

# A Family Preparedness Guide

## This Guide Will Help You to:

Learn what to do before, during, and after an emergency

Create an emergency plan for your family

Prepare an Emergency Go Kit

Contact specific District agencies for help



**Mayor Anthony A. Williams**  
Government of the District of Columbia



# When Emergencies Occur

An emergency can occur quickly and without warning. The most important thing you can do to keep yourself and your family safe from an emergency is to prepare, stay calm, and follow instructions from emergency personnel.

This brochure will help you and your family develop an emergency plan, assemble a preparedness kit, and share some basic information on what to do before, during, and after any emergency. The brochure will also provide you with important information about how to obtain emergency and ongoing disaster recovery assistance.

## Message from the Mayor:

October 4, 2001

Dear Residents,



Since the horrific events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, we are all looking for ways to be better prepared for the known and unknown threats that may confront us in the future. Although we cannot always prevent emergencies, there are many things we can do to be better prepared as individuals, families, and organizations.

The District emergency preparedness operations are being revamped and revitalized as we reassess potential threats and fine-tune our response plans. I recommend that all District residents do the same.

This Guide contains many ideas to help you prepare for emergencies. I hope you find it helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anthony A. Williams".

Anthony A. Williams  
Mayor

## What's Inside

This Guide will help you be better prepared for an emergency affecting the District of Columbia. The following pages will help you:

- ☒ Learn what to do before, during, and after an emergency.
- ☒ Create a family emergency plan.
- ☒ Prepare an Emergency Go Kit.
- ☒ How to contact specific District agencies for help.

# Before Emergency Strikes

An emergency can occur without warning, leaving little or no time for you and your family to plan what to do next. It is necessary for you to learn about the things you can do to be prepared—before an emergency occurs. Two actions that will help you do this are to develop an emergency plan, and prepare an Emergency Go Kit. The next few pages describe how this is done.

## Create an Emergency Plan

Before creating your household emergency plan, learn about the types of emergencies that may affect your community, how you'll be notified of an event, and plans that may already be in place to deal with these events. Learn if your community has a warning system—via television, radio, or another signal—recognize what it sounds like and what to do when you hear it. Emergencies may strike when your family members are away from home, so find out about plans at your workplace, school, or anywhere else you and your family spends time. Steps to take in creating a household emergency plan include:



- 1 Meet with household members and discuss the dangers of possible emergency events, including fire, severe weather, hazardous spills, and terrorism.
- 2 Discuss how you and your family will respond to each possible emergency.
- 3 Discuss what to do in case of power outages or personal injuries.
- 4 Draw a floor plan of your home. Mark two escape routes from each room.
- 5 Teach adults how to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at main switches.
- 6 Post emergency contact numbers near all telephones, pre-program emergency numbers into phones with autodial capabilities.
- 7 Teach children how and when to dial 9-1-1 to get emergency assistance.
- 8 Teach children how to make long-distance telephone calls.
- 9 Pick a friend or relative that all family members will call if separated (it is often easier to call out-of-state during an emergency than within the affected area).
- 10 Instruct household members to turn on the radio for emergency information.
- 11 Pick two meeting places:
  - A place near your home.
  - A place outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home after an emergency.
- 12 Take a Basic First Aid and CPR Class. Contact American Red Cross for more info.
- 13 Keep family records in a water and fireproof safe. Inexpensive models can be purchased at most hardware stores.

### Things to think about...

If any members of your household have disabilities or are elderly, find out what services may be available to aid in their care or evacuation in the event of an emergency.

If you have pets, you should find out whether potential shelters will allow them—many will not. In this case, you may wish to make arrangements for pets in advance of an emergency.

