



## Be prepared -- plan for emergencies

In your day-to-day living, disasters may seem a distant possibility. Yet natural disasters such as floods or tornadoes... Technological or environmental accidents such as chemical spills... Or service disruptions such as power failures during the winter can strike any community, including yours, at any time.

If you're unprepared for a disaster, it can shatter your life.

Expect the unexpected and plan for it. Knowing what to do when a disaster strikes will help you better control the situation and be in a better position to recover more quickly.

No community is equipped to handle all the demands of a catastrophe. Help your community by preparing yourself.

Make sure everyone in your family knows what to do before, during and after an emergency.

Set up a family meeting this week to discuss how you can best prepare for an emergency. Have your own plan.

## Know what to do before a disaster strikes

Will your whole family think clearly and logically in a crisis? Not many of us can. So do your clear, logical thinking now - when you have the time to be thorough.

### Know your enemy

Find out what natural and technological disasters could happen in your community. Know what to expect during each disaster. Your best protection in any emergency is knowing what to do.

### Look at your own situation

#### ■ *Hazard-proof your home*

Anticipate what could go wrong in your home and take corrective action. If you live in an earthquake zone, move or secure objects that could fall and injure you: books, plants, mirrors, lamps, china. Secure objects that could tip and start a fire: water heater, gas appliances. (See also: [Severe storms](#))

If you live in a tornado zone, secure anything that might be blown around or torn loose, both indoors and outdoors. (See also: [Floods](#))

If you live in a flood-prone area, remove all chemical products from the basement. Move irreplaceable belongings to upper floors.

You can install a non-electric, standby heating unit that is not dependent on a motor, fan, or any other electrical device to function. Vent the stove or heater adequately with the type of chimney flue specified for it. Never connect two heating units to the same chimney flue at the same time.

#### ■ *Post emergency numbers*

Keep a list of key telephone numbers and addresses near the phone. (If there's been a major disaster, use the phone only if it's absolutely necessary. Emergency crews will need all available lines.)

#### ■ *Check your insurance*

Make sure you have adequate insurance coverage for the range of risks in your community.



### **Prepare an emergency survival kit**

Aim to have an [emergency survival kit](#) that will keep you and your family self-sufficient in your home for at least three days.

If you've got a flashlight, a battery-operated or crank radio, food, water and blankets, you already have part of an emergency survival kit. All you have to do is assemble the supplies in an easy-to-carry container (in case you have to evacuate).

- *Keep a smaller survival kit in your car*

A blanket, extra clothing, a candle in a deep can, and matches can save your life. [More...](#)

### **Other procedures**

Here are some other steps that can make your life more tolerable in the event of a disaster.

- *Choose an out-of-area or out-of-province family contact*

Choose someone in another province to be your family's contact. After the disaster, it is often easier to call out of the region, as the local phone lines might be tied up. Make sure all family members memorize this person's name and telephone number and know they should call your family contact if they get separated from the family.

- *Have a show and tell*

*If you live in a house:* teach members of your family where and how to shut off the water, electricity and gas supply. Make big, easy-to-see signs, saying Breaker Panel (or main circuit breaker), Gas and Main Water supply. Put these signs near the breaker panel, gas valve and main water valve.

*If you live in an apartment:* show everyone in your family where to find the emergency exit. Show them where the fire alarm is and explain when and how to use it. In a fire or other emergency, don't use the elevators. You'll be trapped in the elevator if the power goes out.

- *Learn about other community emergency plans*

Your kids' school and your workplace might have their own emergency plans. Find out what they are and how they apply to you. You may be separated from your family and need to know how to get reunited. You can assist in educating your children about school plans, etc.

- *Avoid potential emergency situations*

Heed weather warnings and avoid driving and other activities in hazardous weather conditions.

### **Know what to do during a disaster**

Here are some basic procedures for specific disasters. (For more information on these and other disasters, contact us, your provincial or territorial [emergency management organization](#) or your local [Red Cross](#)  office.)

