A Federal Employee's Family Preparedness Guide

This Guide Will Help You to:

- Learn what to do before, during, and after an emergency
- Create an emergency plan for your family
- Prepare an Emergency Go Kit

United States Office of Personnel Management

Working for America

Before Emergency Strikes

During an emergency your family may have little or no time to plan what to do next. It is necessary for you to learn about the things you can do to be prepared—before an emergency occurs. Two actions that will help you do this are to develop an emergency plan, and prepare an "Emergency Go Kit."

Create an Emergency Plan

Part of creating your household emergency plan is to learn about the types of emergencies that may affect your community, how you'll be notified of an event, and plans that may already be in place to deal with these events. Determine if your community has a warning system—via televisions, radio, or another signal—recognize what it sounds like and what to do when you hear it. Emergencies may strike when your family members are away from home, so find out about plans at your workplace, school, or anywhere else you and your family spend time. Steps to take in creating a household emergency plan include:

1. Meeting with household members and discuss the dangers of possible emergency events, including fire, severe weather, hazardous spills, and terrorism.
2. Discussing how you and your family will respond to each possible emergency.
3. Discussing what to do in case of power outages or personal injuries.
4. Drawing a floor plan of your home. Mark two escape routes from each room.
5. Teaching adults how to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at main switches. *If for any reason you do turn off natural gas service to your home, call your gas utility company to restore service.
   DO NOT ATTEMPT TO RESTORE GAS SERVICE YOURSELF.
6. Posting emergency contact numbers near all telephones, and pre-program emergency numbers into phones with autodial capabilities.
7. Teaching children how and when to dial 911 to get emergency assistance.
8. Teaching children how to make long-distance telephone calls and/or to use a cell phone.
9. Choosing a friend or relative that all family members will call if separated (it is often easier to call out-of-state during an emergency than within the affected areas).
10. Instructing household members to turn on the radio for emergency information.
11. Pick two meeting places:
    - A place near your home
    - A place outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home after an emergency.
12. Taking a Basic First Aid and CPR Class. Contact American Red Cross for more info.
13. Keeping family records in a waterproof and fireproof safe. Inexpensive models can be purchased at most hardware stores.

Prepare an Emergency Go Kit

Often during an emergency, electricity, water, heat, air conditioning, or telephone service may not work. Preparing an Emergency Go Kit ahead of time can save precious time in the event you must evacuate or go without electricity, heat, or water for an extended period of time. You should consider including the following items in an Emergency Go Kit:

1. At least a 3-day supply of water (1 gallon per person per day). Store water in sealed, unbreakable containers. Replace every 6 months.
2. A 3-to 5-day supply of non-perishable packaged or canned food and a non-electric can opener.
3. A change of clothing, rain gear, and sturdy shoes.
4. Blankets, bedding, or sleeping bags.
5. A first aid kit and prescription medications (be sure to check the expiration dates).
6. An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses and solution (be sure to check the expiration dates).
7. A list of family physicians, important medical information, and the style and serial number of medical devices such as pacemakers.
8. Special items for infants, the elderly, or family members with disabilities.
9. A battery-powered radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries.
10. Identification, credit cards, cash, and photocopies of important family documents including home insurance information.
11. An extra set of car and house keys.
12. Tools such as screwdrivers, cutters, and scissors, duct tape, waterproof matches, a fire extinguisher, flares, plastic storage containers, needle and thread, pen and paper, a compass, garbage bags, and regular household bleach.

Know the Plans of Your School System

If you have a child who attends school, it is important for you to contact your school system administrators to understand fully what plans are in place to protect your child in the event of an emergency.

Be sure to keep the contact information for your child up to date. Provide your school administrators with a list of family or caregivers who you authorize to pick up your child or children at school.

If a dangerous substance were released in the atmosphere and posed a threat to students during the school day, it is very likely that the schools affected would shelter-in-place and protect children and staff by keeping them inside and moving them to safer areas within the school building.

