

PREPAREDNESS (BEFORE)

Preparedness is what we can all do now to ensure we are ready to handle an emergency.

Preparedness includes those steps you take before a disaster strikes, in order to make sure you and your family remain safe and secure during and after a disaster. Developing emergency plans, learning about resources available during and after a disaster, and practicing what you would do in an emergency are key elements of preparedness.

During a disaster, local first responders may not be able to reach you immediately. You

should be ready to be self-sufficient for at least three to five days. Your level of preparedness may also give you the ability to help others during a disaster. By being prepared, you will enable first responders to take care of those in immediate life-threatening situations. Being prepared and knowing what to do will reduce fear and anxiety and may help you to avoid the danger altogether.

Here are some tips on how to best prepare.

STEP 1: MAKE AN EMERGENCY PLAN – START IT TODAY

Family Emergency Plans

A commitment to planning today will help you respond to future emergencies. Make a family plan. Before an emergency strikes – under “blue skies” – you should:

- ▶ Call a family meeting.
- ▶ Discuss your most concerning hazards.
- ▶ Determine your basic actions for each likely disaster.

- ▶ Figure out how you will determine whether to shelter-in-place or evacuate, and where you will meet up if needed.
- ▶ Discuss how you will communicate if you are separated.
- ▶ Identify an out-of-area contact in case local communication lines are not usable.

Read further for more guidance on each of these issues, as well as other “planning considerations.”

Plan under blue skies

“Blue skies” is the term emergency management professionals use to describe a day with no disasters – no fires, no floods, no cyber-attacks. That is to say: today. It is always best to plan under blue skies, when you have time, resources, and information. Last-minute planning during a crisis is stressful, difficult, and far less effective.

PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

Emergency management professionals talk about planning assumptions – conditions we can't control during an emergency. For a family emergency plan, you should assume:

- ▶ No power
- ▶ No water
- ▶ No heating or cooling
- ▶ Difficult or inoperable communications, including: phone (unless you have a copper land-line), Internet, and wi-fi
- ▶ Limited or no access to money using credit cards or ATMs
- ▶ Limited or no access to retail, including pharmacies
- ▶ No mail or package delivery
- ▶ No trash or recycling service
- ▶ No outside help
- ▶ **Your basic assumption: Prepare to be self-sufficient for three to five days, or longer**

When you are done with your plan, keep a printed hard-copy in a safe and easily accessible place, known to everyone. Also keep a copy in your emergency kits (shelter-in-place, go bag, and vehicle).

Make sure each household member knows the plan, so they know what to do in an emergency

– whether they are at home, at work, or at school, as well as how to communicate with each other.

Finally, keep the information current. You should update it twice a year: when your clock “falls back” or “springs forward.”

Planning Checklist: The Basics

Every family emergency plan should address the following fundamental information:

- ▶ Utilize emergency **alerts and notifications**. Determine how you will receive emergency alerts and notifications. Sign up in advance for systems like Fairfax Alerts (www.fairfaxcounty.gov/alerts).
- ▶ Identify the best way to **escape from every room in your home**. Make sure every person knows how to escape if there is an emergency.
- ▶ Identify a **shelter-in-place location** in your home. This should be an interior room with few windows.
- ▶ Choose **two places to meet** in case you have to leave your home or are not able to return to your home:
 - » One location should be right outside your home (maybe across the street), in case of a short-term emergency.
 - » The second location should be away from your neighborhood (maybe at a friend's house), in case you cannot get home or you have to leave your neighborhood.
- ▶ List **important supplies and papers**. Create a list of items that you will include in your go bag. Consider copies of important documents (financial and insurance documents, passports, birth and marriage certificates, prescriptions, medical information, drivers licenses, credit cards, etc.). Check out “Step 3: Assemble your Emergency Kits,” **p. 21**.
- ▶ Keep a list of **important numbers and information** such as medical providers, insurance companies, utility providers, etc. Use the important contact information provided in this document as a start.
- ▶ Know your home's **utilities**. Document where and how to turn off the water, gas, and electricity safely; know which you can turn back on yourself (electricity: yes; water: if you know how; gas: never).
- ▶ Identify an **emergency contact person** who lives outside the Washington metropolitan area. This is important so each person who lives with you can report in for accountability.
- ▶ Outline an **Emergency Communications Plan**. As part of your emergency plan, discuss how your family will communicate with each other in an emergency.
- ▶ Fill out a **contact card for everyone who lives with you**. Include the locations of your local emergency meeting place and the meeting place outside your neighborhood. Also, include the name and phone number(s) of your emergency contact. For a model contact card, visit www.ready.gov or contact the Fairfax County Office of Emergency Management.
- ▶ In an emergency, consider **texting instead of calling**. A text message may get through when a phone call will not.
- ▶ Look into **online tools** such as Facebook Crisis Response, or use Safety Check to connect with friends and loved ones during a crisis.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH ACCESS AND FUNCTIONAL NEEDS AND SENIORS

