

Preparing For **EMERGENCIES** A Consumer's Guide



PENNSTATE



College of Agricultural Sciences
Agricultural Research and Cooperative Extension

What Is Consumer Emergency Preparedness—and Why Should You Be Concerned About It?

Emergency situations—including power outages, water shortages, or service disruptions, and natural disasters such as floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, and hurricanes—occur frequently around the world. However, many people are not prepared to handle these situations. Think about the last time your household was affected by an emergency. Could the emergency have been handled more easily if you had been prepared for it beforehand? With a little advance planning, you can weather many emergencies without disrupting your normal routine very much.

Consumer emergency preparedness refers to the extent to which your home and family is prepared for emergency situations. You can do several things to prepare for the unexpected. Many of these actions can be incorporated into routine household chores, such as shopping.

Purpose of This Booklet

“An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.”

This booklet aims to help you prepare your home and family for emergency situations. Being prepared *before* an emergency occurs decreases its negative impact on families and communities.

This publication contains steps you can take to prepare for emergency situations ranging from power outages to natural disasters. These preparations can help you manage until things return to normal. **Being prepared is the best defense you can have.**

Many of these suggestions are good practices at any time. If electricity, gas, water, or sewer services failed, how would you and your family adapt to the loss of these services for a day, a week,

or two weeks? How would you manage if the local grocery or discount store was closed for a week? If your family enjoys camping, you already have some idea of how to “survive” without modern conveniences.

The American Red Cross suggests preparing for emergencies by keeping a one- or two-week supply of essential food, water, and medicine. If we act responsibly as citizens and consumers, we can be ready for any potential emergency situation.

Caution! Caution! Caution!

Whenever an emergency occurs, con artists appear on the scene. People out to make a fast buck and unprincipled businessowners may try to prey on your fear and take advantage of uninformed consumers. Do not be talked into buying a service or product that is supposed to protect you from or easily fix mishaps caused by emergency situations. Instead, seek information from reliable, unbiased sources before making any major purchase. Checking with three different sources before buying goods or services is a good way to protect yourself from fraud.

Things to Do When Preparing for Emergencies



Food

1. Gather food items that your family likes to eat, are easy to prepare, and do not need to be refrigerated. Canned and dried foods are good choices. Determine

the amount you need for a two-week period by looking at past purchases. Reviewing grocery receipts from a one- or two-week period can help you decide how much to buy for emergency

purposes. Ask family members to help by developing menus based on the following emergency foods or the foods you store.

2. Rotate food items periodically by eating from the “emergency supply” and replacing what you use immediately. This will keep your emergency food supply fresh.

Food Items to Consider

CANNED

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Juices
- Milk
- Soup
- Meat (beef, pork)
- Fish
- Poultry
- Prepared foods that only need to be heated (choose items with a 6- to 12-month shelf life)



DRIED

- Sugar
- Flour
- Baking mix
- Muffin mix
- Powdered milk
- Salt, pepper, and frequently used spices
- Ready-to-eat cereal
- Uncooked instant cereal
- Pasta
- Rice
- Nuts
- Crackers
- Cookies
- Fruit (raisins, apricots, prunes)

OTHER

- Peanut butter
- Jelly
- Canned beverages
- Candy (hard)
- Vegetable oil

FOOD STORAGE CONSIDERATIONS

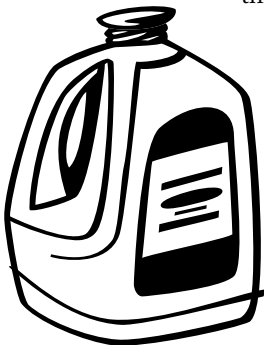
- Prepackaged foods store best and usually won't spoil until opened.
- Buy items in one- or two-use sizes so you don't have to store opened food.
- Use food-grade storage containers such as glass jars, plastic bags with sturdy closures, and vacuum-sealed containers.

WAYS TO HEAT FOOD

- Propane or kerosene stove with fuel
- Outdoor charcoal or propane grill
- Candle warmers
- Nonelectric chafing dishes
- Fondue pots
- Sterno

WATER

Expect to use at least one gallon of water per person per day, and store a three-day to two-week supply for each family member. Water can be stored in thoroughly washed plastic, glass, fiberglass, or enamel-lined metal containers. Clean, plastic softdrink containers work very well and are readily available in most areas.



HEATING AND COOLING

How can you stay warm or cool if your primary system fails? Have two or three alternative plans in place. Is there a neighbor or friend who heats with wood? Do you have a fan if the air conditioning fails? Do you know the location of the nearest emergency shelter and how to get there?

Consider the Needs of All Family Members

When gathering supplies to prepare for emergencies, think about the needs of all members of your family. Some of them may have additional requirements.

- Elderly family members may need special foods, medical items, or specialized items such as denture care products.
- Babies probably will require special foods or care needs such as disposable bottle liners, disposable diapers, toys, and medication measuring spoons.
- Anyone with an ongoing health problem that requires daily maintenance will need to have medicines on hand, such as inhalers for asthma patients or insulin for diabetics.

