



Emergency Preparedness

At the end of the day, it's all about your family.

An Emergency: Snow, ice--power's out because the lines went down. Heat, drought--power's out due to too much demand--no AC, no fans. Tornado, wind storm--power's out because the lines were blown down--and that's most of the County! What if...?

Imagine your family stranded without food, water, or electric-

ity. Do they know what to do to get them through for the next few days, or possibly weeks.

After a disaster: hundreds or even thousands of people need help at the same time. There are only so many fire departments, police, and utilities companies to do the job of getting things back to normal and they will be stretched to their limits.

Maybe you already know this. Maybe you have tried to call the

electric company during an ice storm or after the storm winds passed and have had to wait hours or days for help.

This article has some of the answers you need to make you and your family more self-sufficient. As you read, you can begin to form a personal preparedness plan for yourself and your family. Use these suggestions as a guide to think about how to prepare for emergencies.

The Steps: #1-Make a plan. #2-Build a kit. #3-Practice your plan.

Step #1: Involve your family by talking about who will do what, when an emergency hits your home or neighborhood and how you would stay in contact with each other. Agree on family re-



sponsibilities and where to meet if a disaster happens. This is particularly important if you had a fire. Then you would want to quickly account for everybody in the family. Agree on what you would do if you were advised to evacuate. Do not depend on mobile phones--they usually do not work during large disasters because the circuits become overwhelmed.

Step # 2: Build an emergency kit. The basics are water, food, first aid kit, tools and supplies, clothing and bedding, and special items. Water--one gallon per person, per day. You might have to disinfect your own water. Food--gather foods that require no refrigeration. Canned and dried foods and powdered infant formula work well. Remember the can opener. First aid kit--Does not have to be fancy. Remember what accidents or illnesses your family has had over the past couple of years to get an idea of what your first aid kit should contain. The Red Cross can help you here. Tools and Supplies--Flashlight, radio, fire extinguisher, wrench to shut off household gas, sanitation items such as soap, also unscented bleach for disinfecting water and other surfaces. Clothing and bedding--one change of clothing per person. If the emergency is in the winter or you must evacuate, clothing and bedding can become impor-

tant. Special Items--Remember family members with special needs such as infants, toddlers, and the elderly. Is anyone on special medications? Eyeglasses? Important family documents (birth/marriage certificates, Social Security cards, bank and credit card numbers) should be secured in a waterproof container.

Step # 3: Practice your plan. Make sure that your family knows what to do and where to go. Make sure everyone knows where emergency equipment is and how to use it. A fire extinguisher is great, but if no one knows how to use it, it's worthless. The same goes for first aid kits. Flashlights and small radios need batteries and extra batteries--unless you have the newer and fairly inexpensive hand-cranked models. Practice evacuating your home at least twice per year and drive your evacuation routes so you know they are still useable.

Berrien County Health

Department:
Preventing Disease,
Prolonging Life and
Protecting the
Health of the
Community.



April is Recognizing Public Health Month!

April is Recognizing Public Health month, and the Health Department will bring your articles about Public Health Accomplishments, Emergency Preparedness, Tornadoes and Other Disasters, and Opportunities for the Uninsured. For questions about any of these topics, call us at **926-7121**.

The Red Cross and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) recommend that we prepare for three days to one week of self-sufficiency. In fact, FEMA says, "During the first few hours or days following a disaster, essential services may not be available. People must be ready to act on their own." It's even better to plan for two weeks or longer of being self-sufficient, because some disasters--for example a pandemic flu outbreak--will cause government services and retailers to be too busy or out of resources to help the entire population.



These basic steps and much more detailed information are available from the Berrien County Chapter of the American Red Cross, 927-2288 or FEMA. On-line, visit www.redcross.org and FEMA at www.ready.gov, or call the Berrien County Health Department at **926-7121**.

The Berrien County Health Department has five locations to serve you:

Benton Harbor

769 Pipestone
P.O. Box 706
926-7121

M-139 Office

2106 S. M-139
927-5623

School Based

870 Colfax Ave
925-4500

Niles

1205 N. Front St.
684-2800

Three Oaks

21 N. Elm
756-2008

Or visit us on the web at www.berriencohlthdept.org

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