## Prepare an Emergency Go Kit

Often during an emergency, electricity, water, heat, air conditioning, or telephone service may not work. Preparing an Emergency Go Kit ahead of time can save precious time in the event you must evacuate or go without electricity, heat, or water for an extended period of time. You can gather water, food, first-aid supplies, clothing, bedding, tools, and other essential items to store at any time. You should consider including the following items in an Emergency Go Kit:



- 1 At least a 3-day supply of water (1 gallon per person per day). Store water in sealed, unbreakable containers. Replace every 6 months.
- 2 A 3- to 5-day supply of non-perishable packaged or canned food and a non-electric can opener.
- 3 A change of clothing, rain gear, and sturdy shoes.
- 4 Blankets, bedding, or sleeping bags.
- 5 A first aid kit and prescription medications (be sure to check the expiration dates).
- 6 An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses and solution (be sure to check the expiration dates).
- 7 A list of family physicians, important medical information, and the style and serial number of medical devices such as pacemakers.
- 8 Special items for infants, the elderly, or family members with disabilities.
- 9 A battery-powered radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries.
- 10 Identification, credit cards, cash, and photocopies of important family documents including home insurance information.
- 11 An extra set of car and house keys.
- 12 Tools such as screwdrivers, cutters, and scissors; duct tape; waterproof matches; a fire extinguisher; flares; plastic storage containers; needle and thread; pen and paper; a compass; garbage bags; and regular household bleach.

## Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Working with neighbors in an emergency can save lives and property. Meet with your community members to plan how you could work together until help arrives. If you're a member of a neighborhood organization, such as a home association or crime watch group, introduce emergency preparedness as a new activity. Know your neighbor's special skills and consider how you could help those with special needs, such as people with disabilities and elderly persons.



## If You Have Pets

Create a survival kit for your pet. This should include:



- Identification collar and rabies tag.
- Carrier or cage.
- Leash.
- Any medications (be sure to check expiration dates).
- Newspapers and plastic trash bags for handling waste.
- At least a two-week supply of food, water, and food bowls.
- Veterinary records (most animal shelters do not allow pets without proof of vaccination).

If you have no other choice but to leave your pet at home, **place your pet in a safe area inside your home with plenty of water and food. Never leave pets chained outside.** Place a note outside your home listing what pets are inside, where they are located, and phone numbers of where you can be reached.

## After An Emergency Strikes

During and after an emergency occurs, it is important to *stay calm*. Even after an event, there may still be many dangers. What seems like a safe distance or location may not be. Stay tuned to your local emergency station and follow the advice of trained professionals. Unless told to evacuate, avoid roads to allow emergency vehicles access. What you do next can save your life and the lives of others. Here are some helpful hints:

### If Your Power Goes Out

- 1 Remain calm, and assist family members or neighbors who may be vulnerable if exposed to extreme heat or cold.
- 2 Locate a flashlight with batteries to use until power comes back on. Do not use candles—this can cause a fire.
- 3 Turn off sensitive electric equipment such as computers, VCRs, and televisions.
- 4 Turn off major electric appliances that were on when the power went off. This will help to prevent power surges when electricity is restored.
- 5 Keep your refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep cold in and heat out.
- 6 Do not use the stove to heat your home—this can cause a fire or fatal gas leak.
- 7 Use extreme caution when driving. If traffic signals are out, treat each signal as a stop sign—come to a complete stop at every intersection and look before you proceed.
- 8 Do not call 9-1-1 to ask about the power outage. Listen to the news radio stations for updates.



### Business Preparedness

Business and industry are just as vulnerable to the affects of emergencies as ordinary citizens. Therefore there are basic steps that a business should take to prepare for an emergency. Some of these steps include:

- Prepare backups and store offsite all computer records (i.e. payroll, inventory records, etc.).
- Maintain sufficient insurance coverage for your business.
- Have an evacuation plan in place to evacuate staff and customers.
- Identify critical business functions that absolutely must continue (i.e. shipping, inventory control, payroll) and come up with processes to ensure these will carry on.

## Technological Hazards Emergencies

If you are notified or become aware of a technological hazards emergency such as a hazardous spill/release, fire, or explosion, *do not panic*. If you need to get out of the surrounding area or are directed to evacuate, do so immediately and:



- Take your Emergency Go Kit.
- Lock your home.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a wet cloth.
- Travel on routes specified by local authorities.
- Head up-wind of the incident.

Emergency personnel are trained to respond to these situations. They will tell you what to do, either at the incident site, or via TV or radio.

If you are sure you have time:

- Shut off water, gas, and electricity before leaving.
- Post a note telling others when you left and where you are going.
- Make arrangements for your pets.

If you are instructed to stay inside and not to evacuate:

- Close and lock windows and doors.
- Seal gaps under doorways and windows with wet towels and duct tape.
- Turn off ventilation systems, water, and gas.