If you or someone close to you has a disability or access and functional need, tailor your plan to meet those needs. Each person's needs and abilities are unique, but everyone can take steps to be prepared.

In Fairfax Alerts, there is a Functional Needs Registry. Fairfax County uses the registry for emergency planning, resource management, and communications. During a crisis or emergency Fairfax County uses this system to deliver important emergency alerts, notifications, and updates.

Before

- ▶ Sign up for Fairfax Alerts and the Functional Needs Registry.
- ▶ Know how to get to the Fairfax County Emergency Blog for information during an emergency.
- ▶ On Facebook and Twitter, follow Fairfax County @FairfaxCounty and the Office of Emergency Management @ReadyFairfax.
- ▶ Write down caregiver and emergency contact information.
- ▶ Create a support network. A team can help you identify and get the resources you need. A team should be prepared to check on an individual to see if they need assistance during an emergency. If you use a personal care attendant, check to see if the agency has an emergency plan. Do they provide service at another location if you need to evacuate?
- ▶ Identify where you will go in an emergency.
- ▶ Plan for any assistance to get to a shelter.

During

- ▶ If you are safe where you are, stay there!
- ▶ Contact your relatives or caregiver to let them know where you are. Keep calls brief to conserve battery life. Use text, email, and social media if you can.
- ▶ Watch TV, listen to the radio, or check official social media channels for news as it becomes available.
- ▶ If you need to evacuate, take your go bag, pets, and any other essentials with you.

After

- ▶ Check the area to make sure it's safe.
- ▶ Receive physical First Aid and/or mental health First Aid, if necessary.
- ▶ Check in with family and friends by texting or using social media.
- ▶ If you used items in your go bag, make sure you replace them.
- ▶ Evaluate your plan and adjust as needed.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Remember the unique needs of household members when making your family emergency plan. Incorporate your child's school's emergency plans, locations, and contact information into your plan. Know who is responsible for picking up whom, and where everyone will meet up.

Try to make emergency planning fun for young children. Gather your family members together for a quick family meeting, maybe over a pizza or before watching a favorite movie. Talk about what you will do in an emergency and discuss your family's plan. By using play and pretend – talking about "what-ifs" as stories – emergency planning becomes a little less scary.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PETS

Don't forget about your pets when you are developing your emergency plan.

Research a pet-friendly hotel, a shelter that accepts animals, or a friend's house. Fairfax County will provide a shelter for pets if the incident requires. Bring a cage for anything besides a cat or dog! Do not leave pets at home if you evacuate your house. If you can't get back to your house, identify in advance a trusted friend or neighbor who can retrieve or care for your pet. And don't forget – this person will need to have a key and know where your pet's supplies are kept.

Make sure your animals are wearing collars with up-to-date identification. You can also ask your vet about microchipping your pets to ensure they make it back to you. The Fairfax County Animal Shelter provides this identification several times a year. Call 703-830-1100 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/animalshelter/ for more information.



