

## PREPARING FOR DISASTER

**Are You Ready?** – Like many throughout the world, we have watched, listened, and read in horror of the devastation in Japan. While there are simply some forces of nature that are nearly impossible to battle, the events in Japan have been an important reminder of the importance of being prepared. Are you prepared for a natural disaster that would disrupt utilities, communication, and safety? Sadly, nearly every survey on the subject reveals that a majority of Americans are not prepared for a disaster.

This means having your own food, water, and other supplies in sufficient quantity to last for at least three days. Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone immediately. You could get help in hours, or it might take days. Basic services such as electricity, gas, water, sewage treatment, and telephones may be cut off for days, or even a week or longer.

**Water - How Much Water do I Need?** - You should store at least one gallon of water per person per day. A normally active person needs at least one-half gallon of water daily just for drinking. Individual needs vary, depending on age, physical condition, activity, diet, and climate. Children, nursing mothers, and ill people need more water. Very hot temperatures can double the amount of water needed. A medical emergency might require additional water.

**How Should I Store Water?** - To prepare safest and most reliable emergency supply of water, it is recommended you purchase commercially bottled water. Keep bottled water in its original container and do not open it until you need to use it. Observe the expiration or “use by” date. If you are preparing your own containers of water - It is recommended you purchase food-grade water storage containers from surplus or camping supplies stores to use for water storage. Before filling with water, thoroughly clean the containers with dishwashing soap and water, and rinse completely so there is no residual soap.

**Food** - The following are things to consider when putting together your food supplies:

- Avoid foods that will make you thirsty. Choose salt-free crackers, whole grain cereals, and canned foods with high liquid content.
- Stock canned foods, dry mixes, and other staples that do not require refrigeration, cooking, water, or special preparation. You may already have many of these on hand. (Note: Be sure to include a manual can opener.)
- Include special dietary needs.

### Basic Disaster Supplies Kit

The following items are recommended for inclusion in your basic disaster supplies kit:

- Three-day supply of non-perishable food.
- Three-day supply of water - one gallon of water per person, per day.
- Portable, battery-powered radio or television and extra batteries.
- Flashlight and extra batteries.
- First aid kit and manual.
- Sanitation and hygiene items (moist towelettes and toilet paper).

- Matches and waterproof container.
- Whistle.
- Extra clothing.
- Kitchen accessories and cooking utensils, including a can opener.
- Photocopies of credit and identification cards.
- Cash and coins.
- Special needs items, such as prescription medications, eye glasses, contact lens solutions, and hearing aid batteries.
- Items for infants, such as formula, diapers, bottles, and pacifiers.
- Other items to meet your unique family needs.

*Be sure to account for growing children and other family changes. You may want to add some of the items listed to your basic disaster supplies kit depending on the specific needs of your family.*

### **Maintaining Your Disaster Supplies Kit**

- Just as important as putting your supplies together is maintaining them so they are safe to use when needed. Here are some tips to keep your supplies ready and in good condition:
- Keep canned foods in a dry place where the temperature is cool.
- Store boxed food in tightly closed plastic or metal containers to protect from pests and to extend its shelf life.
- Throw out any canned good that becomes swollen, dented, or corroded.
- Use foods before they go bad, and replace them with fresh supplies.
- Place new items at the back of the storage area and older ones in the front.
- Change stored food and water supplies every six months. Be sure to write the date you store it on all containers.
- Re-think your needs every year and update your kit as your family needs change.
- Keep items in airtight plastic bags and put your entire disaster supplies kit in one or two easy-to-carry containers, such as an unused trashcan, camping backpack, or duffel bag.

***GET YOUR NEIGHBORS INVOLVED:*** Working through your neighborhood or homeowners' association, arrange to share more expensive equipment items such as chain saws, generators, and 4-wheel drive vehicles. (If there is no formal organization in your neighborhood, start with your immediate neighbors and expand from there.) Start a "buddy squad" to check on elderly or disabled neighbors during and after disasters such as extended power outages or winter storms. Also check on children who may be home alone. Turn your organizing efforts into a neighborhood social event, such as a block party. (Draw them in with food - then make your presentation!)