DISASTER PREPAREDNESS
For Seniors By Seniors

Be Red Cross Ready *for Disaster*

American Red Cross

The Greater Rochester Chapter of the American Red Cross developed this information.

Dear Friends,

We are a group of older adults who experienced a two-week power outage when a massive ice storm hit the Greater Rochester, New York, area. We were unprepared for such a disaster. If we had only taken a few simple steps to prepare ourselves for such an event, we could have eliminated many of the hardships we had to endure.

We are just like many of you. Some of us are in good health but aren't quite as agile as we used to be. Some of us have hearing or vision problems; others use a cane or wheelchair. Whatever our limitations, we still need to be prepared. We can be prepared!

To avoid getting caught unprepared, we urge you to immediately review the enclosed information and fill in the appropriate local emergency numbers. Be sure to keep this helpful booklet in a handy place for quick reference.

Sincerely,

Vi	Marion V.	Fran
Melvin Q.	Jam	Roger H.
Julia L.	Dorothy M.	Mary S.
Nancy C.	Janet H.	LaVinia

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS
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Take responsibility to protect your life!
Prepare NOW for a sudden emergency.

Emergencies and disasters can strike quickly and without warning and can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or be confined to your home. What would you do if your basic services—water, gas, electricity or communications—were cut off?

Learn how to protect yourself and cope with disaster by planning ahead. Even if you have physical limitations, you can still protect and prepare yourself.

Local officials and relief workers may not be able to reach everyone right away. You can deal with disaster better by preparing in advance and by working with those in your support network: your family, neighbors and friends as a team. Knowing what to do is your responsibility. This booklet is a guide to being more prepared.

- **The Three Steps to Preparedness**
  1. **Get a Kit**
  2. **Make a Plan**
  3. **Be Informed**
- **When Disaster Strikes**
- **Emergency Contact Page**

The Three Steps to Preparedness

1. Get a Kit

Disasters can happen at any moment. By planning ahead you can avoid waiting in long lines for critical supplies, such as food, water and medicine and you will also have essential items if you need to evacuate.

- For your safety and comfort, have a disaster supplies kit packed and ready in one place before a disaster hits.
- Assemble enough supplies to last for at least three days.
- Store your supplies in one or more easy-to-carry containers, such as a backpack or duffel bag.
- You may want to consider storing supplies in a container that has wheels.
- Be sure your bag has an ID tag.
- Label any equipment, such as wheelchairs, canes or walkers, that you would need with your name, address and phone numbers.
- Keeping your kit up-to-date is also important. Review the contents at least every six months or as your needs change. Check expiration dates and shift your stored supplies into everyday use before they expire. Replace food, water and batteries, and refresh medications and other perishable items with "first in, first out" practices.

On the following pages are some suggestions for building your disaster supplies kit. Include any additional items that you feel might be useful for your particular needs.

Basic Needs and Supplies *(check off)*

- ❑ Three-day supply of nonperishable food
  It is a good idea to include foods that do not need cooking (canned, dried, etc.).
- ❑ Three-day supply of water *(one gallon per person, per day)*
- ❑ Battery-operated or crank-powered radio
- ❑ Flashlight with extra batteries and bulbs
  (do not use candles)
- ❑ First aid kit and manual
- ❑ Sanitation and hygiene items *(toilet paper, feminine products)*
- ❑ Matches in waterproof container
- ❑ Cell phone with an extra battery and charger (s)
- ❑ Whistle *(to attract the attention of emergency personnel)*
- ❑ One change of clothing
- ❑ Blanket
- ❑ Manual can opener
- ❑ Photocopies of personal documents/identification
- ❑ Insurance agent's name and number
- ❑ Cash and coins *(ATMs may not be accessible)*
- ❑ Pet supplies *(including food and vaccination records)*
- ❑ Map of the local area
- ❑ Extra set of keys *(car, house, etc.)*
- ❑ Plastic garbage bags
- ❑ Family and friends' emergency contact information
- ❑ Pack of cards to provide entertainment and pass the time

Cold Climate Supplies *(check off)*

It is possible that you will not have heat during or after a disaster. Think about your clothing and bedding needs. Be sure to include one set of the following for each person:

- ❑ Jacket or coat
- ❑ Long pants and long-sleeve shirt
- ❑ Sturdy shoes
- ❑ Hat, mittens and scarf
- ❑ Sleeping bag or warm blanket