Other ways to prepare

Beyond just having a plan, there are other things you and your family members can do to be better prepared:

- ▶ Add an "in case of emergency" (ICE) contact to every cell phone in your household.
- ▶ Teach children how and when to contact 911. For more information, visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/911/text-to-911.
- ▶ Take a CPR, First Aid, or Stop the Bleed course to learn lifesaving skills.



40%

of businesses that close during a disaster never reopen. Many families impacted by disasters permanently leave the impacted community.

DEVELOP A BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN: Use the Continuity Plan Template in **Appendix C**.

Business Continuity Plans

Do you own or operate a business? Take the time to develop a business continuity plan that positions your company to recover from a disaster. A business continuity plan outlines the **impacts** most likely to disrupt your business, the **critical business activities** that are essential to stay in business and recover quickly, and **continuity strategies** to keep those critical activities running.

Developing a business continuity plan is also an excellent non-disaster management practice. As you develop the plan, you will identify and eliminate single points of failure by introducing redundancies and identifying employees for cross-training.

The tools in this Guide will help you create a plan, ensure safety of your clients and employees, and find gaps within your current models.



STEP 2: PRACTICE YOUR PLAN

A plan is only useful if you know it. Take the time to test and practice your family plan, including having drills. Practice evacuating your home and sheltering in place.

Studies show that people who have thought about and practiced their emergency plans are much more likely to survive, and to recover more quickly from disasters.

STEP 3: ASSEMBLE YOUR EMERGENCY KITS

Emergency kits of various types are essential resources in an emergency. These include kits for sheltering-in-place at home, evacuating (variously known as a “go kit,” “go bag,” “grab-and-go bag,” or “bug-out bag”), and for keeping in your vehicle(s).

Emergency kits include basic supplies and are tailored to every person’s need. You will need additional supplies if your household has children, seniors, individuals with access and functional needs, or pets. Kits should be kept in a water-resistant container or a sturdy, transportable bag, and stored in locations where they will be both useful and accessible when needed:

- ▶ Shelter-in-place emergency supply kit: in a secure location in your home and at work
- ▶ Evacuation go bag: somewhere convenient if you have to evacuate, like a garage or near your front door
- ▶ Vehicle kit: one in each vehicle

Remember that your kits’ contents can overlap in a disaster – if you are sheltering at home, you will have access to all of your kits. If you have to evacuate from home, you will only have your vehicle kit and any go bag you grab. If disaster strikes while you are out, your vehicle kit may be all you have.

Fairfax County recommends every household keep **three to five day’s worth of food, water, and supplies** in their shelter-in-place kits **for each member of the household.**

IF YOU HAVE SMALLER CHILDREN, make a game of your drills. Include “Stop, Drop, and Roll” (for fires) and “Drop, Cover, and Hold On” (for earthquakes). Give prizes to the first person to reach your home’s designated safe room, or to the first person to reach the outside meeting place; time family members’ responses. Making exercising a game reduces children’s fear.

DEVELOP A FAMILY EMERGENCY PLAN: Use the Emergency Plan Template in **Appendix B.**





BLEACH IS A POWERFUL DISINFECTANT. It can be cut with water 1:9 for cleaning, or 16 drops/1 gal. for drinking. Check out <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/drinking/making-water-safe.html> for more information.

What should go into your kits?

► Water:

- For sheltering, figure one gallon of water per person per day, for drinking and sanitation. So for a family of four for three days, that would be twelve gallons. Use commercially bottled water. Keep in mind that bottled water has an expiration date! Consider using bagged emergency water, which has a longer shelf-life.
- For water in a go bag, keep supplies that will allow you to treat your own water, such as water purification tablets, a pump-purifier, or household bleach.
- Consider water pouches for your go bag.

