

Tarrant County Public Health

SAFEGUARDING

OUR COMMUNITY'S HEALTH



Are You Prepared?

Preparing for Emergencies and Natural Disasters

A guide for personal preparedness.

Why Prepare for a Disaster?

Disasters affect thousands of citizens every year, and they don't just happen to "other people" in "other communities." Here in Tarrant County, we have faced floods, fires and tornados that have caused extensive property damage, strained our emergency services and caused loss of life.

Following the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, Americans also must now be aware of the threat of terrorism, including biological and chemical attacks. The nation's Homeland Security Advisory System helps alert federal, state and local authorities – as well as individual citizens – to threat conditions and corresponding protective measures to reduce our vulnerability to terrorist attacks.

The very nature and scope of community disasters may make it difficult for emergency service personnel to respond simultaneously to every person in need. Until help arrives, your comfort and possibly your survival may **depend on your own readiness**. It is important that you know how to respond to severe weather, man-made disasters and interruptions in electricity, water, gas, telephone and other services we use every day.

It's not difficult to prepare, but it does take a bit of planning. To help you, Tarrant County Public Health has developed this guide to preparing for and responding to emergencies and natural disasters. It contains useful instructions about how to prepare for a potential disaster. Being prepared makes good sense when it comes to safeguarding your health and safety. For starters, create a family emergency plan and make sure every member of your household is familiar with the plan.

Planning Ahead

What to Do and What to Have on Hand in an Emergency

Information about disasters and directions from authorities are broadcast by the Emergency Alert System in North Texas. In our community, WBAP 820AM has been designated by the federal government as the primary station for disaster information. Electrical power may be lost, so it is important to have a battery-operated weather radio on hand to hear any important bulletins.

When disaster strikes, your first thoughts are about the safety of your family. You may not be together when an emergency occurs so plan on how you will contact one another, and think about what you will do in different emergency situations. Consider a plan where each family member calls or e-mails the same person, friend or relative in an emergency. It may be easier to make long distance calls than to call across town.

An out-of-town contact may be in a better position to communicate among family members. Be sure each person knows the phone number and has coins or a pre-paid phone card set aside for just this purpose. You may have trouble getting through right away, but be patient.

Determine a meeting place where your family will gather if conditions permit. Don't forget to include an alternate location. Know the plan for your child's school or day care.

Communicating With and Helping Those with Special Needs

If you, your friends or neighbors have a disability or special needs, you may have to take additional steps to protect yourself and others. For example, a hearing-impaired person may not be aware of imminent danger, or a person in a wheelchair may need help getting to a shelter. Consider a neighborhood communications plan to help those who may need special assistance, such as the disabled or the elderly.

Preparing an Emergency Survival Kit

Could you survive on your own for three or more days without city services such as water, electricity, gas, sewage treatment or telephones?

Assembling a survival kit is essential to your safety, health and comfort whether you are confined to your own home or must evacuate quickly. An emergency survival kit that is always ready to "**grab and go**" is an important part of any emergency plan. It should be contained in a large backpack or duffel bag, and every member of the family should know where it's kept.

The following information will help you assemble an emergency survival kit to meet the needs of your household. The basic items are water, food, first aid supplies, tools, clothing and bedding and some special items, depending on your family's needs. **The water and food in your kit will need to be changed every six months.** Review your kit's contents on a regular basis to ensure it's updated as your needs change.

3-Days
1-Gallon
1-Person

Water: The Most Important Item in Your Kit

It is critical to store enough water for your household. You will need water not only for drinking, but possibly for sanitary purposes and cooking as well. Authorities recommend a minimum of one gallon per person, per day, and to have at least a three-day supply.

Use only containers approved for water storage. Store water in plastic, fiberglass or enamel-lined metal containers. Do not use breakable containers or containers that have held toxic substances. You can purchase bottled water, but water from your tap is acceptable as long as it's been treated by a local water utility. You do not need to treat tap water before storing it in clean containers.

Seal your water containers tightly, label them with the date, and store in a cool, dark place. Remember the 3-1-1 formula, 3 days, 1gallon, 1person.

Food: Preparing an Emergency Supply

To prepare food for your survival kit, you don't need to buy unfamiliar foods. You can use the canned food, dry mixes, cereals and other staples that you normally eat. Canned foods that do not require cooking, water or special preparation also are good choices. Be sure to have a manual can opener, cups, plates and utensils.