Supplies for Your Vehicle *(check off)*

- ❑ Flashlight with extra batteries and extra bulbs
- ❑ Maps
- ❑ First aid kit and manual
- ❑ Tire repair kit
- ❑ Jumper cables
- ❑ Flares
- ❑ Bottled water
- ❑ Non-perishable foods such as granola bars
- ❑ *Winter:* Blanket, hat, mittens, shovel, sand, tire chains, windshield scraper, florescent distress flag
- ❑ *Summer:* Sunscreen lotion SPF 15 or higher, shade item *(umbrella, wide-brimmed hat, etc.)*

Other Items You Might Need

- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____
- ❑ _____

2. Make a Plan

The next time a disaster strikes, you may not have much time to act. Planning ahead reduces anxiety. Prepare now for a sudden emergency and remember to review your plan regularly.

Meet With Your Family and Friends

Explain your concerns to your family and others in your support network and work with them as a team to prepare. Arrange for someone to check on you at the time of a disaster. Be sure to include any caregivers in your meeting and planning efforts.

Assess yourself and your household. What personal abilities and limitations may affect your response to a disaster? Think about how you can resolve these or other questions and discuss them with your family and friends. Details are important to ensure your plan fits your needs. Then, practice the planned actions to make sure everything "works."

Family Communications Plan

- Carry family contact information in your wallet.
- Choose an out-of-town contact person. After a disaster, it is often easier to make a long-distance call than a local call from a disaster area.

Community Disaster Plans

Ask about the emergency plans and procedures that exist in your community.

Know about your community's response and evacuation plans (e.g., hurricane, nuclear emergency, severe weather). If you do not own a vehicle or drive, find out in advance what your community's plans are for evacuating those without private transportation or make arrangements with a neighbor who would drive you.

If you receive home care, speak with your case manager to see what their plan is in times of emergency and how they can assist with your plan.

Escape Routes and Meeting Places

- ❑ **Plan the best and quickest escape routes out of your home and evacuation routes out of your neighborhood.**
- ❑ **Decide on a meeting place outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home.**
- ❑ **If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, make sure all escape routes from your home are wheelchair accessible.**
- ❑ **Know the safe places within your home in case you need to shelter during extreme weather events *(e.g., tornado).***
- ❑ **Practice your escape drill every six months.**
- ❑ **Plan for transportation if you need to evacuate to a shelter.**

Post Emergency Phone Numbers Near Your Phones

Post emergency numbers near all of your phones. Include the numbers of those in your support network. Remember that in some emergencies telephone lines might not be working. Consider having alternative plans for contacting those in your network.

Plan for Those With Disabilities

Keep support items like wheelchairs and walkers in a designated place so they can be found quickly. This step is essential for those who have home-health caregivers, particularly for those who are bed bound.

Plan for Your Pets or Service Animals

Take your pets with you if you evacuate. However, be aware that pets (except service animals) are not permitted in emergency public shelters for health reasons. Prepare a list of family, friends, boarding facilities, veterinarians and 'pet-friendly' hotels that could shelter your pets in an emergency.

Utilities

Talk to your utility company about emergency procedures and know how and when to turn off water, gas and electricity at the main switches or valves. Share this information with your family. Keep any tools you will need nearby. Turn off the utilities only if you suspect the lines are damaged, you suspect a leak or if local officials instruct you to do so. (***Note:*** If gas is turned off for any reason, only a qualified professional can turn it back on. It could take several weeks for a professional to respond. Heating and cooking would need alternative sources.)

Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Test your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms regularly. Consider strobe or vibrating alert systems that might meet your needs. Change the batteries in all alarms at least once a year or according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Insurance Coverage

Talk with your insurance agent to be sure that you have adequate insurance coverage. Homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage and may not provide full coverage for other hazards.

Vital Records and Documents

Keep copies of vital family records and other important documents such as birth and marriage certificates, social security cards, passports, wills, deeds, and financial, insurance and immunizations records in a safe location, like a fire safe or safe-deposit box.

Hearing Aids/Cochlear Implants

If you wear hearing aids or assistive devices, consider storing them in a bedside container that is attached to your nightstand using Velcro. Some disasters (e.g., earthquakes) may shift items that are not secured, making them difficult to find quickly.