Prescriptions

Store 3–5 days of medications that are important to your health.

Include any medications that are used to stabilize a medical condition or keep a condition from worsening or resulting in hospitalization, such as medications for asthma, seizures, cardiovascular disorders, diabetes, psychiatric conditions, HIV, and thyroid disorders.

Carry these with you, if possible, in a purse or briefcase in labeled containers.

Rotate these medications whenever you get your prescriptions refilled.

If your child takes medications, communicate with the school to discuss their emergency preparedness plans.

People with complex medication regimens should talk to their physician and pharmacist to help with emergency preparation plans.

Such regimens include: injectable medications, including those delivered by pumps (e.g., insulin, analgesics, chemotherapy, parenteral nutrition); medications delivered by a nebulizer (e.g., antibiotics, bronchodilators); dialysis.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Working with neighbors in an emergency can save lives and property. Meet with your community members to plan how you could work together until help arrives. If you're a member of a neighborhood organization, such as a home association or crime watch group, introduce emergency preparedness as a new activity.

Things to think about...

If any members of your household have disabilities or are elderly, find out what services may be available to aid in their care or evacuation in the event of an emergency.

If You Have Pets

If you evacuate, avoid leaving family pets behind. However, keep in mind that with the exception of service animals, pets are generally not permitted in emergency shelters for health reasons.

For this reason, find out before a disaster occurs which hotels or motels (both within and outside your local area) allow pets. Determine where pet boarding facilities are located.

Create a emergency kit for your pet. This should include:

- Identification tag and rabies tags should be worn on a collar at all times
- Carrier or cage
- Leash each pet during evacuation, if not contained in a carrier
- Any medications (be sure to check expiration date)
- Newspapers and plastic bags for handling waste
- A supply of food, bottled water, and food bowls
- Veterinary records (most animal boarding facilities do not allow pets without proof of vaccination)

For complete information, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has an emergency preparedness guide designed specifically for pets at www.aspca.org/site/PageServer?pagename=emergency.

Shelter-in-Place

In the event of an emergency such as the release of a hazardous material, it is not always recommended to immediately evacuate, as leaving your house might expose you to harmful agents that have been dispersed into the air. "Sheltering-in-place," which means simply staying in your house or current location, may be the best means to avoid harm.

If your spouse, friend, or loved one is a Federal employee, there are protocols in place at every agency to shelter-in-place at the work place if circumstances warrant that action. Federal employees can ask their manager for more information about the procedures in place at their agency.

If Your Power Goes Out

1. Remain calm, and assist family members or neighbors who may be vulnerable if exposed to extreme heat or cold.
2. Locate a flashlight with batteries to use until power comes back on. Do not use candles—this can cause a fire.
3. Turn off sensitive electric equipment such as computers, VCRs, and televisions.
4. Turn off major electric appliances that were on when the power went off. This will help prevent power surges when electricity is restored.
5. Keep your refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep cold in and heat out.
6. Do not use the stove to heat your home.
7. Use extreme caution when driving. If traffic signals are out, treat each signal as a stop sign—come to a complete stop at every intersection and look before you proceed.
8. Do not call 911 to ask about the power outage.
9. Listen to the news radio stations for updates.

If You Need Clean Water

Flooding can cause contamination of water supplies. Bad water can contain microorganisms that cause diseases such as dysentery, typhoid, and hepatitis. If you think your water may be contaminated, you should purify it before using it. This includes water used for drinking, cooking, cleaning dishes, or bathing. The best way to purify water is to boil it.

Boiling. Boiling is considered the safest method of purifying water. Bring water to a boil for 3-5 minutes, and then allow it to cool before drinking. Pouring water back and forth between two containers will improve the taste by putting oxygen back into the water.

