

4. PREPARING YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR COMMUNITY FOR EMERGENCIES

- 4.1. Emergencies can take many different forms, from road accidents and house fires affecting a small number of people through to widespread loss of electricity supply, flooding or an explosion affecting many thousands of people. In general, we should prepare for the impacts of all emergencies, but it is important to be aware of the specific risks we face, and understand how they could affect us so we can become more prepared to deal with their impacts. This chapter provides information on how individuals, families and communities can make themselves more prepared to deal with the impacts of emergencies.
- 4.2. There is a lot you and those around you can do to prepare for an emergency. Are you the sort of person who writes a list before you go on holiday to make sure you pack everything you need? Do you make arrangements with friends, family or neighbours to feed the cat, water the plants or look after the children? If you do these things as part of day-to-day life, you should also be prepared to do them to help yourself prepare for emergencies.

GENERAL ADVICE ON PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

- 4.3. What should I do in an emergency?
- **Call 999 if there** is a threat to life
 - Follow the advice of local emergency responders
 - Think before you act
 - Never put yourself or others in unnecessary danger
 - Try to get to a safe place if possible (this may not be your home)
 - Check for injuries – remember to help yourself before attempting to help others
 - Try to reassure others around you

If you are not involved in the incident, but are close by or believe you may be in danger:



Go in – go inside and stay away from doors and windows



Stay in – stay inside for as long as it is safe to do so



Tune in – tune in to your local radio, TV and internet news channels. Local Emergency Responders will use these to give you information about the situation. A wind up radio will mean that you don't have to replace batteries.

Case Study 1: Niki's family

"As a family, we decided that if something is familiar it's less intimidating so we started to draw up emergency plans together. We drew up a list of things we might need if we had to leave the house for a few days. Some of the things on the list were 'needs'; food, water, dry clothing, a wallet. Some of them were there to keep us occupied, such as books and toys. We each packed a bag, that was light enough for us to carry that would see us through a few days. Around 10 months after we had made up our grab bags we had a house fire, so we made good use of their contents then!"

Considerations for individuals and families

4.4. How can I prepare my family for emergencies?

You can increase your family's ability to cope with and recover from emergencies by being more aware of the risks that could affect you, and knowing what you can do to minimise their impacts upon you:

- Have you identified the risks that might affect you at home and in your local area?
- Do you know what the emergency arrangements are at your work place and child's school?
- Have you identified somewhere your family can meet if you are evacuated or cannot return home?
- Have you identified a friend or relative you can stay with if you need to stay out of your home for a few days?
- Have you gathered essential items to use if you have to leave your home in an emergency?
- Have you gathered supplies to use if you cannot leave your home during an emergency?
- Do you have a written record of your family's contact details, and a way of reaching them if local communication networks are disrupted?
- Have you made arrangements for your pet to be looked after during an emergency if you are not able to do so?

Where can I find out more?

The Preparing for Emergencies Website²¹ contains guidance to help you and your family better prepared to cope with an emergency.

Considerations for communities

4.5. How can I prepare my community for emergencies?

Some of the risks we face mean that local emergency responders may not be able to get to you and your community immediately in an emergency. Their efforts have to be directed to those of greatest need. During this time, individuals and communities may need to rely on themselves, their assets and resources to ensure they are able to cope with the consequences of the emergency. Previous experience has shown that those who have spent time planning and preparing for this know what to do during, and recover more quickly from, emergencies.

Below are some steps your community can take to become more resilient:

1. Begin by considering who your community is and which communities you belong to

Community resilience is about considering what already exists around you, what you already do, and who you already talk to, or work with and think about how you could work together before, during and after an emergency.

2. Get in touch with existing local networks you can work with

There are many community groups that already work to support and enhance our communities. Think about how you could use the skills, resources and expertise of these groups to make your community more resilient.

3. Choose community emergency co-ordinators

These people represent their local community by providing the link between the community and the statutory bodies who provide emergency response services to them. Think about who would take this role in your community.

