

PLAN, PREPARE, PASS IT ON!

Each Spring the clock "springs forward" one hour, batteries get changed in smoke detectors and we scramble to file our taxes on time. This is also the time to make, or review, your Emergency Disaster Plan. Many of the same documents you use to complete your taxes are important to your Emergency Disaster Plan. Creating an Emergency Disaster Plan does not have to be an overwhelming or time consuming project.

On any ordinary day you may have some ideas about the hazards in your community that put you at risk, and how you would respond to those risks if they became actual emergencies. The key is to write down those hazards and your response plan(s).

Plan!

Every good plan starts with a hazard analysis. "What am I at risk from?" This depends on where you live – in the country, in the state, and in your county.

As a Florida resident, your risks are primarily from naturally occurring incidents: thunderstorms, lightning, structure fire, tornados, fresh water flooding, drought, wild fires and hurricanes.

Many of these risks are common and require small or minimal response on your part (e.g. staying indoors, clearing brush from around your home, or watering restrictions). A few however are not as frequent and when they occur, the effects are widespread and may even require you to evacuate to another building, or another area of the state.

Once you've made a list of the hazards you face, the next step is evaluate what you need in order to respond to those hazards. For the more common and "smaller" hazards this can be as simple as having a designated meeting place and phone number for family members to call should you become separated, an evacuation map of your home in case of fire, and a family / friend / hotel / motel nearby you will stay at in case your home is damaged.

However, for the larger and less frequently occurring hazards you may encounter, a bit more planning will be needed because they also have the potential to affect your entire community. It is for these events that you need to have supplies (i.e. food, water, medicine, etc.) and copies of your important papers. You will also need to consider where you will shelter out of the area, and if you have pets, whether they can shelter with you. It is also important to plan for a place to temporarily call home in the event that your home is destroyed and resources are limited in your community afterwards.

Prepare!

Before you realize it, you have written your plan. Now that you have identified what you will need to survive the hazards you have identified, take a look around your home. Ask yourself: "Do we already have the supplies we need?"

Check your pantry, is there enough food for 3 days that does not need to be cooked? If you have food that needs to be cooked, do you have a gas or charcoal grill that you can use outside your home to cook with? As you go through your list of supplies, try to identify items that you can purchase in little amounts throughout the year in order to spread out the cost.

Pass It On!

You have a Plan. You have taken your inventory of supplies and are Preparing. Now you can Pass It On by sitting down with your family to talk through your Emergency Disaster Plan. Share the Plan for each type of hazard, the expected response, and where important documents, including the Plan, and supplies are located. Make sure to include any family or friends located out of the area, which have a role in your Plan, in the conversation.

Encourage co-workers, friends and other family members to take a little time out of their day to write down their Emergency Disaster Plan.

Review your employer's Emergency Disaster Plan to ensure you know what is expected of you during an emergency, and if it may affect your Family Emergency Disaster Plan.

Plan ✓ (done)

Prepare ✓ (done)

Pass It On ✓ (on-going)

Now What?

Enjoy everything that Southwest Florida has to offer each day, practice your Emergency Disaster Plan with your family at least once a year, and review your Emergency Disaster Plan at least once a year for any changes or additions. Then when there are events that are covered by your Plan, use it. When there are hazards that threaten your community, listen to your local Emergency Management Agency and activate your Family Emergency Disaster Plan accordingly.

Most Importantly: Evacuate when ordered to do so by your Local Emergency Management Agency.

Also check with your local Emergency Management Agency for Family Emergency Disaster Plan assistance, and ask if they have a fill-in-the-blank template you can use to make it even easier to complete.

If you have a family member living in an Assisted Living Facility, or Nursing Home, it is important to know what the Facility's Emergency Plan covers. Ask them!

End.