Items you might consider for your kit include ready-to-eat meats, canned fruits and vegetables, canned or boxed juices, milk (powdered or boxed) and soup. High-energy foods such as peanut butter, jelly, low sodium crackers, granola bars and trail mix work well. Don't forget foods for infants or people on special diets.

Other Items:

First Aid Supplies

You can purchase pre-assembled first aid kits at drug and other stores, or assemble your own to match your family's needs. A home first aid kit should include most of these items.

- First aid manual
- Emergency phone numbers
- Sterile gauze
- Adhesive tape
- Adhesive bandages in various sizes
- Elastic bandages
- Cleansing agents: Alcohol wipes, Hydrogen peroxide, Soap
- Antibiotic cream
- Tweezers
- Sharp scissors
- Safety pins (assorted sizes)
- Cold packs
- Thermometer
- Gloves (vinyl gloves or latex gloves)
- Over the counter symptom relievers

Prescription Medications

It may be difficult to obtain prescription medications during a disaster because stores may be closed or supplies may be limited. Ask your physician or pharmacist about storing prescription medicines. **Be sure to:**

- Store them correctly
- Have an adequate supply on hand (minimum of 3 days)
- Check expiration dates

Tool Kit

- A portable, battery-operated radio or television and extra batteries
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Signal flares
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Wrench, pliers, shovel and other tools
- Duct tape and scissors
- Plastic sheeting or trash bags
- Whistle
- Small A-B-C type fire extinguisher
- Work gloves
- Compass
- Paper, pens and pencils
- Needles and thread
- Battery operated clock
- Utility candles
- Heavy duty extension cord
- Pet food if you have pets
- Bug repellent

Kitchen Items

- Manual can opener
- Paper plates, cups and plastic utensils
- All purpose knives
- Household liquid bleach or bleach tablets
- Sugar, salt and pepper
- Aluminum foil and plastic wrap
- Resealing plastic bags
- If food must be cooked, a small cooking stove and cooking fuel

Personal Hygiene Items

- Washcloths and towels
- Soap, hand sanitizer and liquid detergent
- Toothpaste, toothbrushes, shampoo, deodorant, comb, brush, razor, shaving cream, lip balm, sunscreen,
- Contact lens and solution and/or glasses
- Mirror
- Feminine hygiene supplies
- Heavy duty plastic bags and ties for personal sanitation uses and toilet paper
- Medium-size plastic bucket with lid
- Disinfectant

Household Documents and Contact Numbers

- Personal identification, cash or traveler's checks and a credit card
- Copies of important documents: birth certificates, marriage certificate, driver's license, social security cards, passport, wills, deeds, inventory of household goods, insurance papers, immunization records, credit card numbers, stocks and bonds, all stored in a watertight container
- Emergency and physician contact lists and phone numbers
- Extra set of car and house keys

Clothes and Bedding

- One complete change of clothing and sturdy footwear for each family member
- Rain gear, hat, gloves, socks, underwear, and thermal underwear
- Sunglasses
- Blankets or a sleeping bag for each family member

Special Items

Remember to consider the needs of infants, the elderly, the disabled and pets; include entertainment items for children such as books, games and toys. You should also consider putting together a kit of essential items to have at your place of employment and in the trunk of your car should disaster strike when you are not at home.

Evacuation

Hundreds of times each year, transportation and industrial accidents force people to leave their homes. Severe weather and resulting damage also could mean you are required to evacuate your home or community.

When evacuation is necessary, local officials provide information to the public through the media. Government agencies, American Red Cross, Salvation Army and other relief organizations provide emergency shelter and supplies. To be prepared for an emergency, you should have enough water, food and clothing to last at least three days. In a catastrophic event, you may need supplies for even longer.

The amount of time you have to evacuate depends on the disaster. However, many disasters allow no time for people to gather even the most basic supplies.

That's why you should prepare now.



Planning for Evacuation

- Learn about your community's evacuation plans and routes.
- Talk with your family about your plans for evacuation.
- Determine where you would go and how you would get there.
- Plan a place to meet your family members if you are separated in a disaster.
- Find out where children will be sent if schools are evacuated.
- Keep your car fully fueled. If an evacuation seems likely, gas stations may be closed.
- Know how to shut off your home's electricity, gas and water at main switches and valves.

