
Wise Notes for Consumers

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Preparing for the Unexpected

There are continuous reminders that disasters can happen at any time and any place and that each event is unique. As we watch our fellow Texans and Floridians deal with the devastation that Hurricane Harvey and Irma brought, it makes us think about how we would react in case disaster struck even closer to home. Disasters can have natural causes, as well as disasters caused by accidents or terrorists. Whatever the cause, being prepared can help lessen the effects of the crisis. Although we can't prevent disasters, we can reduce the risk of injury and even death by becoming informed. First, each family should establish its own plan, which includes:

- Escape routes: Know how to escape from each room of the house as well as from the neighborhood.
- Family communication: Know how to contact each other in case of separation, and have a designated contact out of town/state that everybody knows to call.
- Communication with emergency personnel: Know who to call and keep their numbers near each telephone and cell phone.
- Utility shutoff and safety: Know how to disconnect the home's utilities in case of gas leak or fire.
- Insurance and other important records: Keep copies of valuable personal papers in a safe place and a remote location.
- Special needs: Know what extra steps to take for family members who are very young, very old or ill.
- Safety skills: Learn how to administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid.
- Pet care: Have a plan for emergency pet care.

Second, each family member should keep a disaster supply kit within easy reach. Each kit should contain such items as:

- Water: for at least three days and at least one gallon of water per person per day.
- Food items that require no refrigeration or preparation, such as peanut butter, nuts, dried

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fruits and protein bars.

- Clean air items: nose and mouth protection masks with N-95 rating, plastic sheets and duct tape.
- Extra clothing: at least one change of clothes per person, plus shoes and blanket.
- First aid kit
- Emergency items: flashlight and extra batteries, battery-operated radio, whistle, shovel and basic tools, baby wipes, toilet paper, plastic garbage bags and maps.
- Special needs items if necessary: baby food and formula, diapers, powdered milk, baby wipes, medications and supplies for dentures and/or contact lenses for adults.

Maintain your kit. Replace batteries every six months and replace food items according to expiration dates.

As we know, some disasters mean evacuating to a safe place. Each family should pre-determine their options in that situation. However, if local officials ask you to evacuate, do so immediately. The authorities will not ask you to leave unless they determine that lives may be in danger.

In Texas, help can be just a phone call away. Keep these numbers close to each phone, including cell phones:

- Emergency 911: the universal emergency telephone number in the U.S.
- 211: Texas First Call for Help, for non-emergency information and referrals.
- Texas Poison control Center at (800) 222-1222.

The publication, "Preparing for the Unexpected," (B-6178) can be ordered on Extension's online Bookstore at <https://agrillifebookstore.org>. It's never too early to start preparing for unexpected events, adding that these steps might mean the difference between life and death.

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