Evacuation

If you are notified or become aware of a technological hazards emergency such as a hazardous spill/release, fire, or explosion, **do not panic.** If you need to get out of the surrounding area or are directed to evacuate, do so immediately and:

- Take your Emergency Go Kit.
- Lock your home.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a wet cloth.
- Travel on routes specified by local authorities.
- Head up-wind of the incident.

If you are sure you have time:

- Shut off water, gas, and electricity before leaving.
- Post a note telling others when you left and where you are going.
- Make arrangements for your pets.

If you are instructed to stay inside and not to evacuate:

- Close and lock windows and doors.
- Seal gaps under doorways and windows with wet towels or seal with plastic and duct tape.
- Turn off ventilation systems

Prepare Your Evacuation Routes in Advance

Many major cities have established evacuation routes that can be used to effectively move individuals from heavily populated areas in the event of an emergency. For instance, the City of Washington, D.C. has identified 14 major arterials that will be used for outbound traffic only. During a major event or emergency situation, radial evacuation routes featuring traffic signals will be timed. In addition, 70 critical intersections on the event/evacuation routes within Washington, D.C. will be manned with uniformed police officers to expedite the flow of traffic and to prevent bottlenecks. Officers will be able to direct drivers to alternate routes should an emergency warrant the closing of current event/evacuation routes.

If you work or live in a heavily populated area, you should prepare in advance the best available routes for you to use in the event that you need to quickly leave the area. Contact your local police or other local emergency preparedness offices for protocols that will be in place in your area during an evacuation.

Natural Disasters

This area is vulnerable to a variety of types of severe weather including thunderstorms, hurricanes, flash floods, snow storms, and tornadoes. Because of this, it is important for you to understand the difference between a watch and a warning for severe weather. **A severe storm watch** means that severe weather may develop. **A severe weather warning** means a storm has developed and is on its way—take cover immediately!

The safest place to ride out **any storm** is inside of a secure building or well-built home. Even in a well-built apartment building, you should:

- Listen to weather updates and stay informed.
- Be ready to evacuate if necessary.
- Keep away from windows and doors.
- Have your Emergency Go Kit handy.

Tornadoes are dangerous because of their high winds and ability to lift and move heavy objects. If you receive a tornado warning, seek shelter immediately.

If you are in your car:

- STOP! Get out and lie flat face down in a low area.
- Cover your head and wait for the tornado to pass.

If you are at home:

- Go to the basement or storm shelter, or rooms near the center of the house.

In a high-rise or other public building:

- Move to the interior, preferably a stairwell or hallway.

Flash Flooding can be very dangerous because of strong, swift currents.

- Move immediately and quickly to higher ground. The force of 6 inches of swiftly moving water can knock people off their feet!
- If flood waters rise around your car, get out and move to higher ground immediately. Cars can be easily swept away in just 2 feet of moving water

Biological Threats

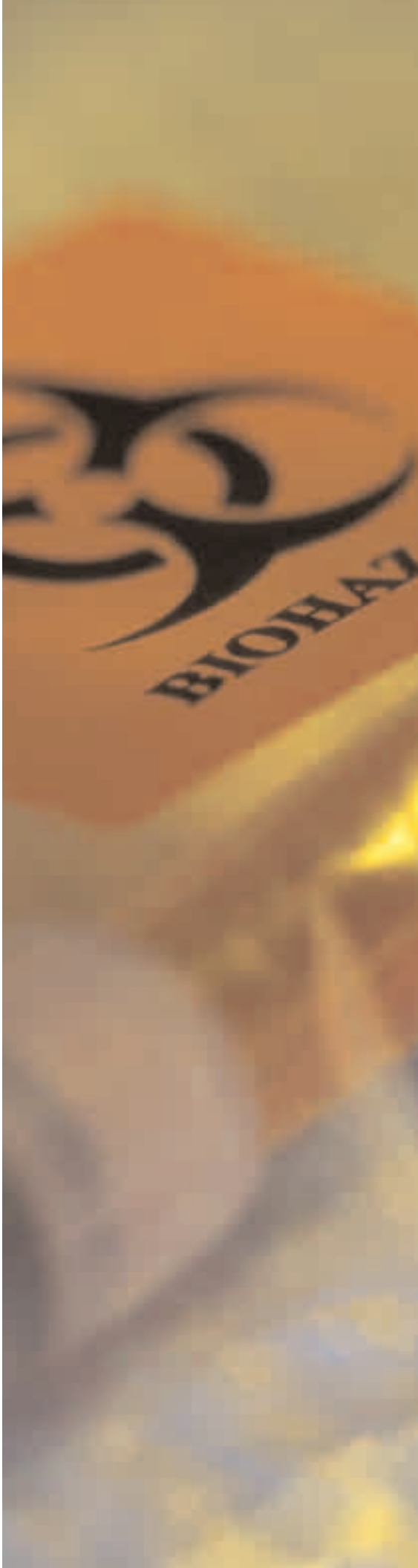
A biological attack is the deliberate release of germs or related substances. To affect individuals adversely, these substances must usually be inhaled, be ingested, or enter through cuts in the skin. Some biological agents such as smallpox can be spread from person to person while others like anthrax do not cause contagious diseases.