Basic Items

- Paper cups, plates, and bowls (no dishwashing conserves water)
- Plastic utensils
- Flashlights with batteries
- Nonelectric can opener
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Aluminum foil (to line cooking pans)
- Plastic storage containers
- Needles, thread, and scissors
- Shut-off wrench to turn off household gas and water
- Candles, lamps, and lamp oil
- Battery-operated smoke alarm
- Tarps or plastic sheeting

Safety

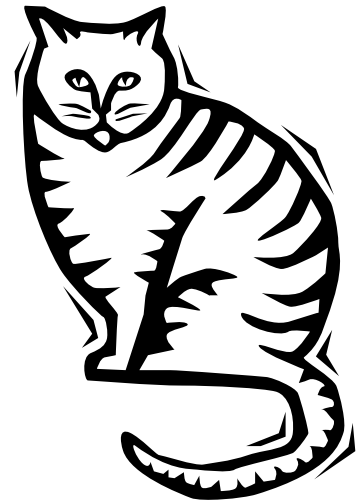
- Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors (Replace batteries each fall and spring when the time is changed from standard time to daylight savings time.)
- Fire extinguishers
- Generators (If you use one, make sure it is in a well-ventilated area away from indoor air intakes.)

Sanitation/Personal Care

- Toilet paper
- Paper towels
- Contact lenses and solutions
- Extra eyeglasses
- Plastic garbage bags and ties in various sizes
- Disinfectant
- Household chlorine bleach
- Feminine hygiene supplies

Pets

- Food (canned or dry)
- Toys
- Litter
- Bedding
- Other routinely needed items (medicine)



Entertainment

Without electricity, some common forms of entertainment, such as television, will not be available. Be sure to store items that can provide enjoyment and ease boredom without using electricity. Possibilities include:

- Craft supplies and directions
- Board games
- Jigsaw puzzles
- Cards
- Books



First Aid Kit

Take a first aid and/or cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) course or refresher. Buy a first aid kit and manual from your local American Red Cross chapter. You can also make your own basic first aid kit. Be sure to include:

- Adhesive bandages in assorted sizes
- Two- and four-inch sterile gauze pads (4–6)
- Hypoallergenic adhesive tape
- Triangular bandages (3)
- Two- and three-inch sterile roller bandages (3 rolls)
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Needle
- Moistened towelettes (baby wipes)
- Antiseptic (peroxide)
- Thermometer
- Tongue depressors (2)
- Petroleum jelly or other lubricant
- Assorted sizes of safety pins
- Cleansing agent/soap
- Latex gloves (2 pairs)
- Sunscreen
- Nonprescription drugs (aspirin or nonaspirin pain reliever)
- Antidiarrhea medication
- Antacid (for upset stomach)
- Syrup of ipecac (use to induce vomiting if advised by the Poison Control Center)
- Laxative
- Activated charcoal (use if advised by the Poison Control Center)

Medical Considerations

Other things to consider or do:

1. Have a two-week supply of any maintenance drugs (those used every day).
2. Get or update copies of your medical and dental records.
3. Get or update vaccines for tetanus, flu, and pneumonia.
4. Register with your local emergency management office if you are on a

life-support system that requires electricity, such as dialysis or pumps for intravenous drips. Make sure emergency management agencies know where you live. Check with your local hospital to see what they advise area residents on life-support machinery to do during emergencies.

5. Have a printed copy of key medical information on each family member, such as immunization records, any major surgeries, allergies, usual medications, doctors' names, and phone numbers.

Communication

The following items can help you keep in touch with other people and receive news and information in an emergency situation.

- Radio with plenty of batteries
- Walkie-talkies
- Cell phone



Financial Matters

Keep copies of all bank statements, canceled checks, mortgage payments, car payments, and other important financial transactions that could cause hardship for you or your family if proof or evidence were needed.

Keep a small amount of cash (less than \$100) on hand for emergencies in case automated teller machines are not working.

Get a copy of your credit report from one of the major credit bureaus listed below at least once each year.

Experian: 888-397-3742
www.experian.com

Equifax: 800-685-1111
www.equifax.com

TransUnion: 800-888-4213
www.tuc.com

Do not give your credit card numbers or bank account numbers to anyone who calls you. If you do, they can access your accounts.



Transportation

Keep at least a half a tank of gas in your car or truck.

Beyond Your Household

The more households that are prepared for emergencies, the better your community will be able to handle one. Spread the word about preparing for emergencies.

- Invite speakers from agencies (local emergency management agency, American Red Cross, Penn State Cooperative Extension) to discuss emergency preparations with civic or religious groups.
- Hold a yearly neighborhood meeting to update neighbors or discuss emergency preparations.

911

Remember: "911" is for emergency use *only*. Nonemergency calls could prevent or delay someone with a real emergency from getting help. Call *only* if you have an emergency and need assistance.

Final Note

The suggestions listed in this booklet will get you started preparing for emergencies. However, each family's situation is different. Give additional thought to ways you can prepare your household. For instance, clothing needs are important in cold climates, and people who use gas to cook might store slightly different foods than someone who uses electricity.

For More Information About Consumer Emergency Preparedness, Contact:

Your local Penn State Cooperative Extension office

The telephone number usually is listed under the county government offices as "Cooperative Extension" or "Penn State Cooperative Extension." You can find your local office on the Web by visiting www.extension.psu.edu.

Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN)

EDEN is a Web-based, disaster information database that includes a national network of experts and state EDEN contacts.
eden.lsu.edu

American Red Cross

For local offices, check your phone directory under "American Red Cross."
www.redcross.org

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Federal Center Plaza
500 C. Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20472
www.fema.gov



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