Maintain Your Kit and Practice Your Plan

Every six months:

- Review your plan with all of your friends and family.
- Check your disaster supplies kit and refresh all expiring items (e.g., food, water, medications and batteries).
- Conduct fire and emergency evacuation drills on a regular basis with your family. Make sure all your plans "work."

At least once a year:

- Change the batteries in all essential devices at the same time each year. (e.g., smoke alarms).

3. Be Informed

Community Hazard Assessment

What hazards threaten your community and neighborhood? Make a list of how they might affect you. Think about both natural (e.g., hurricanes, flooding, winter storms and earthquakes) and human-caused (e.g., hazardous materials and transportation accidents) and about your risk from those hazards.

Which of these hazards are most likely to happen in your community?

- ❑ Earthquakes
- ❑ Hurricanes
- ❑ Winter Storms
- ❑ Tornadoes
- ❑ Thunderstorms
- ❑ Flooding
- ❑ Toxic Spills
- ❑ Home Fires
- ❑ Wildfires

Preparing for a hazard that is most likely to happen in your area will help you be prepared for any disaster. Remember, disasters can happen at any time.

- Do you live alone?
- Do you drive or own a car?
- How good is your sense of smell?
- Do you have any physical, medical, thinking or learning limitations?
- Has your sense of hearing or vision decreased?
- Are you reliant upon any medical equipment?
- Are you reliant upon a caregiver?

Community Warning Systems

How will you be notified of a possible emergency?

Know how local authorities will warn you of a pending or current disaster situation and how they will provide information to you before, during and after a disaster.

Friends, Family Caregivers and Neighbors

Before a disaster happens it is a good idea to have a conversation with those in your support network: your friends, family and neighbors. Let them know your needs in an emergency situation; ask them how they could assist with your plan and whether they would be willing to help. Consider that during some emergencies travel is severely limited and they may not be able to get to you.

Local Neighborhood Emergency Teams

Connect with a group in your local neighborhood. Some of these could include CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), neighborhood watch, community block associations, faith-based organizations, etc. Even if you feel you cannot become a member, let them know your needs and ask them how they could assist with your disaster plan. If available, take advantage of advance registration systems in your area for those who need help during community emergencies.

Local Volunteer Fire Departments

Connect with your local volunteer fire department or ambulance and let them know your needs (especially if you live in a rural area). Discuss with them how they might be able to assist in your disaster plan.

Local EAS (Emergency Alert System)

Certain television and radio stations will broadcast emergency messages from local authorities. Find out which stations broadcast on the Emergency Alert System (EAS).

NOAA Weather Radio/All-Hazard Alert Radio

These special radios provide one of the earliest warnings of weather and other emergencies, and can be programmed to alert you to hazards in your specific area. Call your local National Weather Service office or visit www.nws.noaa.gov for more information.

Door-to-Door Warning From Local Emergency Officials

In some emergencies local responders may come door-to-door and deliver emergency messages or warnings. Listen carefully and follow their instructions!

Senior Living and Assisted Living Communities

If you live in a senior community become familiar with any disaster notification plans that may already exist. Talk to your community management or resident council about how you can all be more prepared together.

Be Aware—Help Inform Others

There may be people in your community that need extra assistance when a disaster occurs. Consider how you can assist them in their preparedness planning and during an emergency.

Sheltering In Place vs. Staying at Home

In some emergencies such as a chemical emergency, you would need to know how to seal a room for safety on a temporary basis, called "shelter in place." In the case of a winter storm, you may be told to "stay at home." This means stay where you are and make yourself as safe as possible until the emergency passes or you are told to evacuate. In this situation it is safer to remain indoors than to go outside. Stay in your home and listen to instructions from emergency personnel. Listen to your television or radio for emergency messages. Be prepared to be on your own and have additional food and water for seven to fourteen days.

If You Need to Evacuate

Coordinate with your family and home care provider for evacuation procedures.

- Try to carpool, if possible.
- Wear appropriate clothing and sturdy shoes.
- Take your disaster supplies kit – "go bag."
- Lock your home.
- Use the travel routes specified or special assistance provided by local officials. Don't take any short cuts, they may be unsafe.

