

Emergency Preparedness – Ideas for Planning for the Unknown

Step 1 Know the risks

Although the consequences of various disasters can be similar, knowing the risks in your region can help you better prepare. Across the nation, we face a number of hazards, such as floods, fires, earthquakes, blizzards and tornadoes. In addition to natural disasters, there are other types of risks, such as power outages and industrial or transportation accidents.

Massachusetts residents can call **2-1-1** for information about the location of open shelters, transportation or other restrictions due to a declared state of emergency, post disaster assistance, ways to volunteer or donate, or other services you or your family may need.

Emergency Management directors for your town can be found at www.mass.gov/doc/community-emergency-management-directors-emd-list/download. For more emergency preparedness information, visit <https://www.mass.gov/be-prepared-for-emergencies>

Step 2 Make a Plan and Practice it!

Every household needs an emergency plan. It will help you and your family know what to do in case of an emergency.

Use the following suggestions to create your plan. Most of this information can be filled out on your own. You may need to get some information from your municipality and state about their emergency plans. Keep this document in an easy-to-find, easy-to-remember place (for example, with your emergency kit). Photocopy this plan and keep it in your car and/or at work, and a copy close to your phone. If you completed your plan online, keep an electronic version on your computer.

Write yourself a reminder to update your emergency plan one year from now. On this date next year, review your contact information, practice your emergency evacuation plans, change the batteries in your smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector, and restock your kit(s). Change the batteries, food, and water in your emergency kits once a year.

- Meeting places

Identify safe places where everyone should meet if you cannot go home or you need to evacuate: Safe meeting place near home; a safe meeting place outside the immediate neighborhood; evacuation routes from the neighborhood. Your family may not be together when an emergency occurs. Plan how to meet or how to contact one another and discuss what you would do in different situations. Arrange for each family member to call, e - mail or text the same out-of-town contact person in case of an emergency. Choose an out-of-town contact who lives far enough away that he or she is unlikely to be affected by the same event. If you have recently moved to a new area, make arrangements through friends, cultural associations or community organizations.

- Neighborhood Safety Plan

Work with your neighbors to identify people who may need extra help during an emergency. To help make sure everyone is taken care of, assign "block buddies."

- Household Plan – Emergency Exits

Draw up a floor plan of your home that shows all possible exits from each room. Plan a main exit route and an alternate exit route from each room. If you live in an apartment, plan to use the stairs instead of the elevators. If you are unable to use the stairs, notify emergency personnel ahead of time. Also, identify an evacuation route from your neighborhood in case you need to leave in a hurry (and think of more than one option).

- Household Plan – Safe Home Checks

- Note locations of a working carbon monoxide detector, smoke alarms, and well-stocked first aid kit. If you live in an apartment, or if you are staying in a hotel, know where the fire alarms and at least two emergency exits are located.
- Note locations of fire extinguishers. All capable adults and older children should know how to use them. See instructions regarding the lifetime of your fire extinguisher, check with your local fire department for more information.
- Older children and adults should know how to turn off your home's water, electricity and gas. Make large, easy to-see signs for water and gas shut-offs as well as for the electrical panel; include phone number for each vendor.
- Teach children how and when to dial 9-1-1 as well as how to call the designated out-of-town contact. Limit phone calls to urgent messages only. Keep calls short to free up the lines for others.

- Consolidate Important Information

- Make copies of birth and marriage certificates, passports, licenses, wills, land deeds and insurance. Take photos of family members in case a lost persons' record is created. Keep them in a safe place, both inside and outside your home. You might want to put them in a safety deposit box or give them to friends and family who live out of town.

- List emergency contacts in cellphones as “ICE” (in case of emergency), which will make it easier to contact the right person in case of an emergency responder needs to make a call on your behalf.
 - Write down important medical details for your emergency kit and give a copy to your personal support network. Doctors' names and phone numbers • Health card numbers for every member of the family • Accommodation needs • Insurance information • Allergies/Medical conditions • Emergency contacts • Medication • Family medical history • Recent vaccinations • Health screenings • Surgeries.
 - Make note of Home and Car Policy Numbers • Home Security System Company's name • Ambulance: 9-1-1 Non-emergency numbers for Police • Fire • Health clinic • Poison control
- Workplace
Learn about the emergency evacuation plans in place and what you will need to do. You may want to have some basic supplies at work, such as water and food that won't spoil, in case you need to stay put for a while. Check with your employer about workplace emergency plans, including fire alarms, emergency exits, meeting points, and designated safety personnel or floor wardens.
 - Children
Ask your children's school or daycare about their emergency policies. Find out how they will contact families during an emergency. Find out what type of authorization the school or daycare requires to release your children to a designated person if you can't pick them up. Make sure the school or daycare has updated contact information for parents, caregivers, and designated persons.
 - Pets
In case of an evacuation, remember that pets are not allowed in some public shelters or hotels. In case of an evacuation, prepare to take your pets with you to the home of a relative or friend, or take steps to identify pet-friendly hotels or pet boarding facilities in your area and further away from home. • Establish a personal support network of friends, relatives, healthcare providers, co-workers and neighbors who understand your special needs.

