

This September marks America's fifth annual Emergency Preparedness Month, a yearly campaign designed by the Department of Homeland Security to educate citizens as to the importance of preparing for a possible disaster. At the core of this outreach program is a list of four simple actions that everyone should take in order to be prepared for an emergency: Get a Kit, Make a Plan, Stay Informed, Get Involved. This year Emergency Preparedness Online will be examining each of these four steps.

BE PREPARED:

Get a Kit

By John Cavanagh and Anne Malia

An emergency preparedness kit. It won't take much time to make, and it could turn out to be your most valuable possession, should an emergency occur. It's not just a good idea; it's a person's responsibility! The very act of preparing an emergency kit is an exercise in disaster readiness because one is putting thought into the different circumstances that might arise during the course of an emergency. Having taken a good hard look at these scenarios, a person will be in a much better frame of mind to actually face them. Above all, an emergency kit is practical. And preparing a kit makes you think in a logical, practical manner. For instance, what are the basic elements of survival? The things that immediately come to mind are food, water, air, warmth, and medicine. Let's consider some of these necessities as we prepare the kit.

Food

When preparing an emergency kit, start by storing, at least, a three-day supply of non-perishable food. Look for foods that don't need any refrigeration, preparation or cooking. Try not to store too many salty foods because they can bring on thirst, and water could be scarce during an emergency. Consider storing food that have a high nourishment value, such as ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits and vegetables. Also, protein or fruit bars, dry cereal or granola, peanut butter, dried fruit, nuts, canned juices, non-perishable pasteurized milk, high energy foods, vitamins. Don't forget food specifically for infants. Remember to pack a manual can opener and eating utensils!

Once the food has been gathered, it is important to store it properly. Food should be stored in a cool, dry spot, preferably out of the sun. Perishable food, such as cookies and fruit bars, should be wrapped in plastic and kept in sealed containers. If you have open packages of food like nuts or dried fruit, empty them into screw-top jars or airtight cans in order to keep the food fresh. Stored properly in containers dry pasta, dried corn, baking powder, salt, soybeans, and white rice can be kept indefinitely. Other foods must be replaced on a regular basis. Within a year replace canned meat and vegetable soups, canned fruit, fruit juices, canned vegetables, canned nuts, jelly, peanut butter, cereal, and vitamins. Within six months replace boxed potatoes, dried fruit, crackers, powdered milk. Always discard canned goods that have become swollen, dented, or corroded.

During the emergency, examine all food for signs of spoilage before you eat it. Discard perishable food, like meat, that has been left at room temperature for over two hours. If you lose power, eat the food from the refrigerator first, then the food from your freezer, saving your stored supplies for last. It is important to keep one's hands clean when handling the food. If soap and running water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand wipe or gel. If the water supply is running low, eat salt-free crackers, whole grain cereals, and canned foods with high water content.

Water

A clean water supply is a crucial part of your emergency preparedness kit. Remember the old adage you never miss the water until the well runs dry? This will take on a dire meaning should drinkable water suddenly become unavailable. When considering water storage, it is recommended that at least three days worth of water be put aside, allotting one gallon of water per person each day. Remember, this is a rule of thumb and children, nursing mothers, and sick people may require more water. Also people living in a warmer climate may need more water.

It is important to store the emergency water supply properly, in a cool dark place in your home. The best way to store water is by using store-bought, factory-sealed water containers. The next best way is by storing water tightly in clean

plastic containers like soft drink bottles. These containers should be carefully washed, sanitized, and rinsed. Wash using dishwasher soap and then rinse. Sanitize by making a solution consisting of 1 teaspoon of liquid chlorine to a quart of water. Swish the solution around the inside of the container. Rinse the container thoroughly with clean water before using it. Remember that in a severe emergency, your water supply could be more precious to you than gold so take the time to prepare it properly. Do not use containers that cannot be sealed tightly, glass containers that can break, and containers that have once held a toxic substance. Avoid plastic milk bottles and cartons, which are hard to clean and break down over time. Also, avoid using store-bought water that has passed its expiration date. Remember to change your water supply every six months.