What to Do if You are Told to Evacuate

Listen to local media and follow instructions. If the danger is a chemical release and you are told to evacuate immediately, gather your family and leave. Take one car; this will keep your family together and reduce traffic congestion. In other cases, you may have time to follow these steps:

- Grab your emergency survival kit.
- Secure your home by locking doors and windows, unplug appliances, turn off the water and drain faucets.
- Turn off electricity, if instructed to do so.
- Let others know where you are going.
- Leave early to avoid bad weather and traffic.

In all cases, use good judgment. Even if you have not been informed of an evacuation, you should leave your home if you feel you and your family are in danger by staying.

Shelter

Taking shelter is critical to your protection in a disaster and can take several forms. Sheltering in place is appropriate when conditions require that you stay in your home, place of employment, or other location when disaster strikes. In-place sheltering may be brief (such as going to a safe room until conditions have improved) or long term, as when you stay in your home for several days possibly without electricity or water. Consider keeping a small emergency kit in your vehicle or place of employment.

Long Term Sheltering in Place

Winter storms, flooding, and a chemical or radiological release may isolate individual households and make it necessary for you to take care of your own needs until the disaster has ended or until rescue workers arrive. If this happens, stay in your shelter until local authorities say it's safe to leave. Use your emergency kit for food, water and comfort. You may be instructed to seal doorways and windows to prevent exposure to outside hazards.

If for some reason you need additional water, other sources include melted ice cubes, water drained from the water heater faucet, if the water heater has not been damaged, and water dipped from the flush tanks (not the bowls) of home toilets. Flush tank water should be free of chemicals or cleansers. Bowl water can be used for pets.

If water pipes are damaged or if local authorities advise you, turn off the main water valves to prevent water from draining away in case the water main breaks. The pipes will be full of water when the main valve is closed. To use this water, turn on the faucet at the highest point in your house, which lets air into the system. Then, draw water as needed from the lowest point in your house, either a faucet or a hot water tank.

Unsafe water sources include radiators, hot water boilers (home heating systems), water beds, swimming pools and spas. Chemicals make this water unsafe to drink, but it can be used for personal hygiene, cleaning and other uses.

Water Treatment

Boiling is the Safest Method of Treating Water

Boiling water kills harmful bacteria and parasites. Bring water to a rolling boil for 3-5 minutes. Let cool before drinking. Boiled water will taste better if oxygen is put back in by pouring it back and forth between two clean containers.

Chlorination Using Liquid Chlorine Bleach

Use only regular household liquid bleach that contains 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite and no soap or scents. Some containers warn “not for personal use.” You can disregard this warning if the label states sodium hypochlorite as the only active ingredient and you follow these instructions carefully:

Add 16 drops of unscented bleach per gallon of water; stir and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water does not have a slight bleach odor, repeat the dosage and let it stand another 15 minutes.

Water Purification Tablets

These tablets release chlorine or iodine. They are inexpensive and available at most sporting goods stores and some drug stores. Follow the package directions carefully. **A note of caution:** People with hidden or chronic liver or kidney disease may be adversely affected by iodized tablets and may experience worsened health problems as a result of ingestion.

Prepare

One of the best means of protection is to take steps to make sure your home is safe from the potential effects of floods, tornados and other weather disasters. There are steps you can take to reduce or avoid the impact of a disaster.

- Make sure builders and contractors comply with local building codes that pertain to flood, fire, wind and other hazards.
- Obtain flood insurance where applicable.
- Relocate electric, telephone and cable lines to the upper level of your home.
- Put heating, ventilation and air conditioning units in the upper level or attic.
- Make sure your roof is secured to the main frame of your house.
- Consider building a safe room or shelter in your home for possible protection from tornados and thunderstorms
- Purchase storm shutters for exterior windows and doors.
- Install smoke alarms.

Animals and Disaster

Include pets in your disaster plan since they depend on you for their safety and survival.

- Identify a shelter or boarding facility for your pets. If you bring your pet(s) it may not be allowed to stay in the same shelter with you.
- Be sure your pet has proper identification secured to its collar.
- A current photo of your pet.
- Make sure you have a pet carrier or leash to restrain them during tense situations.
- Put pet food, water, medications, vaccination records, litter box and other supplies in your survival kit.

Natural Disasters

www.KnoWhat2Do.com

In Tarrant County, we are at risk for several natural disasters, and it pays to know what they are and how to prepare for them. While natural disasters can't be prevented, there are things you can do to minimize your risk of injury.