Different than a conventional explosive or attack, biological attacks may not be immediately evident. Some of the normal indicators of this type of attack would be an increase in the number of illnesses reported by local health care workers or a large number of dead or sick animals throughout your area. These attacks are normally discovered by emergency response personnel in reaction to the indicators listed above.

What Should You Do?

In the event that you witness a suspicious attack using an unknown substance, there are a number of things you can do to protect yourself and your family. First, leave the immediate area as quickly as possible and protect yourself by finding something to place over your nose and mouth. Any layered material like a t-shirt, handkerchief, or towel may help prevent particles of the substance from entering your respiratory system. If you have a long-sleeved shirt or jacket, they would be useful in covering exposed skin. They may also prevent bacteria from entering cuts you may have. If you are indoors and the suspected attack takes place outdoors, remain inside unless told otherwise by authorities. Report the attack to emergency personnel.

You can also take precautionary measures such as keeping shots up-to-date and making sure you practice good personal hygiene. A healthy body will be able to better fight any potential contamination by biological agents. In the event that anyone around you becomes ill, do not automatically assume that it is from the suspected attack as many of the symptoms from these attacks resemble common illnesses. Seek the medical advice of your physician.



Chemical Threats

Chemical attacks differ from biological attacks in that a toxic gas or liquid is used to contaminate people or the environment. The prevalent symptoms you would experience from a chemical attack are tightness in the chest, difficulty breathing, blurred vision, stinging of the eyes, or loss of coordination.

It is worth noting that the public routinely accepts the risks posed by accidental release of chemicals. The response to an emergency event involving chemicals, however, is the same regardless of whether the emergency is a result of intentional or unintentional actions.

What Should You Do?

If you witness a suspected chemical attack outdoors, move laterally or upwind from the area as quickly as possible. If you cannot leave the area, try to get inside, away from direct exposure and follow your instructions to shelter-in-place. If you are inside and an attack occurs in your building, try to leave the area if possible. If not, move to a safe location in the building and shelter-in-place.

If you suffer any of the symptoms mentioned above try to remove any clothing you can and wash your body with water or soap and water if available. Do not scrub the area, as this may wash the chemical into the skin. Seek medical assistance as soon as possible. If you see someone experiencing these symptoms, keep them away from others as much as possible, and try to keep them comfortable.

While extensive decontamination requiring disrobing is a possibility, this will normally only occur if you become a casualty of the agent or are evacuated and require medical treatment in a "clean" medical facility. This procedure may be required to prevent the spread of contamination.

Nuclear Explosions and Radiological Contamination

A nuclear blast consists of tremendous thermal (heat), light, and blast energy. The blast can spread radioactive waste capable of contaminating the air and surrounding landscape. While this type of attack is less likely than a biological or chemical attack, the remote possibility of its occurrence means you should be prepared.

