

Preparedness: Better to be safe than sorry

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

Disaster. The word alone can strike fear in your heart, and these days there are plenty of natural and manmade disasters to fear — earthquakes, extreme cold and heat, hurricanes, power outages, terrorism, tornadoes and tsunamis, to name a few. Of course, if you live in the middle of Kansas, chances are pretty slim that a tsunami will hit your town, but as Dorothy and Toto — two legendary Kansans — learned, tornados

The American Red Cross suggests you hold a family meeting to discuss the kinds of disasters that can happen. In an emergency, your family might be forced to evacuate, so decide on one or two spots where everyone will meet, such as just outside the house or apartment building, or at the entrance to the neighborhood. Also, ask an out-of-state friend or relative to be your family's contact person, and make sure everyone in the family knows the contact person's phone number.



happen, and escaping to Oz is not a practical disaster preparedness plan.

So what should you do to prepare for the worst? For starters, you don't have to prepare for each potential threat individually. The American Red Cross suggests an "all-hazards approach" to preparedness planning, says spokeswoman Tara Lynch, so don't get bogged down in the alphabet threat soup. There are three basic things you can do, she says, that are simple and effective and can apply to any disaster:

- 1 Have an emergency preparedness kit ready
- 2 Create a family communications and evacuation plan
- 3 Be informed

"Get to know the types of disasters that can happen in your community," Lynch says, "and be aware of the risks that could occur in your business, at your child's school, or in your community."



Make sure your family knows where to meet and how to reach one another in an emergency >>

Safety tip:
In the event of a disaster such as a flood or hurricane, tap water may be unsafe to drink, so be sure to keep bottled water on hand.

But whether you're ordered to evacuate or shelter-in-place — a fancy term for "stay put" — you'll need to have some essential supplies on hand, so find an easy-to-carry container, such as a duffel bag or plastic trash can, and start preparing a disaster supply kit today. Just as you wouldn't begin a family trip without some prior planning and packing, you wouldn't want to find yourself in the midst of a disaster situation without an emergency kit!

What to put in your emergency kit

The thought of packing an emergency supply kit overwhelms many people, Lynch says, but it shouldn't. The American Red Cross recommends doing it in stages rather than all at once.



You can start today by grabbing an extra bottle of water or batteries the next time you go to the grocery store.

"You'll be amazed at how much progress you can make," Lynch says.

But whatever you pack, into the mix must go the "big six," which the American Red Cross says are absolutely imperative: bottled water; non-perishable food; a battery-operated or hand-cranked radio; flashlights (make sure you have extra batteries for both the radio and flashlight); medications, including first aid supplies; and copies of important documents, such as your driver's license and insurance papers, in a resealable plastic bag.

There are many other items you'll think of based on your family's needs, including extra clothes, blankets, diapers, pet food, denture needs, contact lens solution or insulin and other prescription drugs. If you have a condition that requires refrigerated medications, talk to your doctor and plan accordingly.



Food for thought

To be prepared, you need to store at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food and water. Plan on one gallon of water per person per day.

Remember: The power might be out, so steer clear of foods that require refrigeration or cooking, or foods that require water for preparation. If you're a potato chip or pretzel addict, keep in mind that water will be in short supply, and salty foods will make you thirsty. Still, choose foods you'll want to eat, Lynch says. For example, "If you hated peanut butter anyway, you're not going to want to eat it in the middle of a disaster," she notes.

Here's a shopping list to get you started: Canned food, nuts, dried fruit, peanut butter, crackers, cereal, energy bars, bottled water, juice boxes, and non-perishable pasteurized milk.

And don't forget to put a hand-operated can opener in your emergency food kit!

Protecting your pets

Just as Dorothy looked out for Toto when she evacuated — tucking him into her basket — you, too, should plan ahead for your pet's needs. Like humans, pets require at least a three-day supply of food and water. Pet food should be stored in an airtight, waterproof container. When packing, consider each pet's needs, such as litter for the cat, or bedding for the bunny. If you must evacuate, take your pets with you. Keep in mind, however, that many disaster shelters don't accept pets, so you'll need to plan ahead for a safe haven. For more information about disaster preparedness for pets, visit the Humane Society of America's Web site at www.hsus.org.



>> For more preparedness tips, visit www.ready.gov or www.redcross.org.



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