## Natural Hazards Emergencies

The District is vulnerable to a variety of types of severe weather including thunderstorms, hurricanes, flash floods, snow storms, and tornadoes. Because of this, it is important for you to understand the difference between a watch and a warning for severe weather. *A severe storm watch* means that severe weather may develop. *A severe weather warning* means a storm has developed and is on its way—take cover immediately!

The safest place to ride out *any storm* is inside of a secure building or well built home. Even in a well built apartment building you should:



- Listen to weather updates and stay informed.
- Be ready to evacuate if necessary.
- Keep away from windows and doors.
- Have your Emergency Go Kit handy.

*Tornadoes* are dangerous because of their high winds and ability to lift and move heavy objects. If you receive a tornado warning, seek shelter immediately.

If you are in your car:

- STOP! Get out and lie flat face down in a low area.
- Cover your head and wait for the tornado to pass.



At home:

- Go to the basement or storm shelter, or rooms near the center of the house.

In a high-rise or other public building:

- Move to the interior, preferably a stairwell or hallway.

**Flash Flooding** can be very dangerous because of strong, swift currents.



- Move immediately and quickly to higher ground. The force of 6 inches of swiftly moving water can knock people off their feet!

- If flood waters rise around your car, get out and move to higher ground immediately. Cars can be easily swept away in just 2 feet of moving water!

## If You Need Clean Water

Flooding can cause contamination of water supplies. Bad water can contain microorganisms that cause diseases such as dysentery, typhoid, and hepatitis. If you think your water may be contaminated, you should purify it before using it. This includes water used for drinking, cooking, cleaning dishes, or bathing. The best way to purify water is to boil it.



**Boiling.** Boiling is considered the safest method of purifying water. Bring water to a boil for 3-5 minutes, and then allow it to cool before drinking. Pouring water back and forth between two containers will improve the taste by putting oxygen back into the water.

## Recovering from an Emergency

Recovery continues even after you return home, as you and your family face the emotional and psychological effects of the event. Reactions vary from person to person, but may include:



- Restless sleep or nightmares.
- Anger or wanting revenge.
- Numbness or lack of emotion.
- Needing to keep active, restlessness.
- Needing to talk about your experiences.

- Loss of appetite.

- Weight loss or gain.

- Headaches.

- Mood swings.

Crisis, grief, and stress **counseling is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week** for you or a family member suffering persistent emotional or psychological problems related to an emergency.

All of the above are normal reactions to stressful events, and it is important to let people react their own way. It may be helpful to:

- Talk with your family and friends about what happened and how you feel about it, and try to evaluate and plan for the chance it could happen again.
- Volunteer at a local shelter, blood bank, or food pantry to assist emergency victims.
- Consult your minister or spiritual advisor.

In particular, children may need reassurance and extra attention. It is best to encourage them to share their feelings, even if you must listen to their stories repeatedly—this is a common way for children to grasp what they've experienced. You may also want to share your feelings about the event with them.



District of Columbia Emergency Management Agency  
2000 14<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20009

## Important District Telephone Numbers

### Police, Fire, & EMS

#### EMERGENCIES

**911**

#### NON-EMERGENCIES

**311**

#### The Mayor's City-wide Call Center

(202) 727-1000

**DC Emergency Management Agency (24 hour)**  
(For the hearing impaired)

(202) 727-6161  
(202) 727-3323

**Department of Mental Health**  
(For the hearing or speech impaired)

(800) 793-4347  
(202) 561-7000

**American Red Cross, National Capital Chapter**

(202) 728-6401

**Verizon**

(800) 275-2355

**PEPCO**

(Power outages)  
(Downed wires)

(202) 833-7500  
(202) 872-3432

**Poison Control Center**

(800) 222-1222

**Washington Gas**

(800) 752-7520

**DC Water and Sewer Authority**  
(Water and Sewer Emergency Number)

(202) 787-2000  
(202) 612-3400

Additional information on  
emergency preparedness  
is available by calling

**FEMA** at: (800) 480-2520, or  
**DC EMA** at: (202) 673-2101 ext.1163

Or on the **Internet** at:

<http://www.fema.gov>  
<http://www.redcross.org>  
<http://dcema.dc.gov>

311 is a toll-free phone number to request  
police services in non-emergency situations.  
These are situations that are not serious,  
not life threatening, or not currently in progress.