► Food and cooking: If the power is out, it will be impossible to refrigerate food, and if you have an electric range, cooking will be limited to backyard grilling or a camp stove (if you plan to use either, keep a supply of fuel in a safe location). Keep a ready supply of foods that don't require cooking or refrigeration. Be sure to have a manual can opener (or multi-tool) on hand! Some examples include:

- Canned meat
- Canned fruit, beans, vegetables, and soup
- Bars: energy, protein, fruit, or granola
- Dry cereal
- Peanut butter
- Crackers
- Baby food and formula, if needed

Remember to avoid foods high in salt and sodium because these will make you thirsty. Don't forget some fun food to help keep up morale. And remember that even non-perishable food usually has an expiration date. Store some lightweight, high-energy foods in your go bag.

► Disposable kitchenware: Include utensils, cups, plates, and napkins.

- Plastic bags: Zipper-lock type plastic bags are useful for storing cookies, cereal, crackers, etc. (you don't want to attract bugs and vermin), and trash bags are useful for all sorts of things – including trash.
- Weather-appropriate clothes: Pack a change for everyone, including extra socks and underwear; be sure to include rain ponchos.
- Blankets or sleeping bags: One for each household member – mylar “astronaut” blankets are compact and inexpensive.
- Items for the kids: Pack some of their favorite non-perishable snacks, plus a few books, games, blankets or “lovies,” and maybe music devices (and batteries).
- Personal basics: Pack soap, washcloths, toothpaste, toiletries for both men and women, shampoo, hygiene products, and toilet paper.
- Basic gear: Include waterproof matches, a few zip-ties, a roll of duct tape, and a multi-tool or pocket knife – because you never know when they might come in handy, especially if you have to evacuate.
- Cell phone chargers: Emergency/camping chargers can be found on the Internet or at hardware or outdoor stores.
- NOAA Weather Radios: NOAA radio is now available as an app, but there is no substitute for a crank-powered weather radio.
- Flashlights: Be sure to include (and regularly replace) the batteries, or invest in a few crank-powered lights.
- First Aid kit: Basic kits can be purchased complete, or assembled from scratch in a trip to any pharmacy. Be sure to include common over-the-counter medications plus injury-cleaning and -treatment supplies. Be aware that medications expire.
- Work gear: For clean-up or just moving around after a disaster, ideally this equipment will include heavy duty work gloves, N95 dust masks, ear plugs, work goggles/glasses, and hard-toed/waterproof boots.

ARE YOU AN INDIVIDUAL WITH ACCESS OR FUNCTIONAL NEEDS, OR A SENIOR? OR ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR HELPING SUCH A PERSON, OR CHILDREN OR PETS, TO BE PREPARED? Make an emergency kit that fits your particular needs, and plan for backup for anything essential, like medical equipment.

For individuals with access and functional needs:

- ▶ A list of types and model numbers of any needed medical devices
- ▶ Documentation of all relevant health information, including physician contact information
- ▶ Any assistive technology you might need, along with instructions for use
- ▶ Extra wheelchair batteries
- ▶ Oxygen
- ▶ Catheters
- ▶ Medication, including arrangements for anything that needs to be refrigerated
- ▶ Food for service animals

For children:

- ▶ Diapers and formula for infants and toddlers
- ▶ Favorite snacks
- ▶ Toys, books, "lovies," and other items to provide both diversion and comfort – if you think emergencies and relocation are stressful for adults, just imagine being a child

For pets:

- ▶ Pet food, treats, and water for at least three days
- ▶ Litter, litter box, newspapers, paper towels, and plastic trash bags
- ▶ Grooming items/sanitary wipes
- ▶ Household bleach
- ▶ Toys, leashes, harnesses, and carriers
- ▶ Medications or medical records
- ▶ A crate if appropriate for your cat or dog; a cage is necessary for any other kind of pet

- ▶ **Important documents:** Inventory of home items, insurance information, identification, and financial information.
- ▶ **Cash:** Assume you will not have access to funds via credit cards or ATMs – how much cash would you want on hand for three to ten days?
- ▶ **Other miscellaneous items:** Don't forget a spare set of glasses and your prescriptions, hearing aids, and prescription medications in your kits.