- When you arrive at a shelter, notify the shelter management of any needs you may have. They will do their best to accommodate you and make you comfortable.
- Let your out-of-town contact know when you left and where you are going.
- Make arrangements for your pets. Take them with you if you leave.

Public Shelters

Relief organizations, like the American Red Cross, may open shelters if a disaster affects a large number of people or the emergency is expected to last several days.

Be prepared to go to a shelter if—

- Your area is without electrical power.
- Floodwater is rising.
- Your home has been severely damaged.
- Police or other local officials tell you to evacuate.

Services Provided at a Red Cross Shelter

- Food
- Temporary shelter
- Basic first aid

All American Red Cross emergency services are provided free of charge.

To learn about Red Cross shelters that have been opened in your area, listen to your local media, check with your local American Red Cross chapter or visit *www.redcross.org*.

Immediately After a Disaster

- If the emergency occurs while you are at home, check for damage using a flashlight. DO NOT light matches or candles or turn on electrical switches. Check for fires, chemical spills and gas leaks.
- Shut off any damaged utilities.
- Check on your neighbors, especially those who are elderly or have disabilities.
- Call your out-of-town contacts and let them know you are okay.
- Stay away from downed power lines.
- Do not drive through flooded roads.
- Monitor local broadcasts for information about where you can get disaster relief assistance.

If Electrical Power Is Lost

- Use a flashlight or battery-operated lantern. ***DO NOT USE CANDLES.***
- Turn off or unplug all major appliances (e.g., stove, refrigerator, dryer). They could be damaged by the electrical surge when the power is restored.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- Use portable generators cautiously. Make sure they are operated only out-of-doors in a well-ventilated area. Refuel a generator only after it has cooled. Do not connect a generator to your home's electrical system except though an approved transfer switch installed in compliance with the local electrical code.

Financial Exploitation/Scams

Unfortunately, after a disaster there may be some people who will try to take advantage of your vulnerability. Beware of high-pressure sales, disclosing personal financial information (account numbers and credit card information) and services provided with no written contract. For information on scams, go to *www.ftc.gov*.

Before a Fire

Plan two escape routes out of each room. Choose a place to meet outside after escaping from a fire. Practice your fire escape with everyone in your home every six months.

Plan to use the stairs during a fire evacuation, even in buildings with elevators. If you cannot use stairways, make special arrangements for help in advance.

Sleep with the bedroom door closed. Install smoke alarms inside and outside sleeping areas to give you warning of toxic fumes.

Test your smoke alarm every month. Change batteries on the same day each year. Vacuum it occasionally to remove dust. Replace smoke alarms every ten years—they lose sensitivity over time.

In Case of Fire

- **Remain calm.** Drop to the floor and crawl. Most fire fatalities are due to breathing toxic fumes and smoke. The cleanest air is near the floor. Breathing toxic fumes and smoke is more dangerous than the risk of injury in getting to the floor quickly.
- Feel any door before you open it. If it is hot, find another way out.
- If your smoke alarm sounds, never waste time to get dressed or collect valuables or pets. Get out of your home immediately.

- Do not try to fight the fire! Call for help from a neighbor's phone.
- **Never go back into a burning building for any reason. Get out and stay out!**
- If your clothes catch on fire, drop to the floor and roll to suffocate the fire. Keep rolling (running from the fire only "fans" the flames and makes it worse).
- If you are in a wheelchair or cannot get out of your home, stay by the window near the floor and signal for help.

Grandparents and Grandchildren

Many children visit their grandparents often; they may even live with you. The following safety advice for children can help grandparents prepare a safe environment at home for children:

- Store matches and lighters up high in locked cabinets, away from children.
- Install plastic covers over all exposed electrical outlets.
- Move cleaning chemicals like cleansers, soap, drain cleaner and other poisons to high cupboards OR install a child-proof lock if you must keep these items in low cabinets.

- Store prescription medicines and over-the-counter drugs like aspirin, cough medicines and stomachache remedies in a cabinet out of reach of children.
- If children are playing outside or in a pool when skies grow dark or you hear thunder, have them come indoors right away.

Children Can Help Grandparents, Too

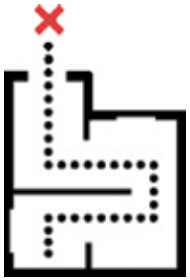
Have children test each smoke alarm in your home to make sure it is working by using a broom handle to push the test button.

