

Disaster Preparedness at Home

Carole Geiger

How did you fare in the aftermath of the June 29 Derecho Storm that wreaked such havoc across our area? Did you have an individual or family plan in place that enabled you to switch into emergency mode? Hmm: Makes good sense, doesn't it? Remember the earthquake and its impact across a wide area around Louisa, VA? How did you weather the winter storms that periodically paralyze our beautiful corner of Virginia? Did anyone else bail window wells during several hurricanes in a row a few years ago? What would you do if a toxic accident on our stretch of I-81 or one involving a train passing through Botetourt County required you to evacuate your family and pets for a few days?

Coping with these periodic and usually unexpected emergencies bring trauma and often huge inconveniences to our lives. However, a few simple preparations and precautions you can take in advance will make such disruptions and dangers easier to manage. The library and online resources provide valuable information you can access and adapt to your needs.

Perhaps the easiest place to begin finding that information is at <http://www.vaemergency.gov/>: Virginia Department of Emergency Management. Among their resources you will find a section called "Get A Kit," which includes a downloadable worksheet to help you get ready either to hunker down at home without power or to evacuate. **The following provides an essential short list, which you should adapt to fit your personal and family needs:**

- Have supplies on hand to last each person at least three days.
- Using boxes or plastic bins or totes, assemble a kit with at least the following:
 - Food that does not require electricity or fuel for storage or preparation (such as canned tuna, turkey, chicken, freeze-dried packets, healthy snack bars)
 - Pet food for three days, if applicable
 - Manual can opener
 - Water (at least three gallons per person for drinking and sanitation)
 - Battery-powered/hand crank radio with weather band and extra batteries
 - Flashlight(s) with extra batteries
 - First-aid kit
 - Sanitary supplies used by individuals in your family
 - Toilet paper – at least one roll per person
 - Paper towels or rags
 - Disinfectant cleaning wipes
 - Hand sanitizer
- Make a written family emergency plan – look for a form on this site – and keep it with your emergency supplies. Make sure you include the following to pack at the last minute:
 - Medications and a list of allergies
 - Keys
 - Leashes, beds, and rags or old towels for pets
 - Essential family papers
 - Important telephone numbers and addresses
 - Camera to record damage

For more information, link to <http://www.vaemergency.gov/readyvirginia/getakit>.

Hints from Our Church Family

As we all recovered from the storm, we asked St. Mark's parishioners to share some of their ideas for managing in an emergency. Let's start with a 'baker's dozen':

1. Buy a generator, get it ready, and test it out before an emergency!
2. Prepare for a shortage of gasoline – the lines stretched for blocks in some areas while folks waited to get gas for their vehicles, generators, and chain saws!
3. Never let the gas tank in your car fall below a quarter tank.
4. Keep charcoal or an extra tank for a grill so that you can cook on the grill.
5. Take pictures NOW of all angles of your buildings, property, household possessions, equipment, and vehicles. Store these in a safe, fire-resistant and waterproof place to use when filing insurance claims.
6. Take pictures afterwards of damage, including the inside of your refrigerator and freezer and again of the bags and stacks of food from your refrigerator and freezer before you throw it away so that you can use these pictures for filing insurance claims. Note: Some of our localities did not charge folks for taking spoiled foodstuff to the dump.
7. Know where you can buy dry ice. As soon as possible when the power goes out, buy dry ice for the freezer.
8. Keep containers with water frozen in your freezer. It helps hold the cold longer in a power failure. If using bottles of water, be sure to rotate them frequently so that the plastic doesn't deteriorate, causing a health problem if you use the water later.
9. If you have a chest freezer, don't open it to check on it. Many reported that only the top layer of food in chest freezers had to be tossed and the rest remained solidly frozen for days.
10. Save bleach bottles to store emergency water: When you finish a bottle of chlorine or hydrogen peroxide bleach, fill it to the brim without rinsing it out first, label the bottles "Emergency Water," and store it to use for washing and flushing toilets in an emergency. The residue of bleach helps to keep 'crud' from forming in the water, making it great to use for sanitation.
11. Have a bin with a few towels, pillows, and blankets or sleeping bags all together to evacuate.
12. Have a plan for checking on neighbors and family members who might require assistance.
13. In your written family plan, decide where you will meet if members of the family become separated. Many people had difficulty with both landlines and cell phone transmission this last time, so knowing in advance where you would meet can make a real difference in both peace of mind and safety.

What would you suggest? If you have additional good ideas to share, let me know and I'll be glad to compile them for the next Good News Letter.

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