Step 3 Create an Emergency Kit

In an emergency, you will need some basic supplies. Make sure your kit is easy to carry and everyone in the household knows where it is. Keep it in a backpack, duffle bag, or suitcase with wheels, in an easy-to-reach, accessible place, such as your front hall closet. If you have many people in your household, your emergency kit could get heavy. It's a good idea to separate some of these supplies in backpacks. That way, your kit will be more portable, and each person can personalize their own grab-and-go emergency kit. The key is to make sure critical items are organized and easy to find.

Basic Emergency Kit

- A copy of your emergency plan and contact information
- Water – at least one gallon of water per person per day; include small bottles that can be carried easily in case of an evacuation order
- Food that won't spoil, such as ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits, vegetables (and manual can-opener), energy bars, peanut butter, dried foods, nuts (replace food / water once a year)
- Disposable plates, eating utensils, garbage bags
- Crank or battery-powered flashlight (and extra batteries). Replace batteries once a year.
- Crank, battery-powered radio (and extra batteries) or NOAA Weather radio
- First aid kit, soap, sanitizer
- Personal hygiene items, toiletries, toilet paper and Hand sanitizer
- Extra keys to your car and house
- Some cash in smaller bills, such as \$10 bills and change for payphones
- If applicable, include 1-2 months of medication and medical supplies, prescriptions and medical documents.
- If applicable, include items such as baby food and supplies, equipment for people with disabilities, or food, water and medication for your pets or service animal (personalize according to your needs).
- Candles and matches or lighter (place candles in deep, sturdy containers and do not burn unattended)
- Change of clothing and footwear for each household member
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each household member
- A whistle to signal for help
- Duct Tape, plastic sheeting or tarp
- Water purifying tablets and/or unscented chlorine bleach, which can serve as an **emergency disinfectant of drinking water**

- Basic tools (hammer, pliers, wrench, screwdrivers, work gloves, dust mask and pocketknife)
- Books, games, puzzles and other comfort items

Emergency Vehicle Kit

- Blanket
- Candle in a deep can and matches
- Extra clothing and shoes
- First aid kit with seatbelt cutter
- Flashlight (crank or battery powered). Replace batteries once a year.
- Food that won't spoil (such as energy bars)
- List of contact numbers
- Radio (crank or battery-powered). Replace batteries once a year.
- Small shovel, scraper and snowbrush
- Warning light or road flares
- Water
- Whistle

Recommended additional items to keep in your vehicle • Antifreeze, windshield washer fluid • Fire extinguisher • Road maps • Sand, salt or cat litter (non-clumping) • Tow rope and jumper cables.

Step 4 Be Calm in an Emergency

Emergency instructions

- Call 9-1-1 (where available) to report a fire, a crime or to save a life.
- For non-emergency calls, use non-emergency number or police, fire and other health services in you planning notes.
- When notifying emergency services of your location, provide the exact street or civic address and nearest intersection.
- For the gas and water valves, keep shut-off instructions close by and read them carefully.

During an Emergency

- Follow your emergency plan.
- Get your emergency kit.
- Make sure you are safe before assisting others.
- Listen to the radio or television for information from authorities. Local officials may advise to shelter in place. Follow their instructions.
- Stay put until all is safe or until you are ordered to evacuate.

Evacuation orders

- If you are ordered to evacuate, take your emergency kit, your wallet, personal identification for each family member and copies of essential family documents with you. Bring a cell phone and spare battery or charger with you if you have one. Use travel routes specified by local authorities.
- If you have time, call or e-mail your out-of-town contact. Tell them where you are going and when you expect to arrive. Once you are safe, let them know. Tell them if any family members have become separated. If possible, leave a note telling others when you left and where you are.
- Shut off water and electricity if officials tell you to do so. Leave natural gas service on unless officials tell you to turn it off. If you turn off the gas, the gas company has to reconnect it. In a major emergency, it could take weeks for a professional to respond.
- Take pets with you. Lock your home. Follow instructions from authorities.
- If you go to an evacuation center, register your personal information at the registration desk. Do not return home until authorities advise that it is safe to do so.

FYI

Belchertown: FireChief John Ingram jingram@belchertown.org is the EMD for the town. He has a CEMP plan for the town and is working with MEMA on a COOP plan. Town is still waiting on the MEMA Grants for the Hazard mitigation planning.

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