

## Are you ready for an emergency?

Emergency Preparedness Week (EP Week) is an annual event that takes place each year during the first full week of May. This national event was coordinated by Public Safety Canada, in close collaboration with the provinces, territories and partners. As taken from the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services website there are three steps that everyone should take to be prepared during an Emergency.

### Step 1: Make a Plan

In an emergency, your family may not be together, or you may be asked to evacuate your home. Thinking about what you would do in different situations and preparing a plan with every member of your family is the first step to being prepared.

**A Family Communications Plan** During an emergency, it may be easier to reach someone using text messaging or social media or to make a long-distance call than to call someone locally (due to network damage or a jammed system). Discuss with your family which way(s) you will try to get in touch with each other. Identify one or two out-of-town contacts you and your loved ones can call or text message to connect and share information. Be sure they live far enough away so they will not likely be affected by the same emergency. Contact 1: and Contact 2:

**Make sure everyone in your family, as well as your two key contacts, knows how to use text messaging.** During emergencies, these messages may often get through even when phone calls may not. Always keep your communications devices fully charged.

**Evacuation plan** in case you are asked to evacuate your home, or even your area, select two safe locations you could go to. One should be nearby, such as a local library or community centre. The other one should be farther away, outside your neighbourhood, in case the emergency affects a large area. Safe meeting place 1 (near home): and a safe meeting place 2 (outside my neighbourhood): You should also plan how you would travel to a safe location if evacuation was advised. Have an emergency survival kit ready to take with you (that's Step 2). And if you have pets, think of someone who can take your pet(s) if you have to leave your home. Often, only service animals are allowed at receptions centres. My evacuation route, location of my emergency survival kit and the Location and contact information for pet assistance.

**Evacuation Route** Make sure everyone in your family knows how to safely exit your home?by a main exit and an alternate one. Be sure to consider your living situation. For instance, if you live in a high-rise and have special needs, talk to your building manager or neighbours to make special arrangements, if necessary. Review of safe exits from home

**Emergency Numbers** Keep a listing of emergency numbers at the ready and make sure all members of your family know where they are. Teach children when and how to dial 9-1-1 and other key numbers they may need to call. Here are some numbers you should consider having on this list: 9-1-1 (where available), Police, Fire, Family Doctor, Telehealth, Poison control, Family & friends who can lend support in a crisis, Insurance contact and Utility companies.

**Fire and Other Safety** Follow general household safety rules for smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers. More information on how many to have, where to place them, how often to check and replace them can be obtained from your local fire department. Review of household fire and other safety

**Utility Shut-off Procedure** Every adult in your family, as well as older children, should also know how to turn off main utilities?water, electricity, gas. In certain emergencies, authorities will ask that these be turned off for safety reasons. Write out instructions, if needed, and post somewhere visible. Everyone should also know where the floor drain is located and ensure that it is not obstructed, in case of flooding. Review of directions to turn-off utilities?water valve, electrical panel, gas valve

**Important Documents** Make copies of important documents (insurance, main identification documents like driver's licence and passport, birth and marriage certificates, wills). Keep with your plan in a safe place. Consider sharing copies with out-of-town family members or keep a set in a safety deposit box. Packet of important documents

**Emergency Planning and Safety Beyond Your Home** Inquire at your workplace, and your child's school or daycare about their emergency plans. Find out about their evacuation plans and how they will contact family in an emergency. Make sure that you keep all relevant contact information up to date at work and at your child's school or daycare, and make sure any people designated to pick up your child are familiar with your emergency plan.

**Think of your neighbours.** Identify anyone who may need assistance during an emergency and discuss a plan with them and other neighbours. For instance, help them prepare an emergency plan and survival kit, and arrange to check in on that person during an emergency, like a power outage.

**Planning for Special Needs** If you or anyone in your family has special needs, be sure your plan reflects them. For instance, for someone with special medical needs or a medical condition, you may want to include in your plan a medical history, copies of prescriptions, information for key health-care contacts. Your emergency kit should also contain extra medications and supplies. You

may not have access to conveniences, such as pharmacies, immediately after an emergency has occurred. It is also a good idea to teach others about any special needs, such as how to use medical equipment or administer medicine.

To learn more about emergency planning for disability and special needs, consult our guide for people with disabilities/special needs.

#### When Your Plan Is Ready

Discuss your plan with other family and friends so they know what you would do in an emergency.

Keep your plan in an easy to reach location. A good place is with your emergency kit. Make sure everyone in your family knows where to find it. Once a year, review your plan with the entire family. Update it to reflect any changes you want to make. Refresh your survival kit at the same time, with new food, water and other supplies.

#### Step 2: Build an Emergency Survival Kit

Your emergency survival kit should have everything you and your family would need to be safe and take care of yourselves for at least three days immediately following an emergency.

The following list is broken down into the essentials, items you may need to meet your family's unique needs, and items to have ready in case you have to leave your home.

What to put in your kit: Essentials: food (non-perishable and easy-to-prepare items, enough for 3 days) and a manual can opener, bottled water (4 litres per person for each day), medication(s), flashlight, radio (crank or battery-run), Extra batteries, First-aid kit, Candles and matches/lighter, Hand sanitizer or moist towelettes, Important papers (identification, contact lists, copies of prescriptions, etc.), extra car keys and cash, whistle (to attract attention, if needed), Zip-lock bag (to keep things dry) and farbage bags.

Items for babies and small children?diapers, formula, bottles, baby food, comfort items, prescription medication, medical supplies and equipment, pet food and supplies, any other items specific to your family's needs, extra supplies for evacuation, clothes, shoes, sleeping bags or blankets, personal items (soap, toothpaste, shampoo, comb, other toiletries), playing cards, travel games, other activities for children

Pack the contents of your kit in an easy-to-carry bag(s) or a case on wheels. Store your kit in a place that is easy to reach, and ensure that everyone in your family knows where it is. Your kit does not have to be built overnight. Spread your shopping over a few weeks. Purchase a few items every time you go to the store. Your water supply is meant to cover what you would drink as well as what you might need for food preparation, hygiene and dishwashing. Check and refresh your kit twice a year?when the clocks shift to/from daylight savings time is a good time. Check all expiry dates and replace food and water with a fresh supply. Check batteries and replace as needed. Keep your cell phone or mobile device fully charged.

#### Step 3: Be Informed

There are two main ways that you can be informed about emergencies: sign up for Ontario's emergency alerts, and learn more about the hazards you can face and how you can be prepared for them. During an emergency, you should stay tuned to local news channels. Be sure to have a portable, battery-operated or crank radio in your survival kit in case of power outages.

Ontario's three types of alerts?Red Alerts, Emergency Information Advisories and Tornado Warnings?quickly deliver information on threats or emergencies that have occurred via email, text message, RSS feed, and other channels. They usually include information on how to keep you and your family safe. You just have to sign up.

Ontario's Hazards Different hazards require a different approach for being prepared and knowing how to protect yourself and your family. Learn more about Ontario's hazards, so you can better prepare for them and know what to do to protect yourself.

For more information go to [www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/default.html](http://www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/default.html) where you will find more on how to build your emergency survival kit and include items for the needs of all family members.

**By Michelle Austen**