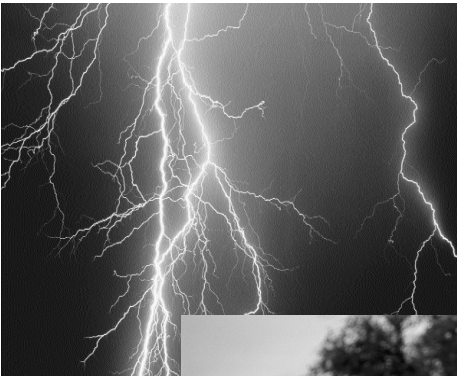
THUNDERSTORMS

A thunderstorm “watch” means that weather conditions might result in a thunderstorm. A “warning” means that a thunderstorm is in our area.

What to Do

- Pay close attention to media reports or a weather band radio for information.
- Pick a safe place in your home where family members can gather during the thunderstorm. Preferably, a room without windows, skylights and glass doors is best.
- Do not go outside during a thunderstorm.
- Close windows, blinds, and curtains securely.
- Avoid using the telephone or electrical appliances as their cords and lines can conduct electricity.
- Avoid taking baths or showers or using water.
- If you are outside, take shelter in a strong building. Never stand under trees. Also take cover in a car with a hard top - not a convertible.
- If you are boating or swimming, get out of the water immediately.
- If you are in a car, don't stop your vehicle under an overpass.
- Do not drive into any flooded roadway. As little as six inches of water may cause you to lose control of your car and two feet will sweep most vehicles away.

Turn around don't drown!



FLOODS

Flash floods are common in our area. A flood “watch” means conditions are good for a flood. A flood “warning” means that a flood has been identified in the area or will occur soon.

What to Do

- Listen to the media or weather band radio for information.
- Avoid low-lying areas.
- Never drive into flooded areas, even if it looks as though the water is not deep.
- If you must evacuate your home, secure it well before leaving; turn off your utilities and tell someone where you are going.

TORNADOS

Tornados are common in Texas and can cause extensive damage and even loss of life. Since you may only have a few minutes of warning, if any, it’s important to be prepared and take shelter immediately. A tornado “watch” means that conditions are good for a tornado. A tornado “warning” means a tornado has already been spotted in the area or indicated by radar.

What to Do

- Pay close attention to media reports or a weather band radio for information.
- Stay inside; move away from doors, windows and outside walls.
- Move to an inside room, hallway or closet.
- If you are outside or in a car, move to a sturdy shelter or lie down in a ditch.
- Do not park your car under an overpass.

FIRES

Fires are deadly. A fire can engulf your home in minutes, making early warnings essential to escape quickly.

What to Do

- Have an escape plan.
- Install smoke detectors in your home or apartment.
- Have a fire extinguisher ready and know how to use it.
- Plan escape routes from each part of your house. Everyone in your family should practice and be familiar with the escape plan.
- Pick a place outside your home to meet.
- Make sure windows, and doors are not obstructed.
- Check electrical wiring and don’t overload extension cords.
- Use fireplaces, wood stoves and space heaters very carefully.
- Know where your gas valve is and how to turn it off.
- Ask your local fire department to inspect your home for possible fire hazards.



Terrorism

Unfortunately, the threat of terrorism is now a fact of life. And while terrorists will most often pick high-profile targets, terrorism also can take the form of kidnappings, bomb scares and cyber attacks that disrupt computer systems. Whether unintentional from an accident or intentional as a result of terrorism, we face chemical, biological and nuclear threats in our lives. By knowing what to do and preparing in advance, you can reduce the harmful effects of these disasters. Two important things to remember: Listen for instructions from local health authorities, and make sure your emergency survival kit is ready to "grab and go."

Public Health, police, fire and other agencies are trained to respond to terrorist attacks, so listen to these organizations for information on what to do. You can help by staying aware of your surroundings and reporting suspicious activities, unattended packages and luggage, unusual devices and threatening conversations to authorities. Never handle suspicious packages or situations yourself. Make written notes if possible and call the police immediately.

Our federal government uses the Homeland Security Advisory System to communicate information about the threat of terrorism. With five threat levels ranging from low (green) to severe (red), there are specific recommendations associated with each set of conditions.

CHEMICAL THREATS

Chemical threats could be a train or tanker spill. Even if you can't see or smell the chemicals, serious danger could be present.

BIOLOGICAL THREATS

Biological threats are germs or biological toxins that can make you ill and your environment unhealthy. These threats can be inhaled, enter through the skin or can be ingested with food. Some can be spread to other humans and some cannot.

