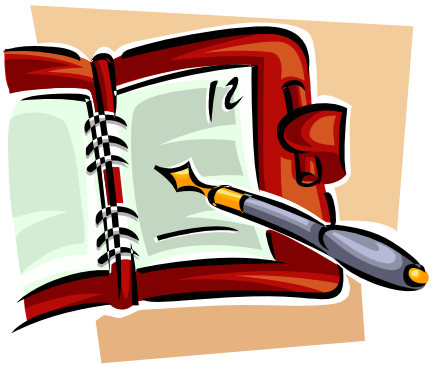
Building Disaster-Resilient Communities
A 12 Point Program for Individual, Family & Community Preparedness

By Al Cooper

1. Have an emergency plan



Develop, maintain and practice a written, comprehensive plan detailing how emergency contingencies will be mitigated, prepared for, responded to and recovered from.

Ask the question – "What would we do if. . ." a particular set of emergency circumstances were to arise? Think about possible and likely risks and areas of vulnerability, then identify desirable resources and possible options. Consider how your plan correlates with school, work place and neighborhood plans. Keep in mind the fact that the very process of making a plan may well be more important than the plan itself.

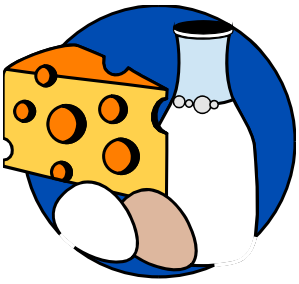
2. Get an emergency kit

Assemble and maintain a portable 72-hour emergency kit containing items designed to support each individual with vital health & personal comfort essentials for two or three days away from home. Of the two most likely responses to a wide range of emergencies, the possibility of evacuation should drive this effort.

Keep your personal kit simple, light in weight, and easy to update according to seasonal and other variables. Any of a long list of possible carrying options may prove practical, including a compact back pack which leaves hands free. Of primary importance is a flashlight and battery radio together with fresh back-up batteries for each. Other important items often overlooked might include essential medications, some cash money ("plastic" might not work") and a list of key contact information. Position your kit(s) with quick access in mind.

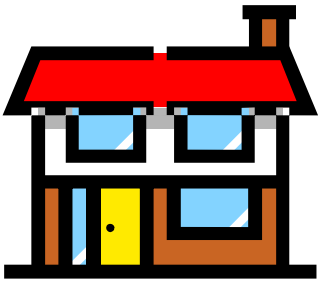
3. **Have emergency food supplies**

Fortify home-base with food, water and other provisions designed to care for the regular daily needs of those residing there, anticipating the second of the two most likely emergency situations – one where, for possibly extended periods of time, outside resources will be unavailable or limited.



Don't allow yourself to be daunted by the notion that there is "magic" in the famous "one-year-supply." Begin with an inventory of what you already have, then set some practical, reasonable and achievable goals for adding the things in form and quantities which make sense for you. This is not a one-size-fits-all game plan. Build your program around foods which are desirable for you, have a long shelf life, and require a minimum of preparations. Date everything, and begin at once to put it into regular use, always maintaining and increasing based upon experience.

4. **Prepare to shelter-in-place**



Identify, outfit and prepare an area of your home base suitable for a "shelter-in-place" emergency, such as might arise from a hazardous material release. In such a case, evacuation might expose a population to a greater danger than "staying put."

Select a room or space which is relatively easy to isolate from outside air intake, and which promises a degree of comfort for a short period of time. In outfitting this space, assume that the emergency may involve a temporary interruption of electric power with the personal inconveniences which follow. A shelter-in-place kit should include a battery-powered radio and flashlight, along with pre-cut sheets of plastic and tape for helping to further proof the area against outside contamination. Some of the same thoughtfulness which goes into the 72-hour kit can help guide preparations here. A kit which fits under a bed or into a closet corner is sensible.

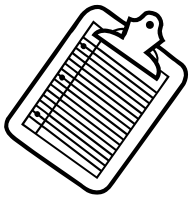
5. **Know your home**

Make it your business to become familiar with the critical infrastructure of your homebase and learn how to operate electric circuits, natural gas service controls, culinary water main valves, outside air vents, etc. Locate necessary tools where they are handy for use in an emergency. Consult appropriate experts if necessary. Knowing when to turn utilities off and on is important.

Remember during a “shelter-in-place” emergency to turn off air conditioner/heating systems which bring outside air into the building or space providing shelter. In schools and work places, this may require the services of a custodian.

6. Take inventory

Inventory items of special value and importance and their location in the home base, assigning a priority to each. In the event of an evacuation order, there may be only minutes to take property with you. Limitations of time and space may suggest the need to pre-position and/or protect such belongings.



The very act of producing this list – like the basic plan itself – may prove a useful reminder of the things that really have value in our lives. Usually, it will be family records, genealogies, irreplaceable photos, etc. which rise to the top of the list. A plan to consolidate the location and enhance the portability of high-priority items may result.

7. Equip your car

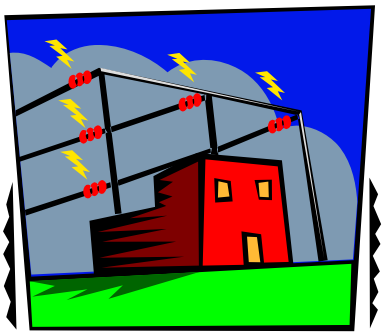
Outfit the family vehicle(s) with items which will add to its safety and security in various emergency and everyday situations, with an eye to the changing of seasons and circumstances. Make it a matter of habit to keep the fuel level above the halfway mark.