4. Establish a Community Emergency Group

There are 'Community Emergency Groups' already established in both rural and urban areas where people have recognised the need to consider what their community might need in an emergency and have set about helping themselves to be prepared. You do not have to establish a new group. You may instead wish to build in and use existing community groups and consider how they might include building community resilience into their activities.

5. Develop a Community Emergency Plan

Your local authority's emergency planning group may be able to provide you with some guidance about how to go about writing a Community Emergency Plan and how you should involve them in it.

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<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Dealingwithemergencies/Preparingforemergencies>

Where can I find out more?

The Preparing for Emergencies website contains information and a step by step guide to creating a community emergency plan, including a template, to help your community become more resilient.

Case study 2: Fairford Emergency Action Group

“We worked with our town council to form the Fairford Emergency Action Group. It helps us coordinate our community response to the risks that face us. In Fairford, this includes a risk from flooding, accidents blocking our narrow streets and aircraft accidents (from the nearby RAF base). We bought equipment to help in any future crisis and identified premises to be used as a Rest Centre”

Dealing with the impacts of emergencies

4.6. It is important to remember that the consequences of an emergency might be similar, even if the emergency itself is different. For example, a power cut lasting several days could be caused by a severe snowstorm or an industrial accident. However, it is useful to think about what you, your family and community can do to reduce the impact that some specific emergencies have on day-to-day life.

Loss of mains electricity or gas

4.7. Power cuts can affect household appliances, lighting and other electronic equipment. Prolonged loss of electricity can also result in loss of mains water, sewerage and mobile communications. Nationally,

schools and offices may close temporarily unless they can find alternative power sources or may have to alter their hours to accommodate rota cuts.

- Ensure you have back-up arrangements for childcare with friends or relatives in the event of schools being closed.
- Store important contact details separately from your mobile phone.
- Gather essential supplies. This could include bottled water; a battery powered or wind up radio; a torch; tinned food and alternative heating sources.
- Have a spare landline handset that plugs directly into your phone line – handsets that plug into the mains electricity will not work during a power cut.

Fuel shortages

- 4.8. There are several ways in which you can use less fuel in your car:
- Use alternative methods of transport (such as bus, train, bicycle or foot).
 - Share lifts to work or alternate the school run with other parents.
 - Plan ahead to try and avoid travelling at peak times when congestion is likely. Sitting in traffic will reduce your vehicle’s fuel economy.
 - Avoid allowing your car to idle. No matter how efficient the vehicle, idling consumes fuel. One minute of idling uses up more fuel than restarting your engine.

- Use your car's electrics less. Car electrics such as radios and sat navs impose an extra load on the engine, making it work harder and burn more fuel. Air conditioning can increase fuel consumption considerably.
- A poorly tuned engine can also increase fuel consumption. By properly maintaining your car and by following the recommended maintenance schedule in your owner's manual, you can maximise fuel efficiency.

Disruption to telecommunications

4.9. It is important to consider how you might cope if your landline and mobile phone were out of action. You could prepare for this happening by taking the following steps:

- Work out how your friends and family can stay in contact in the event of any disruption.
- Identify default arrangements (for example, for meeting people or collecting children from school) if you cannot get in touch with your family.

Disruption to IT

4.10. Simple measures can help prevent data loss or corruption on your computer (for example, using up-to-date anti-virus software or a firewall). Similarly, some basic steps can be taken to reduce the impact of losing access to data:

- Make back-up copies of important electronic files and store them in a safe place.
- Create paper versions of the important documents stored on your computer.

Disruption to mains water supplies

4.11. There are several measures that can be taken to prepare for disruption to mains water supplies. These include:

- Store some bottled water in your home.
- Make arrangements to use friends' or relatives' facilities if you can't use your own.
- Use water more sparingly.