RADIOLOGICAL THREATS

A nuclear explosion, whether intentional or accidental, may create "fallout" that may be carried by the wind for hundreds of miles. Fallout is radioactive particles that descend to earth after a nuclear explosion.

What to Do

- Educate yourself on the different kinds of threats and how to respond to them.
- Pick an interior room in your home where you can block out air that may contain chemicals if you are instructed to "shelter in place."
- Turn off all ventilation in your home.
- If you have been exposed and experience trouble breathing, have watering eyes, or your skin stings, if possible decontaminate as quickly as possible. Cut clothing off, do not pull over head.

- Wash hands with soap and water. Remove contact lenses.
- Flush eyes with lots of water.
- Wash exposed body parts.
- Change into uncontaminated clothing.
- Call a hospital or fire department for information on where to go for decontamination.
- Make sure your emergency survival kit is ready.
- If there is a flash or fireball, take cover immediately, preferably underground. Any protection is better than none, and the more distance and time you can put between you and the explosion, the better.
- Listen to local authorities for information on what to do.
- Learn about any early warning signals and emergency aid sources.

Recovering from Disaster

After a disaster, putting your life and home back together can be a very difficult process. Your first concern should be your household's and your family's safety, security and health.

- Be aware of new hazards created by the disaster, such as washed out roads, contaminated water, broken glass, a gas leak or damaged wiring, to name a few.
- Be aware of exhaustion. Don't do too much at once. Drink plenty of water, eat healthy foods and get enough rest.
- Inform local authorities about health and safety hazards, including chemical releases, downed power lines, or smoldering insulation.
- If your home was damaged by fire, don't enter until authorities say it is safe.
- Enter carefully and check for damage. When appropriate, use a stick to poke through debris.
- Check for cracks in roofs, chimneys and foundations.
- If you smell gas or hear a hissing sound, leave immediately. If possible, turn off the main gas valve outside and call the gas company from a safe place.
- Check the electrical system. If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box if you can do so safely.
- Check water and sewage systems and turn off the main water valve if they are not working properly.
- Open cabinets carefully. Be aware of objects that may fall.
- Throw out food, cosmetics and medicine that may have been contaminated.

Coping with Disaster

The emotional toll that disaster brings can sometimes be more devastating than the financial strains of damage and the loss of a home, business or personal property. Crisis counseling programs may provide assistance to help people cope with and recover from a disaster.

No one who is involved in a disaster is untouched by it. It is normal to feel anxious about your safety. Profound sadness, grief and anger are normal reactions to abnormal events. Acknowledging your feelings will help. If you have difficulty communicating thoughts, sleeping, or become easily frustrated, you may need crisis counseling and stress management assistance. Accept help from community resources to aid your recovery.

How to Get Involved?

Medical Reserve Corps

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) is part of our national response. MRC units are comprised of local, citizen volunteers who are trained to respond to health and medical situations in support of established, local public health and emergency medical response systems. Beyond basic first aid, CPR and their own skills, these volunteers will be further trained to respond in the event of bioterrorism or a natural disaster. Anyone 18 years or older, interested in helping protect their community, such as active, inactive or retired health professionals, students in health professions and others may volunteer.

Register@www.bealocalhero.org/tarrantcounty.



Be Prepared

Do not jeopardize your safety or health during a life-threatening emergency. Use sound judgment and follow the instructions of local authorities.

Resources:

Tarrant County Public Health
817-321-4700
<http://health.tarrantcounty.com>

Federal Emergency Management
Agency
1-800-480-2520
www.fema.gov

American Red Cross
Chisholm Trail Chapter
817-335-9137
<http://chisholmtrail.redcross.org>

United States Department of Health &
Human Services
1-877-696-6775
www.hhs.gov

Department of State Health Services
1-888-963-7111
www.dshs.state.tx.us

Poison Control Center
1-800-222-1222

Centers for Disease Control &
Prevention
1-888-246-2675
www.cdc.gov

Community Information & Referral
Service
Dial 211

Important Telephone Numbers

Emergency Contacts

Dial 911 for all emergencies

Police:

Fire:

Hospital:

Local Contact:

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Nearest Relative:

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Family Work Numbers:

Name/Number:

Name/Number:

Name/Number:

Family Doctors

Name/Number:

Name/Number:

Schools

Name/Number:

Name/Number:

Tarrant County Public Health

SAFEGUARDING
OUR COMMUNITY'S HEALTH

1101 South Main Street, Fort Worth, Texas 76104
817-321-4700 <http://health.tarrantcounty.com>