Medicine and First Aid

It is not uncommon for injuries such as cuts and burns to occur during emergency situations. Considering these unpleasant possibilities is an important step in preparing a well-stocked first aid kit to store with your emergency provisions. You will want to include items that can help stop bleeding, prevent infection, and assist in decontamination. Consider packing Latex, or other sterile gloves and sterile dressings to stop bleeding. Also, adhesive bandages in a different variety of sizes. In order to prevent infections, pack antibiotic ointments and burn ointments.

Remember to include cleansing agents such as soap and antibiotic towelettes, in order to disinfect. Daily prescription medications such as insulin, heart medicine, and asthma inhalers are an essential part of the kit. Non-prescription drugs like aspirin, antacid, and anti-diarrhea medication could come in handy. Remember to rotate all medicines in order to account for expiration dates.

Additional Items

Once you have covered your basic survival needs, you can expand on the contents of your emergency preparedness kit as you see fit. There is no way to tell how big – or small a future emergency might be. Or if one will occur at all. The only certain thing is that the more thorough your kit, the more prepared you will be. Ready.gov lists a number of good suggestions to consider adding to an emergency kit, including:

- Prescription medications and glasses
- Infant formula and diapers
- Pet food and extra water for your pet
- Important family documents - such as copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records in a waterproof, portable container
- Cash or traveler's checks and change
- Emergency reference material such as a first aid book or information from www.ready.gov
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person. Consider additional bedding if you live in a cold-weather climate.
- Complete change of clothing including a long sleeved shirt, long pants and sturdy shoes. Consider additional clothing if you live in a cold-weather climate.
- Household chlorine bleach and medicine dropper – When diluted nine parts water to one part bleach, bleach can be used as a disinfectant. Or in an emergency, you can use it to treat water by using 16 drops of regular household liquid bleach per gallon of water. Do not use scented, color safe or bleaches with added cleaners.
- Fire Extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Feminine supplies and personal hygiene items
- Mess kits, paper cups, plates and plastic utensils, paper towels
- Paper and pencil
- Books, games, puzzles or other activities for children

Involve Children

Parents are often hesitant to discuss some of the scary realities of a possible catastrophe with their children. It is understandable. Nobody wants to frighten their young ones. However, it is certainly possible to have an age appropriate talk about what to do in case of an emergency. Involving children in the preparation of an emergency kit is a pro-active way to introduce them to the idea of emergency preparedness, show them that they have the ability to plan and that their family is ready for anything. Children feel a sense of power when they are

allowed to help. Include the kids by asking them to come up with things to include in a disaster supplies kit. You can take some of the fear out of the idea by allowing them to pack items such as books, games or nonperishable food treats. Children can be given the job of reminding the adults to keep the kits updated. Children could make calendars and mark the dates for checking and rotating emergency supplies. Children could also help by preparing a small emergency kit for the family pet. In doing this, the child assumes the role of protector and gains a sense of empowerment.

Remember the Pets

They bring joy to the family at the best of times – so don't forget your animal(s) during the worst of times. That's when they'll need you the most. Prepare a special emergency kit with your pet in mind. Include food and water for at least three days for each pet. Remember their food and water bowls and a manual can opener. Include any medications that the animal needs. Depending on the pet, set aside litter and litter box or newspapers, paper towels, plastic trash bags, grooming items, and household bleach. Pack sturdy leashes, harnesses and carriers to transport pets safely so they do not run away. Pets can get very skittish during an emergency and if they escape you may not be able to find them again. The carrier you buy should be large enough for your pet to comfortably stand, turn around, and lie down. Remember, your pet may have to stay in that carrier for hours. Make certain to get a secure cage (with no loose objects inside it) to accommodate smaller pets. Your pet could need blankets or towels for bedding and warmth.

You're covered

Preparing an emergency kit is one of the foundations of disaster readiness. Its importance cannot be over emphasized. With a properly stocked kit in place, you will have the strength, confidence, and (most importantly) the materials to face the challenging circumstances of a sudden disaster. Having what you need, when you need it could make the difference between being swept up in the chaos of a catastrophe or weathering the emergency as calmly and effectively as possible. For more information you can visit Ready America at www.ready.gov

and The Center for Disease Control and Prevention at
<http://emergency.cdc.gov/preparedness/kit/>.

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