Transport disruption

4.12. The following considerations may help you prepare for disruption to transport:

- Put in place back-up arrangements for getting to work and for other essential journeys (such as taking the children to school).
- Make arrangements so that you can work from home if required.
- Work out alternative routes to get to your destination before you set off on your journey.
- Tune in to the local radio, switch on the television or search the internet for travel advice before you set off.

Human diseases

4.13. People can adopt simple and basic hygiene measures to protect themselves against disease and to reduce the risk of spreading viruses. Measures may include:

- Stay at home when ill, provided there is no need for you to go to hospital or visit a doctor. You may wish to contact NHS Direct or NHS 24 for further advice on what to do.
- Cover the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Dispose of dirty tissues promptly and carefully.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water to reduce the spread of the virus from the hands to the face or to other people, particularly after blowing the nose, disposing of tissues or coming in from outside.
- Regularly clean frequently touched hard surfaces, such as kitchen worktops and door handles.

Loss of access or damage to your home

4.14. Considering the following points may help you prepare for possible loss of access or damage to your home:

- Keep copies of important documents (such as insurance details) stored at another location.
- If your home is at risk of flooding, plan to move valuable items to a higher floor or different location to avoid damage.

- Consider where you might move your car to avoid it being damaged.
- Identify somewhere your family could meet if you cannot return to your home.
- Identify a friend or relative you can stay with if you need cannot stay in your home.
- Make arrangements for your pets.
- Prepare a list of useful numbers (for example, the emergency responders and your insurance company).
- Gather essential items you may need to take with you. This could include personal documents, your insurance policy, emergency contact numbers, a torch, a battery or wind-up radio, mobile phone, first aid kit and blankets.
- Identify neighbours who may be particularly vulnerable and what you could do to help them if they were denied access to their home.

4.15. Specific information on how to prepare for flooding is available on the Environment Agency's website. It includes guidance on preparing your home or business for flooding, including how to access Floodline Warnings Direct to have warnings sent to your landline or mobile phone.

Further information

Information on how to prepare for and respond to emergencies is available on the following websites.

General advice:

The 'Preparing for Emergencies' booklet, translated into 18 languages, is available at: www.direct.gov.uk/en/governmentcitizensandrights/dealingwithemergencies/preparingforemergencies

www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/government-citizens-and-rights/dealing_with_emergencies/preparing-for-emergencies.htm

Specific advice across the UK:

Road traffic

www.highways.gov.uk
www.trafficscotland.org
www.roadsni.gov.uk

Rail

www.nationalrail.co.uk
www.translink.co.uk

Fuel and gas

www.berr.gov.uk
www.detini.gov.uk

Electricity

www.berr.gov.uk
www.detini.gov.uk

Water supply

www.defra.gov.uk
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

www.sepa.org.uk
www.drdni.gov.uk
www.niwater.com

Human diseases

www.dh.gov.uk
www.scot.nhs.uk
www.nhs.uk
www.dhsspsni.gov.uk
www.publichealth.hscni.net
www.hscni.net

Animal diseases

www.defra.gov.uk
www.dardni.gov.uk

Telecommunications and IT

www.cpni.gov.uk

Severe weather

www.metoffice.gov.uk

Flooding

www.environment-agency.gov.uk
www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thepittreview
www.sepa.org.uk
www.riversagencyni.gov.uk

Fire

www.communities.gov.uk/fire/

Useful telephone numbers:

Floodline (England and Wales)

0845 988 1188

Flood Incident Line (Northern Ireland)

0300 2000 100

Highways Agency – 24 hours traffic

08700 660 115

Highways Agency Information Line

08457 50 40 30

Traffic Scotland

0800 028 1414

Travel Watch (Northern Ireland)

0845 712 3321

National Rail Enquiries

08457 48 49 50

Translink (Northern Ireland)

028 9066 6630

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office Travel
Advice**

0870 606 0290

NHS Direct (England and Wales)

0845 46 47

NHS 24 (Scotland)

08454 24 24 24