

VTech Guest Article

Be Ready- Storm and Fire Preparedness

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It was October 29. Our bathtub was filled with water, candles and matches sat on each table; and battery-powered lanterns waited in every room. Fresh blankets were neatly folded on the bed. The two of us watched television and waited for Hurricane Sandy to hit. Yes, we were ready. Ready, but unprepared for winds plowing through our power lines, snapping off all lights and heat.

Being prepared for an emergency is “one of those messages that people hear, but unless a disaster has happened recently they don't get around to it,” said Alison Johnson of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

With so many natural disasters in the news lately, we've been reminded of the need to plan, prepare and implement emergency safety. While the consequences of storm and fire are unpredictable, there are important steps we can take to give ourselves maximum control in any emergency.

Plan

The time to plan is when everything is OK; not when the nightly news announces a hurricane or tornado. Check with your library, town hall and fire department. They will recommend and explain the designated routes in the event of an evacuation. If you live in a planned community, check with management about the emergency protocol they have put in place. Make sure that you and your family are fully aware of what arrangements have been made. If you do not drive, understand how you can access the evacuation route.

Use the checklist at www.aginginstride.org or at www.AoA.gov to formulate your plan and designate an emergency captain from among family or friends.

Decide to meet at a specified location, and stage a drill twice a year to simulate an emergency evacuation experience. What transportation would be available? What barriers to following the plan will you face? Are your exits blocked? Are doors hard to open?

Drills give you a mental anchor to visualize exactly what you would do in an emergency and increase your odds of actually carrying through your plan. Especially in case of fire, the drill will let you become familiar with using a ladder or a fire extinguisher. These may take practice.

Prepare

Create an emergency kit. These kits should be stored in the safe room in your house, in your car and another with the emergency captain. You'll find a list of suggested contents at <http://www.ready.gov/build-a-kit>.

You will each need one gallon of water per day and enough food for three to six days. But be aware that a gallon jug might be too heavy for an older adult, so use smaller portable bottles.

Non-perishable senior meals are available through companies such as [Golden Cuisine](#), and food programs at faith-based organizations and senior centers.

Don't forget that extra pair of glasses, walking shoes, a dust mask and possibly a sleeping bag. Include extra medication, insulin syringes, hearing aid batteries, and a list of the doctors and pharmacies you use. Keep your papers, including Social Security card, allergy alerts, veteran's papers, and Medicare and Medicaid cards in a waterproof bag. Even in an emergency, dignity counts. Make sure you have incontinency supplies and disposable wipes.

Implement

Communication must stay open to the extent possible when you implement your plan. VTech's CareLine phone makes emergency dialing intuitive, as the corded phone still works if the electricity goes out. You can place four pictures on your CareLine phone for push button calling, and also program two emergency numbers in the companion pendant. The pendant enables you to make your call from up to 600 feet away from your home.

In case of fire or immediate emergency, do not hesitate to call 911, your family emergency captain, and any other contacts suggested by local police or fire department. Then follow your plan.

In our case, a large tree fell across our driveway making it impossible to leave the house. We had lost both cellphone and landline communication. But, our plan worked, because we chose an emergency captain outside of the storm range who called for help when he did not hear from us within a designated time.

Manage expectations

Secure your home when you leave. Not only will this minimize damage, but it will give you a sense of ease that you have protected your home to the best of your ability.

Lock doors and windows; and turn off electricity and water, (natural gas can only be turned off by professional). If you don't have the hand strength to close off water, arrange for a neighbor to do so. Close fireplace dampers, turn off air conditioners and fans before you head for the predetermined meeting place.

Plan, prepare, implement and manage expectations. Hopefully then you can return home, perhaps with holes in the ceiling, but safe and sound.

Resources

American Red Cross

www.redcross.org, Preparing for Disaster for People with Disabilities and Other Special Needs

Centers for Disease Control,

www.bt.cdc.gov

Checklists

Aging in Stride, www.aginginstride.org

Agency on Aging, www.AoA.gov

FEMA, Federal Emergency Management Agency

Older Adults -- www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/older/

Fires -- www.ready.gov/home-fires

Family Emergency Planning-- www.ready.gov

Directory of State Agencies-- www.FEMA.gov

Video on Using a Fire Extinguisher [from KARE11 TV](#)