

12- MONTH DISASTER PLANNING GUIDE

(AS POSTED ON THE AMERICAN RED CROSS WEBSITE)

Disaster planning is crucial when you live in a region as rich in natural hazards as the lands that make up the American Red Cross Northwest Region -- from earthquakes and volcanic eruptions to wildfires and mudslides. And while planning needs to be thorough, it need not take all your waking hours. As the Washington Department of Emergency Management puts it, "Being prepared for disasters may seem daunting or intimidating, but it's actually simple and easy."

To make planning easier, the Department has put out a guide which promises: "ONE HOUR of planning and action each MONTH leads to successful PREPAREDNESS." The guide, found at www.DisasterReadyWashington.com breaks your planning down to 12 gulps -- one hour of planning each month for a year.

Here's how the planning breaks down, month by month.

Month one: Your communications plan. The idea is to collect all the information you will need to survive a disaster. Your working tools are your telephone and portable radio. Collect the telephone numbers of agencies that will notify you of disaster in the making. Collect the numbers you would call for updates on current conditions -- the fire department, for instance, or the county sheriff. Finally collect numbers of friends or neighbors who could provide help in an emergency, or who might need help in an emergency.

Month two: Your action plan. Think through the steps you would actually take if you had to seek shelter in an emergency. Determine where you might be sent, and map several routes to the shelter. Think about who you would alert to the evacuation and those whose plans you would want to know about.

Month three: Water. Whether you evacuate or shelter in place, you will need lots of water - enough to supply everyone, including animals, for at least two weeks. A gallon of water a day is recommended for each member of your household. Store the water in plastic containers with screw tops. There are some large, sturdy containers made for this use.

Month four: Grab-and-go kits. The kit would contain everything each person would need if you had to evacuate your home. That includes fresh clothing, sanitary items, and medications. Include vital documents, important phone numbers, and cherished mementos. Include some cash in small bills since there may be no working ATMs where you are going. Store everything in easy to grab bags and keep them accessible.

Month five: Important documents. That includes passports, vaccination records, insurance policies, favorite pictures, and the like. Keep them in a secure, waterproof pouch.

Month six: Get two weeks ready. List everything you might need to survive two weeks of sheltering at home or in a shelter -- from pet supplies to spare eyeglasses to toilet paper and extra socks. Include a first aid kit, some books and games, extra toothpaste, extra charging cords and a stout pocketknife. Red Cross has a Calendar document that suggests how to procure the items a little at a time to spread out the cost.

Month seven: Fire safety. Are you fully equipped to cope with fire? Using smoke and CO2 alarms, for instance? Check all wiring and electrical outlets for wear and damage. Do you have at least one working fire extinguisher? If you use a space heater, does it feature an automatic cut-off if it tips over? What safety checklists does your fire service offer?

Month eight: Utility safety. Are oil and propane tanks a safe distance from your house? Might a flying ember threaten to set the tanks on fire? Could you turn off the gas if fire threatened? Could you turn off your electricity in an emergency? Contact your local utilities for their best fire safety advice.

Month nine. Under the bed. Prepare to respond day or night, in any sort of weather. Keep a pair of stout shoes under the bed, should you need to flee at night. Keep a pair of durable gloves, a flashlight and extra batteries near the bed. A sweater would prove useful if you needed to evacuate during a chilly night.

Month ten. Drop, cover and hold on. That's how you survive an earthquake, dropping to the ground at the first signs of shaking, crawling under a furniture piece that will protect your head from falling objects, and holding on to something solid until the shaking stops.

Month eleven. Shelter in place. Where would you go if there was a fire in the home and you couldn't make it out the door to safety? Pick a room and prepare it for sheltering in place. The room should have windows so responders can rescue you. Keep towels in the room to jam under doors to keep toxic smoke out. Keep a radio in the room so you hear any official instructions from responders.

Month twelve. Home hazard hunt. Do a room by room search for all potential hazards. Is your water heater fastened to the wall? Are heavy objects stored on lower shelves so the contents don't pour down on you? Remove any heavy objects hanging over your bed. Is your home securely anchored in case of a quake? Are any of your chimney bricks loose? Is your house well-lit and the house numbers clearly visible from the street so responders can find you?

So that's the Emergency Management home safety calendar. One hour each month spent preparing your home and residents for safety could save you and yours no matter what nature of disaster comes your way.