service to your home, call your gas provider to restore service. ***Do not attempt to restore gas service yourself.***
- Post emergency contact numbers near all telephones, pre-program emergency numbers into phones with autodial capabilities.
- Teach children how and when to dial 9-1-1 to get emergency assistance.
- Teach children how to make long-distance telephone calls.
- Pick a friend or relative that all family members should call if separated. It is often easier to call out-of-state during an emergency than within the affected area.
- Instruct household members to turn to your local radio or television station for EAS information.
- Pick two meeting places:
  - a. A place near your home.
  - b. A place outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home after an emergency.
- Take a basic first aid and CPR class. Contact the American Red Cross for more information.
- Keep family records in a watertight and fireproof safe. Inexpensive models can be purchased at most hardware stores. ***If members of your household have disabilities or are elderly, find out what services may be available to aid in their care or evacuation in the event of an emergency.***

## Prepare an Emergency Go Kit

During an emergency, electricity, water, heat, air conditioning, or telephone service may not work. Preparing an Emergency Go Kit ahead of time can save precious time in the event you must evacuate. You should consider including the following items in an Emergency Go Kit:

- At least a 3 to 5 day supply of water (1 gallon per person per day). Store water in sealed, unbreakable containers. Replace every 6 months.
- A 3 to 5 day supply of non-perishable packaged or canned food and a non-electric can opener.
- A change of clothing, rain gear, and sturdy shoes.
- Blankets, bedding, or sleeping bags.
- A first aid kit and prescription medications (be sure to check the expiration dates).
- An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses and solution (be sure to check the expiration dates).
- A list of family physicians, important medication information, and the style and serial number of medical devices, such as pacemakers.
- Special items for infants, the elderly, or family members with disabilities.
- A battery-powered radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries.
- Identification, credit cards, cash, and photocopies of important family documents, including home insurance information.
- An extra set of car and house keys.

- Tools such as screwdrivers, cutters, and scissors; duct tape; waterproof matches; a fire extinguisher; flares; plastic storage containers; needle and thread; pen and paper; a compass; garbage bags; and regular household bleach.

## **Pets**

In the event of an evacuation, make arrangements for your pets in advance. Make sure you have:

- Identification collar and rabies tag.
- Carrier or cage and leash.
- Any medications (be sure to check expiration dates).
- Newspapers and plastic trash bags for handling waste.
- Sufficient supply of food, water, and food bowls.
- Veterinary records (most animal shelters do not allow pets without proof of vaccination).

## **Neighbors**

Meet with your community members to plan how you could work together until help arrives. If you're a member of a neighborhood organization, such as a home association or crime watch group, participate in emergency preparedness activities and planning for your community. Know your neighbors' special skills and consider how you could help those with disabilities and special needs.

## **After an Emergency Strikes**

It is important to stay calm. Even after an event, there may still be many dangers. What seems like a safe distance or location may not be. Stay tuned to your local emergency radio or television station, and follow the advice of trained professionals. Unless told to evacuate you should avoid using roads to allow emergency vehicles access. Here are some helpful hints:

### **If Your Power Goes Out**

- Assist family members or neighbors who may be vulnerable if exposed to extreme heat or cold.
- Locate a flashlight with batteries to use until power comes back on. Do not use candles—this can cause a fire.
- Turn off sensitive electric equipment, such as computers, DVD players, and televisions.
- Turn off major electric appliances that were on when the power went off. This will help to prevent power surges when electricity is restored.
- Keep your refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep cold in and heat out.
- Do not use the stove to heat your home, this can cause a fire or fatal gas leak.
- Use extreme caution when driving. If traffic signals are out, treat each signal as a stop sign—come to a complete stop at every intersection and look before you proceed.
- Do not call 9-1-1 to ask about the power outage. Listen to the local radio stations for updates.

## **Business Preparedness**

There are basic steps that a business should take to prepare for an emergency. Some of these steps include:

- Prepare backups and store off site all computer records (i.e. payroll, inventory records, etc.).
- Have an emergency plan in place for staff and customers and test this plan regularly.
- Maintain sufficient insurance coverage for your business.
- Identify critical business functions that absolutely must continue (i.e. shipping, inventory control, payroll) and come up with processes to ensure these will carry on.