Ask children to draw a floor plan of your home and show two ways out of every room in case of fire.

Ask your grandchildren to help you assemble your disaster supplies kit and get them to assemble one for their family at the same time.

Home Caregivers—Special Considerations

Prepare a disaster supplies kit for any family member who cannot do so on their own. If this person receives home care, speak with the case manager to see what the agency's role would be in case of emergency at home or if evacuation is indicated.



Develop home fire escape and evacuation plans and practice them every month in case of fire and other disasters particular to your area. Enlist the assistance of other family members if possible.

Find out what provisions are available in your area in case evacuation is needed, especially if your family member requires an uninterrupted power source for survival.

Know that you may be directed to a hospital or a medical or functional support shelter and you may need to continue caring for that person during the emergency situation.

Be sure to make your back-up assistants and family members aware of all emergency plans.

Emotional and Psychological Effects

Disasters often cause emotional distress. Being prepared will lessen your anxiety. When an emergency occurs, know that you may experience some emotional, physical, mental and spiritual reactions.

Some typical physical reactions:

- Stomachaches
- Difficulty sleeping/fatigue
- Headaches
- Appetite disturbances
- A worsening of chronic medical conditions like arthritis, diabetes or high-blood pressure

Some typical emotional reactions:

- Sadness
- Excessive anxiety
- Emotional numbness
- Depression
- Irritability and anger

Some typical mental reactions:

- Confusion
- Memory problems
- Difficulty making decisions
- Disorientation
- Lack of focus and concentration

Some typical spiritual reactions:

- Anger with God
- Questioning one's spiritual beliefs
- An increase in prayer
- A need to find spiritual reasons for the disaster
- A need to be comforted by spiritual leaders

When a disaster occurs, it can remind you of previous events in your life. Remember what you did then to help you get through it and see if it works now.

Sometimes this new disaster seems like the final straw! If you find memories bring up old grief, sadness, fear and anger, it can be distressing. Try to separate your reactions to previous events from what is happening now. Remember that you were able to cope last time and remind yourself you can cope now.

Everyone Is Affected by Disaster—Not Just Seniors

Emotional and other kinds of responses are expected. That's okay. In a disaster, many people have problems taking care of routine tasks. Be encouraged by a positive attitude, remind yourself of your strengths, and tasks can be more easily done.

Support is most important. And getting help is important. Ask for what you need.

If there are family or friends nearby, let them support you. Let the Red Cross or other agencies assist you. Don't worry about not appearing independent. Everyone needs help when disaster strikes.

Preparation Makes a Difference

When you're upset or confused, already having your disaster plan in place will allow you to do what needs to be done to take care of yourself. It's much easier to remain calm when you know what to do. Use this booklet to help you prepare.

Summary and Reminders

Take responsibility by planning now.

Listen for information on the radio and TV about hazardous weather and other events, and heed the advice of local officials. Leave right away if told to do so.

In some communities, people who need help or transportation during an evacuation are asked to register that need with their local government.

Call your local emergency management office for information about what to do during an evacuation. It is important to have alternative plans in case circumstances change.

Gather essential supplies, and be sure to keep a list of medications and their dosage, a copy of your eyeglass prescription and other important papers to take with you if you have to leave your home.

Useful Web Sites

American Red Cross *www.redcross.org*

Department of Homeland Security *www.ready.gov*

National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration
www.noaa.gov

Federal Emergency Management Agency *www.fema.gov*

Homeland Security Management Institute
www.monroecc.edu/depts/hsmi

AARP *www.aarp.org*

For more information, please contact your local emergency management office, American Red Cross chapter or www.redcross.org.

The American Red Cross, a humanitarian organization led by volunteers, guided by its Congressional Charter and the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross Movement, will provide relief to victims of disasters and help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies.

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Lifespan of Greater Rochester, N.Y.

Other Local Information and Web Sites

Additional Specific Information You Might Need

Important Numbers

Police: _____

Fire department: _____

Ambulance agency: _____

Family doctor: _____

Poison Control Center: **1-800-222-1222**

For more information, visit: ***www.redcross.org***

Emergency Contact Information

Name: _____

Home address: _____

Family members' contact information:

Out-of-town contact information:

Family meeting place outside the neighborhood:

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