As you assemble your kits, consider how your supplies are allocated, and whether you need to duplicate anything (like First Aid kits). What would you need to shelter in your home? What would you need to evacuate to a shelter or unknown destination? What should always be with you in your vehicle? Keep in mind that if you do stay home, you'll have access to everything in your go bag.

Assembling a kit can also be fun and empowering. You can take trips to the pharmacy, camping supply stores, and grocery stores to get the items you need. You can make buying supplies into a scavenger hunt for kids.

REMEMBER that you don't have to put together an emergency supply kit all at once. Start small and add a little at a time.

This list is just a start. First Aid kit lists and emergency kit supply lists – including specialized lists for vehicles, seniors, children, pets, and individuals with access and functional needs – are available from many sources. Check out **Appendices B and G**, the **ReadyNOVA.org** site and FEMA's **ready.gov** for starters.



Maintain Your Emergency Kit(s):

After assembling your kit, remember to maintain it so it's ready when needed.

- ▶ Check the out-dates on your food and water twice a year: when your clock “falls back” and “springs forward” (when you replace the batteries in your smoke alarms).

- ▶ Test batteries in flashlights and radios every three months.
- ▶ Check the expiration dates on medications twice a year.
- ▶ Re-think your gear needs every season and replace seasonal items such as clothing and shoes (or pack your kit for four-season use); be sure your emergency kits stays age-appropriate to your children as they get older.

STEP 4: STAY INFORMED DURING AN EMERGENCY

When an emergency strikes, you need access to information on the latest threats in your area, and guidance on what actions to take. There are several ways to get information during emergencies in Fairfax County.

The best method to use is to **sign up for Fairfax Alerts**, a free opt-in service that provides emergency notification to you by e-mail, text, or “reverse-911” calls. Sign up at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/alerts.



You can also:

- ▶ Follow the Fairfax County Government Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Blog at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergency/blog.
- ▶ Follow the county on social media:
 -  @FairfaxCounty
 -  @FairfaxCounty
 -  @FairfaxCounty
- ▶ Watch or listen to TV and radio:
 - Fairfax County Government Radio can be accessed by calling 571-350-2160 or by visiting <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicaffairs/radio>.
 - Tune in to Fairfax County Cable TV Channel 16.

- Other local TV or radio broadcasts will likely cover major disasters.

- ▶ Visit the county's website at www.fairfaxcounty.gov.

Even on non-emergency days, you can stay connected and receive information.

- ▶ Sign up for the Emergency Preparedness Newsletter at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/alerts.
- ▶ Follow Fairfax County OEM on social media:
 -  @Ready Fairfax
 -  @ReadyFairfax
- ▶ Sign up for the Fairfax County Functional Needs Registry: People with physical, sensory, mental health, and cognitive and/or intellectual disabilities, as well as women in the late stages of pregnancy, seniors, and people with large body mass who require special equipment, may need assistance during emergencies. The Functional Needs Registry is an opt-in list of names and addresses of individuals who may need additional assistance in an emergency. During a crisis, the county uses this list to deliver targeted emergency alerts, notifications, and updates.



Sign up for Fairfax Alerts,

a free opt-in service that provides emergency notification to you by e-mail, text, or “reverse-911” calls. Sign up at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/alerts.



STEP 5: GET INVOLVED

We are all in this together.

Building a culture of preparedness makes Fairfax County a more resilient community. Creating a trained, informed, and engaged public is the best way to empower individuals to support those in need.

There are many ways to get involved so you can make a positive difference. To volunteer, connect with any of the below local organizations.

For organizations' contact information and more ways to get involved, go to **p. 7** and **Appendix A** of this Guide.



- ▶ Fairfax County OEM Volunteer Corps
- ▶ Fairfax County Citizen Corps Council
 - Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
 - Fire Corps
 - Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS)
 - Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)
- ▶ Neighborhood Watch
- ▶ Faith Communities in Action (FCIA)
- ▶ Volunteer Fairfax
- ▶ Fairfax County/ Volunteer Fairfax Community Resiliency Groups
- ▶ American Red Cross