## **Technological Emergencies**

If you are notified or become aware of a technological hazards emergency such as a chemical, biological, or radiological emergency, fire or explosion, do not panic. The best defense from any of these emergencies is education and awareness. If you need to get out of the surrounding area or are directed to evacuate, do so immediately and:

- Take your Emergency Go Kit.
- Lock your home.
- Travel on routes specified by local authorities.
- Travel with car windows up and air vents, air conditioner, and heater turned off.

Emergency personnel are trained to respond to these situations. They will tell you what to do, either at the incident site, or via TV or radio. Emergency broadcasts can be received via the Emergency Alert System (EAS).

If time permits:

- Close and lock windows and doors and close all vents and fireplace dampers.
- Turn off all fans and heat or air conditioning.
- Shut off water, gas, and electricity before leaving.
- Post a note telling others when you left and where you are going.
- Make arrangements for your pets.

For more information regarding the different types of chemical and biological agents, visit the [Centers for Disease Control Website](#) and/or [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#).

If you are instructed to stay inside:

- Close and lock windows and doors.
- Turn off ventilation systems, water and gas.
- Seal gaps under doorways and windows with duct tape.

- If you suspect chemical or biological agents have entered your house, move to a room in the interior of the house on a higher floor if possible. Many harmful agents that could enter a house will fall and accumulate at lower levels.
- If harmful vapors do enter the house, cover your nose and mouth with a damp or wet cloth.
- Stay inside until authorities say it is safe.

## **Natural Hazards Emergencies**

Communities are vulnerable to a variety of types of severe weather, including thunderstorms, hurricanes, flash floods, snow storms, and tornadoes. It is important for you to understand the difference between a watch and a warning for severe weather. A severe weather watch means that severe weather may develop. A severe weather warning means a storm has developed, take cover immediately. The safest place to ride out any storm is inside of a secure building or well-built home. You should:

- Listen to weather updates and stay informed.
- Be ready to evacuate if necessary.
- Keep away from windows and doors.
- Have your Emergency Go Kit handy.

### **Lightning**

Lightning is produced in all thunderstorms. If you are close enough to a storm to hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck by lightning. Move inside as quickly as possible. If caught outside:

- Try to get inside a building as quickly as possible.
- If a building is not available, move into a car with all windows closed.
- In an open area or field, move to a low area such as a ravine or valley.
- In a group of people, spread out, keeping several yards apart from each other.

### **Tornadoes**

Tornadoes are dangerous because of their high winds and ability to lift and move heavy objects. If you receive a tornado warning, seek shelter immediately. For additional information on severe weather conditions and precautions to take, visit the [National Weather Service Website](#).

If you are in your car:

- STOP! Get out and lie flat face down in a low area.
- Cover your head and wait for the tornado to pass.

At Home:

- Go to the basement, storm shelter, or rooms near the center of the house.

In a high rise or other public building:

- Move to the interior, preferably a stairwell or hallway.

### **Flash Flooding**

Flash Flooding can be very dangerous because of strong, swift currents:

- Move immediately and quickly to higher ground. The force of six inches of swiftly moving water can knock people off their feet!
- If flood water rise around your car, get out and move to higher ground immediately. Cars can be easily swept away in just two feet of moving water!

### **If You Need Clean Water**

Flooding can cause contamination of water supplies. Contaminated water can contain microorganisms that cause diseases such as dysentery, typhoid, and hepatitis. If you think your water may be contaminated, you should purify it before using it. This includes water used for drinking, cooking, cleaning dishes or bathing. The best way to purify water is to boil it. Bring water to a boil for 3 – 5 minutes, and then allow to cool before drinking. Pouring water back and forth between two containers will improve the taste by putting oxygen back into the water.

### **Emergency Food Supplies**

It is possible for a healthy person to survive on half of their usual food intake for an extended period. Here are some helpful tips:

- Use canned foods, dry mixes and other staples you use everyday.
- Foods that require no refrigeration, preparation, or cooking are the best.
- Make sure you have a manual can opener and disposable utensils in your emergency food supply.
- Individuals with special diets and allergies will need to be considered as well as toddlers and the elderly.