What Should You Do?

If a nuclear explosion occurs, immediately drop and stay down until any blast wave passes over you and it is safe to get up. Debris can often cause injuries from a nuclear explosion so it is often safer to remain down until debris stops falling. Do not look at the blast.

When it is safe to do so, seek shelter inside a building or basement. Since dirt or earth is one of the best forms of protection from radiation, put as much shelter between you and the potential contamination as possible. If it is safe to leave without going in the direction from which the blast came, you should decide whether to leave the area to minimize the amount of time you spend exposed to radiological contamination. You should always try to place as much shielding and distance between yourself and the contamination as possible and limit the amount of your exposure by leaving laterally or upwind from the area when it is safe to do so.

Dirty Bombs

Dirty bombs are regular explosives that have been combined with either radiation causing material or chemical weapons. While most news reports talk about radiological dirty bombs, chemical agents may be used as well. Blasts from these types of weapons normally look more like a regular explosion, and the contamination spread is not often immediately noticeable. While this type of attack normally spreads contamination over a more localized area, you should be prepared to follow many of the same procedures as listed above.

After experiencing any of these types of attacks, tune to your local channels for information and instructions. Emergency responders are trained and equipped to evaluate and react to threats rising from these incidents. After a nuclear blast, you may be unable to get a signal from radio or television stations for a period of time. This is expected; so be persistent.

While radioactive, biological, and chemical weapons do pose a threat, they are attacks that you, and your family or fellow employees can survive if you keep a cool head and follow the instructions given by your local responders.

Recovering from an Emergency

Recovery continues even after you return home, as you and your family face the emotional and psychological effects of the event. Reactions vary from person to person, but may include:

- Restless sleep or nightmares.
- Anger or desire for revenge.
- Numbness or lack of emotion.
- Needing to keep active, restlessness.
- Needing to talk about your experiences.
- Loss of appetite.
- Weight loss or gain.
- Headaches.
- Mood swings.

All of the above are normal reactions to stressful events, and it is important to let people react their own way. It may be helpful to:

- Talk with your family and friends about what happened and how you feel about it, and try to evaluate and plan for the chance it could happen again.
- Volunteer at a local shelter, blood bank, or food pantry to assist emergency victims.
- Consult your minister or faith advisor.

In particular, children may need reassurance and extra attention. It is best to encourage them to share their feelings, even if you must listen to their stories repeatedly—this is a common way for children to grasp what they've experienced. You may also want to share your feelings about the event with them.

Acknowledgments

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Other agencies
Department of Homeland Security
Department of State
Department of Justice
Centers for Disease Control
Homeland Security Council
National Institutes of Health

And special thanks, on behalf of those whose families include pets, to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Key Telephone Numbers

Police, Fire & EMS
Emergencies 911
Non-Emergencies 311

Department of Homeland Security 1-800-BE-READY
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) .....(202) 566-1600
FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force
(24/hr line for reporting suspicious activity) .....(202) 278-2000
Poison Control Center .....(800) 222-1222
National Weather Service .....(301) 713-4000

Additional Resources

The following publications are excellent resources for employees and managers to study to gain a more in-depth understanding about the potential risks and steps that can be taken to mitigate the damage from an attack.

- **Are You Ready? A Guide for Citizen Preparedness**
  (www.fema.gov/areyouready)
  Federal Emergency Management Agency
- **Federal Employee's Emergency Guide**
  (www.opm.gov/emergency/)
  Office of Personnel Management
- **Preparing Makes Sense. Get Ready Now**
  (http://www.ready.gov/readygov_brochurev2.pdf)
  Department of Homeland Security
- **The D.C. Emergency Management Agency Website**
  (http://dcema.dc.gov/)
  City of Washington, D.C.
- **Manager's Handbook on Handling Traumatic Events**
  Office of Personnel Management
  (www.opm.gov/emergency/)