

## Know What To Do:



### In Developing a Family Disaster Plan

If a disaster occurred today would you be ready here at work? Unless you have prepared at home, you won't be ready at work. Your efforts will be directed to protecting your family and your home and that's where it should be. Preparing for emergencies at home will allow you to focus on your responsibilities at work. You should plan in advance what you will do in an emergency. Be prepared to assess the situation, use common sense, and **inventory** what you have on hand to take care of yourself and your loved ones. Think about the places where you socialize and frequent, and if you have children, their schools. Inquire about the emergency plans at the locations where you spend a lot of time. By law, schools are required to have an emergency plan, but does your church? Or the gymnasium where the kids play basketball? Find out how they communicate with families during an emergency. If they do not have an emergency plan, consider helping develop one. If you have children talk to them about how they should get in touch with you during an emergency. Make sure you have a redundant system! Having one cell phone number is not enough. Your children should have your cell phone, your office and even your boss' number available to locate you during, or after an emergency.

The next step in preparing a disaster plan is to determine how you will be notified of a disaster. In some cases, the disaster itself will be your notification. If an earthquake occurs, you will not need emergency sirens to notify you. An impending storm, tornado or chemical spill may require some type of notification. In Arlington and the surrounding counties, the most likely disasters would include:

- fires,
- utility failures,
- flashfloods,
- chemical spills,
- terrorist attacks, and
- severe weather (extreme heat, ice storms, tornadoes, severe thunderstorms with hail)

Different types of disaster will cause the information to come to your attention in different ways. One common type of emergency notification is via **emergency radio** and **TV broadcasts**. Usually severe weather and chemical spills are communicated rapidly over the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration's Weather Radio System. Also for severe weather and chemical spills you might hear a community outdoor warning siren, or get an automated telephone call. Your local news media is one of the best methods of receiving emergency information and notifications.

The third step is **to have a plan**. While you are at work, your employer should have an emergency action plan. In order to take rapid appropriate action during an emergency, you should take the time to review your work emergency plans at least annually, but optimally you should review them at the beginning of each season. Use these plans as a model to develop your home plan. You will not need to take every step at home that you take at work. Let common sense guide you when developing your family plan.

Resources to help make your plan are found at the following websites:

- <http://www.redcross.org/homefires>
- <http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.53fabf6cc033f17a2b1ecfbf43181aa0/?vgnextoid=537b218c37752210VgnVCM10000089f0870aRCRD&currPage=6057d7aada352210VgnVCM10000089f0870aRCRD>
- <http://www.fema.gov/plan/index.shtm>

Below are some hints in helping to prepare your family disaster plan.

1. Posting emergency telephone numbers near telephones (fire, police, ambulance, etc.). You should teach your children how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local Emergency Medical Services number for emergency help.
2. Showing each teenage and adult family member how and when to turn off the utilities (water, gas, and electricity) at the main switches.
3. Checking to see if you have adequate insurance coverage.
4. Getting training from the fire department for family members on how to use the fire extinguisher (ABC type), and showing them where it's kept.
5. Installing smoke detectors on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms. Consider installing a carbon monoxide detector and a natural gas detector in your home.
6. Conduct a home survey, looking for hazards.
7. Stock emergency supplies and assemble a Disaster Supplies kit (<http://www.ready.gov/america/getakit/index.html>)
8. Take a Red Cross first aid and CPR class.
9. Determine the best escape routes from your home. Find two ways out of every room.
10. Find the safe places in your home to go when a tornado and chemical spills occur in your community. Ensure that you identify two places to meet. One of the places should be outside of, but adjacent to your home. You would use this location in the event of a fire or evacuation. Identify a second location outside of your neighborhood in the event that you cannot return home. Everyone must know this location and if it has a telephone, you should know the number.
11. Ask an out-of-state friend to be your "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance than locally. Also you may not have continual use of a telephone since utilities will be affected and cell phone circuits may be overloaded. You and other family members should call this person and tell them where you are located and how to get in touch with you. Everyone must know your contact's phone number.
12. Develop a disaster kit with water, food, first aid supplies, clothing, bedding, tools, emergency supplies and special items. Keep the items that you would most likely need during an evacuation in an easy-to-carry container like a large plastic storage container, a camping backpack, or a duffle bag.
13. Also, you need to plan how to take care of your pets during an emergency. If you are forced to go to an emergency shelter, you will not be able to take your pets with you. Find a friend or family member that lives away from you that will board your pet until you are able to return home. Take pictures of your pet and make sure they have tags in the event they are lost during the disaster.
14. If you use your home computer for personal records or business, make sure that you create a CD each month with your data. The CD should be stored in a safety deposit box, a fire resistant media box or sent to an out of town family member or friend for safe keeping. This will help you recover data if the computer is lost through a disaster, or if the computer crashes.
15. If you have children in daycare, grade or high school, ask to see their emergency plans. Schools are required to have emergency plans. Review their plans for other emergencies as well. Their plan

should also have information about how they will communicate with parents during a disaster. Ensure that they have staff members trained in first aid and CPR.

16. Once you have developed your emergency plans for home, meet with your family and discuss why you need to prepare for a disaster. Explain the dangers of fire, severe weather, and other disasters to children. Plan to share responsibilities and work together as a team. Discuss the types of disasters that are most likely to occur.
17. Your local office of Emergency Management, Fire Department or the American Red Cross can provide you information and/or assistance in preparing for disasters at home. The Office of Emergency Management will provide you additional information and assistance for disaster preparedness in the workplace.
18. Once your home and loved ones are safe and taken care of, you will be able to devote your full attention to your responsibilities here at the University of Texas at Arlington. This will make you a great parent/spouse/significant other at home and a great employee at work should a disaster strike.