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Ottawa Journal: be prepared, have an emergency kit

Winter is quickly approaching and of course, we can anticipate unpredictable, harsh weather. We learned many lessons from the ice storm of December 21, 2013, including just how punishing Canadian weather can be and to be prepared at home when these types of natural disasters occur. One way to be prepared for an ice storm or any emergency is to prepare an emergency kit.

An emergency kit is always an important item to have on hand for any emergency. The Government of Canada advises that when considering and preparing such a kit, it should allow you to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours, as you may not have power or tap water and, therefore, have to manage without for a period of time.

When building your emergency kit, you will want to include some basic supplies which you may already have on hand, such as: food, water, and a battery-operated or a wind-up flashlight. You will want to ensure the kit is well-organized; easily accessible, especially if it was dark when it was needed; all members of your household know where to find it; and it's easy to carry. It can be kept in a backpack, duffle bag, or a piece of luggage with wheels and kept in a closet in the front hall of your home. Another suggestion is to separate some of the supplies in backpacks to allow the kit to be more convenient and each member of the household may tailor their own kit to their own needs.

The Government of Canada's Get Prepared website (www.getprepared.gc.ca) provides a suggested list of basic supplies to include in a 72-hour emergency kit, which includes: water (two litres of water per person per day and use small bottles to ensure it can be easily carried in case of an evacuation order); food (ensure you select food items that won't spoil, such as canned food, energy bars, and dried foods and that you replace both the food and water once per year); manual can opener; flashlight and batteries; battery-powered or wind-up radio; extra batteries; first aid kit; special needs items (prescription medications, infant formula, and/or equipment for people with disabilities); extra keys for your car and house; cash (keep smaller bills in the kit, such as $10 bills and travellers cheques can be helpful, as well as change for payphones); and an emergency plan (include a copy of it and ensure it has in-town and out-of-town contact information).

The Get Prepared website recommends that Canadians also have additional emergency supplies on top of the basic emergency kit (which assists in being self-sufficient for the first 72 hours of an emergency). This will ensure you're prepared for the worst emergency situations that could arise. The additional supplies include: two additional litres of water per person per day (for cooking and cleaning); candles and matches or a lighter (kept in durable containers and never leave candles unattended); change of clothing and footwear (for each member of the household); sleeping bag or warm blanket (for each member of the household); toiletries; hand sanitizer; toilet paper; utensils; garbage bags; household chlorine bleach or water purifying tablets; basic tools (i.e. hammer, pliers, wrench, screwdrivers, work gloves, pocket knife); small fuel-operated stove and fuel; whistle (to attract attention); and duct tape.

In having an emergency kit on hand, you will have peace of mind knowing you're prepared for any emergency situation that may take place, such as an ice storm. For more information on preparing an emergency kit, please visit the Get Prepared website at the web address listed above.

By David Tilson, MP