#### **During an earthquake**

- *If you are in a building*

Stay inside. Stay away from windows. Get under a heavy desk or table and hang on. If you can't get under something strong, flatten yourself against an interior wall, protect your head and neck.



▪ *If you are outside*

Go to an open area. Move away from buildings or any structure that could collapse. Stay away from power lines and downed electrical wires.

▪ *If you are in a car*

Stop the car and stay in it. Avoid bridges, overpasses or underpasses, buildings or anything that could collapse on you and your car.

**During a tornado**

▪ *If you are in a building*

Go to the basement immediately. If there isn't one, crouch or lie flat (under heavy furniture) in an inner hallway or small inner room or stairwell away from windows.

Stay away from large halls, arenas, shopping malls, etc (their roofs could collapse).

▪ *If you are caught outside*

If there is no shelter, lie down in a ditch or ravine, protecting your head.

▪ *If you are driving*

Get out of and away from the car. It could be blown through the air or roll over on you. Lie down as above.



**During a severe lighting storm**

▪ *If you are in a building*

Stay inside. Stay away from windows, doors, fireplaces, radiators, stoves, metal pipes, sinks or other electrical-charge conductors. Unplug TVs, radios, toasters and other electrical appliances. Don't use the phone or other electrical equipment.

▪ *If you are outside*

Seek shelter in a building, cave or depressed area. If you're caught in the open, crouch down with your feet close together and your head down (the "leap-frog" position). Don't lie flat -- by minimizing your contact with the ground, you reduce the risk of being electrocuted by a ground charge. Keep away from telephone and power lines, fences, trees and hilltops. Get off bicycles, motorcycles, and tractors.

▪ *If you are in a car*

Stop the car and stay in it. Don't stop near trees or power lines that could fall.

**During a flood**

Turn off basement furnaces and the outside gas valve. Shut off the electricity. If the area around the fuse box or circuit breaker is wet, stand on a dry board and shut off the power with a dry wooden stick.

Never try to cross a flooded area on foot. The fast water could sweep you away.

▪ *If you are in a car*

Try not to drive through flood waters. Fast water could sweep your car away. However, if you are caught in fast-rising waters and your car stalls, leave it, and save yourself and your passengers.



### **During a winter power failure**

Turn the thermostat(s) down to minimum and turn off all appliances, electronic equipment and tools to prevent injury, damage to equipment and fire. Power can also be restored more easily when the system is not overloaded.

Use proper candle holders. Never leave lit candles unattended.

Don't use charcoal or gas barbecues, camping heating equipment or home generators indoors. Home generators are handy for backup electricity in case of an outage, but there are hazards.

To operate a generator safely, follow the manufacturer's instructions and always:

- ensure that the generator operates outdoors in well-ventilated conditions, well away from doors or windows;
- connect lights and appliances directly to the generator. If extension cords must be used, ensure they are properly rated cords approved by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA).

Direct installation of a generator to an existing electrical system should only be done by a qualified technician.

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## **Know what to do after a disaster**

Right after the emergency, you may be confused or disoriented. Stay calm and remember the following procedures.

### **Help the injured**

Help anyone who is injured. Get your [emergency survival kit](#) (the first aid kit should be with it).

### **Listen to the radio**

Listen to your local radio station on your battery-operated radio for instructions.

### **Don't use the telephone**

Don't use the telephone unless it is absolutely necessary. Emergency crews will need all available lines.

### **Check your home**

Check for damage to your home. Remember the following points:

- Use a flashlight -- don't light matches or turn on the electrical switches if you suspect damage or smell gas.
- Check for fires, fire hazards or other household hazards.
- Sniff for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. If you smell gas, turn off the main gas valve, open windows and get everyone outside quickly.
- Shut off any other damaged utilities.
- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline and other flammable liquids immediately. Wear protective clothing. For major spills or leaks, call in professional help.

- Confine or secure your pets.
- Check on your neighbours, especially the elderly or people with disabilities.