Such obvious items as a blanket, heavy-duty flashlight, container of drinking water, a collapsible shovel, a basic first aid kit and jumper cables are a start. Some high-energy snack bars and weather-conscious clothing items are good additons. A sharp-pointed rock hammer within the driver’s reach may become a life-saving method of breaking through a window in a flood situation, and a spare cell-phone kept charged is a smart further step.

8. Prepare to go powerless

Prepare the home base to remain secure and reasonably comfortable during short or extended periods of electrical power failure. This is once of the most likely events to follow in the wake of both natural and man-cuased emergencies. Alternate lighting, communication, heating and food preparation resources should be part of the basic emergency response plan.

Battery-operated lights should be positioned strategically in different parts of a residence along with a program which insures a supply of back-up batteries. (Alkaline batteries have a long shelf-life, and LED systems operate frugally.) In the case of a prolonged outage, alternate-fuel lamps may prove important. Propane lanterns with handy cartridge replacement systems are easy to use and widely available. Kerosene-fueled lamps, such as the Aladdin design are economical to operate and provide a soft, silent source of illumination while producing a minimum of fumes. (Always plan for extra fresh air sources and ventilation when using any fueled device indoors or in a confined space. They all will consume some of the available oxygen supply as well as produce fumes.) Storing flammable fuels requires special attention, and kerosene is less volatile than others. Outdoor propane and charcoal grills are an excellent cooking alternative, as are camp stoves and Dutch oven systems. Extra blankets, sleeping bags and warm clothing should be a part of every non-electric plan. At least one adult family member should remain awake and on watch when alternate lighting/heating devices are in use, even with recommended ventilation. Make sure that the presence of charged A,B,C fire extinguishers and practice in using them correctly is a part of your basic emergency response plan. Gasoine or other combusibly-fueled generators may greatly extend the ability to compensate for loss of commercial power, but require a knowledge and planning to operate safely. Never position a generator indoors or where its exhaust fumes may migrate into a living space. Remember that the storage of adequate fuel supplies adds a certain safety burden, and limits the duration of this alternate source of power.



9. Plan for pets

Plan for the care and disposition of pets and domestic livestock in the event of a range of possible emergency-spawned contingencies. Almost without exception, emergency shelters-usually managed by the Red Cross-do not welcome pets.

Domestic pet plans might include larger quantities of food, supplies, provision for automatic, gravity-feed water and food dispensers, multiple litter

boxes, etc. Arrangements for extended care by family members, friends or commercial service providers might also be considered.

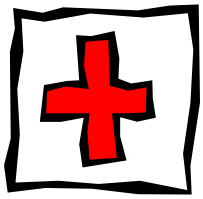
10. Figure financial contingencies

Develop a comprehensive "Financial Contingency Plan" geared to your particular set of economic circumstances and designed to respond to the possible interruption of normal cash flow and debt retirement obligations.

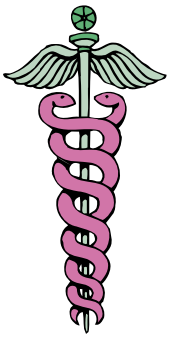
Among those "emergencies" most likely to occur at some point, but least anticipated and planned for is the interruption of income occasioned by loss of employment, illness or even the unexpected death of a bread-winner. The economic consequences of a natural or manmade disaster may also effect cash flow in a temporary, or even long-term way, reducing our ability to deal with everyday affairs and activities. In addition to making use of food storage supplies already identified, and thereby freeing up financial resources, contingency plans might also include such goals as the accumulation of cash reserves on an ongoing basis, and the pre-payment of some key monthly obligations, ie. home mortgages, car contracts, and medical insurance plans. "Buying time" thus becomes an important dimension of the overall emergency plan. While this may not be accomplished easily, or all at once, it is a worthwhile long-term objective well worth pursuing.

11. Remember your health

Plan for the continuation of health and medical needs during a time of extended emergencies and special circumstances.



With an empmhasis on critical, life-supporting medications and supplies, and with the consultation of the prescribing physician where indicated, maintain a supply of such items sufficient to bridge an emergency response such as enforced evacuation or other interruption of normal access. Carry on your person preferably, vital written prescriptions for eye glasses and other vital, personal medical needs, and a clear description of treatment requirements. An insulin-dependent diabetic, for instance, should anticipate having to leave home base with a small portable cooler, and a supply of insulin and syringes. Just as one shouldn't allow the fuel in the vehicle to get below half, the person with a medication dependency, should not allow the supply to get below



the 30-day mark. Make sure some other family member has a copy of your medical plan.

12. Remember those with special needs

Include someone with special needs in your planning. Somewhere, probably

nearby, is a neighbor or acquaintance who is handicapped, elderly, home-bound, or medically-dependent and alone. Be prepared to share your resources, and the security of your home base with that person, and to check on their well-being in a time of emergency.

It is an article of faith among those who have studied, or personally endured real disasters, that in the end, it is neighbor-helping-neighbor which most insures the “disaster-resiliency” of a community.