*If you turn off the gas, it should only be turned back on by a professional from the gas company.*

### Watch for hazards

Hazards	What to do
<b>Post-earthquake hazard</b>	
<i>Damaged buildings</i>	Stay out of damaged buildings, even if they look okay.
<i>Aftershocks</i>	Stay put.
<i>Water gets cut off</i>	Use emergency water from water heater, toilet tank, melted ice cubes.
<i>Power can go off</i>	If you live in an apartment, don't use the elevator. You'll get stuck in it.
<i>Tsunamis (huge ocean waves)</i>	If you live near the ocean, stay away from the waterfront.
<b>Post-flood hazards</b>	
<i>Contaminated drinking water</i>	Use bottled water or bring water to a rolling boil for ten minutes or add one drop of non-perfumed chlorine bleach per litre of water (or three drops per litre of cloudy water) and allow it to stand for 30 minutes before consuming. (Water should still have a slight chlorine smell.)
<i>Contaminated dishes and utensils</i>	Wash and sterilize dishes and utensils. Use boiling water or use a sterilizing solution of one part chlorine bleach to four parts water; then rinse dishes and utensils thoroughly.
<i>Basement full of water</i>	Drain the water in stages, about a third of the volume of water per day. (Draining the water too quickly can structurally damage your home.)
<b>Other hazards</b>	
<i>Food poisoning</i>	Check food supplies in refrigerator, freezers and cupboards for signs of spoilage. When frozen food begins to defrost it should be cooked; otherwise dispose of it in accordance with the instructions from local health authorities.
<i>Loose or dangling electrical</i>	Stay away. Advise the authorities if you can.

<i>wires</i>	
<i>Broken sewer and water mains</i>	Advise the authorities if you can.
<i>Contaminated flood water in the basement</i>	Disinfect every three days if the flood is severe and the house is occupied for an extended period. For the average home, mix two litres of liquid bleach into the flood water.
<i>Watch for mould</i>	Mould is a health hazard. If mould is present wear a face mask and disposable gloves. Anything that stays wet long enough will grow mould. Dry everything quickly to avoid future health problems.

### **Be ready to evacuate**

If the emergency is serious enough, you may be asked to leave your home and go to a nearby evacuation centre (like a school gym or a community hall).

### **If you have to evacuate**

- Leave immediately.
- Take your emergency survival kit with you.
- Listen to the radio and follow instructions from local emergency officials.
- If you are instructed to do so, shut off water, gas and electricity.
- Make arrangements for pets.
- Wear clothes and shoes appropriate to conditions.
- Lock the house.
- Follow the routes specified by the officials. Don't take shortcuts. A shortcut could take you to a blocked or dangerous area.
- If you have time, leave a note telling others when you left and where you went. If you have a mailbox, you could leave the note there.
- If you are evacuated, sign up with the registration centre so you can be contacted or reunited with your family and loved ones.
- If you have to evacuate your home for a prolonged period during a winter power failure, drain the water from the plumbing system. Starting at the top of the house, open all taps, flush toilets several times and open the drain valve in the basement. Drain your hot water tank by attaching a hose to the tank drain valve and running it to the basement floor drain. (If you drain a gas-fired water tank, the pilot light should be turned off -- the local gas supplier should be called to re-light it!) Unhook washing-machine hoses and drain.

### **Expect emotional reactions**

■ *You won't "act like yourself" for a while*

Most people caught in a disaster usually feel confused. They may tremble, feel numb, vomit or faint. Immediately after the disaster, they often feel bewildered, shocked, and relieved to be alive. These feelings and reactions are perfectly normal.

Later, many survivors sleep poorly, have no appetite, are angry with those around them or panic at the slightest hint of a storm. Children might start thumb-sucking or bed-wetting. These feelings and reactions are perfectly normal too.

▪ *How to get yourself and your family back on track*

Talk about your feelings. Talk about what's happened.

Encourage your children to express their feelings. They may want to do this by drawing or playing instead of talking. Understand that their feelings are real. Recognize that when you suffer a loss, you may grieve. (Yes, you can grieve the loss of a wedding photo or your grandfather's favourite ring.) You may feel apathetic or angry. You may not sleep or eat well. These are normal grief reactions. Do give yourself and your family permission to grieve and time to heal.

▪ *How to help your children*

Children exposed to a disaster can experience a variety of intense emotional reactions such as anxiety, fear, nervousness, stomach aches, loss of appetite and other reactions. These are normal and temporary reactions to danger. Parents can help relieve such reactions by taking their children's fears seriously, reassuring them, giving them additional attention and hugging them.

***A child who feels afraid is really afraid***

After a disaster, children are most afraid that:

- the event will happen again
- someone will get hurt or injured
- they will be separated from the family or
- they will be left alone.

So comfort and reassure them. Tell them what you know about the situation. Be honest but gentle. Encourage them to talk about the disaster. Encourage them to ask questions about the disaster. Give them a real task to do, something that gets the family back on its feet.

Keep them with you, even if it seems easier to look for housing or help on your own. At a time like this, it's important for the whole family to stay together.

**Checklists**

Think of any special needs that someone in your family might have. Include any other items that your family would need. Here are some suggestions.

<b><i>Babies / toddlers</i></b>	<input type="checkbox"/> diapers <input type="checkbox"/> bottled milk <input type="checkbox"/> toys <input type="checkbox"/> crayons and paper
<b><i>Other family members</i></b>	<input type="checkbox"/> prescription medication, and extra eye glasses. (Keep at least one week supply of medication in your emergency kit and include copies of prescriptions for your medicine and glasses.)
<b><i>Pets</i></b>	<input type="checkbox"/> dog/cat food

### Emergency food and water kit

Have at least a three-day supply of food and water on hand. Choose ready-to-eat foods that your family likes. And choose food that doesn't need refrigeration.

<b>Water</b>	four litres per person per day -- two for drinking and two for food preparation, hygiene and dishwashing.
<b>Food</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> canned food: soups, stews, baked beans, pasta, meat, poultry, fish, vegetables, fruits</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> crackers and biscuits</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> honey, peanut butter, syrup, jam, salt and pepper, sugar, instant coffee, tea</li></ul> <p><b>Replace canned food and dry goods once a year.</b></p>
<b>Equipment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> knives, forks, spoons</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> disposable cups and plates</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> manual can opener, bottle opener</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> waterproof matches and plastic garbage bags</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> fuel stove and fuel (follow manufacturer's instructions).</li></ul> <p><b>Don't use a barbecue indoors.</b></p>

### Emergency survival kit

- flashlight and batteries (in case the lights go out)
- radio and batteries or crank radio (so you can listen to news bulletins)
- spare batteries (for radio and flashlight)
- first aid kit
- candles and matches/lighter
- extra car keys and cash (including coins/cards for telephone)
- important papers (identification for everyone, personal documents)
- food and bottled water (See "[food list](#)")
- clothing and footwear (one change of clothes per person)
- blankets or sleeping bags (one blanket or sleeping bag per person)
- toilet paper and other personal supplies
- medication
- backpack/duffel bag (or something else in which to carry the emergency survival kit in, in case you have to evacuate)
- whistle (in case you need to attract someone's attention)
- playing cards, games

### Car kit

- shovel
- sand, salt or kitty litter
- traction mats
- tow chain
- compass
- cloth or roll of paper towels
- warning light or road flares
- extra clothing and footwear
- emergency food pack
- axe or hatchet
- booster cables

- ice scraper and brush
- road maps
- matches and a 'survival' candle in a deep can (to warm hands, heat a drink or use as an emergency light)
- fire extinguisher
- methyl hydrate (for fuel line and windshield de-icing)
- flashlight
- first aid kit with seatbelt cutter
- blanket (special 'survival' blankets are best)

### **Additional information**

Produced in cooperation with [Canadian Red Cross](#) 

Please contact your provincial/territorial [emergency management organization](#) (EMO) for regional or local information on emergency preparedness. For general information or to order our self-help brochures, please [contact us](#).

- See also: [Natural Hazards of Canada](#) and the [Canadian Disaster Database](#).