



Hurricane Katrina laid siege to the city of New Orleans in 2005, leaving over 81 billion dollars' worth of damage in her wake. Hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated, left to the mercies of the federal government and the Red Cross. Many others were stranded in homes surrounded by high flood waters, with no power and no means of communication. The graceful old city became a home for vandals and looters as all vestiges of civilization vanished for weeks.

The government hurriedly set up temporary shelters in the Superdome and the New Orleans Convention Center for displaced residents. Thousands crowded into places without adequate sanitation facilities, food supplies, and water.

No one was ready for a disaster on such a grand scale - not the residents, not the responders and not the federal government. As a result, the government and the Red Cross came under fire for not responding quickly enough.

Because of flooded, impassable highways and disorganization on the part of the relief efforts, refugees who were crowded into the Superdome and the New Orleans Convention Center went for four days without supplies. People who had remained in their homes were without electricity, plumbing or running water and waited even longer for help.

We've seen many disasters over the years from the safety of our living rooms. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina struck closer to home, and we saw how quickly we go can from civilized to the status of a third world country. Many of us made donations, did volunteer work and assisted the victims. For some, Katrina was a wake-up call. Our eyes became opened to the need to be more prepared. We became aware that help was not always a simple "9-1-1" call away and that government relief efforts might not arrive as quickly as we'd previously expected.

In a society filled with people waiting to be rescued, planning ahead can mean the difference between being together or separated, frightened or confident - even alive or dead. To begin to prepare for this short term disruption, you must begin with a plan. Consider this emergency plan as a map that will help you and your family navigate efficiently through a disaster. You will know what to expect from one another, know how to perform, and know how to get by.

PLAN FOR DISASTERS MOST LIKELY TO OCCUR IN YOUR LOCATION

Chaos and confusion can be as much of an enemy as any act of devastation. Together with your family, decide what to do before a disaster is imminent. Discuss the different threats that are more likely for your area. They could include:

- Winter storms
- Hurricanes
- Tornadoes
- Earthquakes
- Extended power outages
- Floods
- Mandatory evacuation
- Fires
- Epidemics
- Economic downturns

Once the emergency has happened, it's too late to plan. You are *reacting* instead of *acting*. As a family, sit down and discuss likely disaster scenarios that could occur. For instance, when I lived in Houston, TX, my family had to prepare for the likelihood of hurricanes occurring. Not only that, we had to prepare for tornados, chemical leaks from refineries, and flash flooding.

CREATING AN EMERGENCY PLAN

Prepare your children by allowing them to help create the plan. They will feel much more comfortable in a scary situation if they know what to do and what to expect.

Creating practice drills is another way to get family members to think and be focused and calm during an emergency.

As a family, discuss your emergency meeting places, contacts, and plans. Give your children the opportunity to express their feelings and to ask questions so they fully understand the disaster plan.

Ask these questions:

1.) How you will get in contact with one another?

Everyone in the family should know the “emergency job” of the other family members. Will Dad pick up the child at the elementary school while Mom picks up the teen at the high school? Are the kids to attempt to walk home or should they stay put and wait to be picked up?

Plan at least two routes to accomplish these things in case streets are closed due to the disaster.

2.) Who is an out-of-area person that could coordinate communication if you are separated?

Choose a close friend or family member outside the immediate vicinity. This person is less likely to be affected by the same disaster and can be a calm port of communication. In an emergency it is possible that a family member might not be able to get home safely.

Local communications may be inoperable due to a storm or natural disaster. An out-of-area contact can coordinate the locations of the family members and serve as Communications Central until the family can reunite. Every family member should carry the phone number and contact information for the out-of-area person.

3.) What will happen if the kids are in school?

Schools have their own disaster plans in response to evacuations, storms, or other emergencies. The school’s disaster plan must be taken into account when making your family preparedness plan. Mom and Dad should visit the school to get the specific details of the schools plan. Knowing what to expect can go a long way towards assuaging fear and panic.

GETTING ORGANIZED

Once you’ve created your basic plan, it’s time to get organized! Having an emergency binder with checklists and instructions has been a proven way to have all of the pertinent information -

plans, checklists, phone numbers, etc., in one easy-to-grab binder. This can help you stay organized during a disaster and minimize chaos and panic during emergencies.

Consider collecting the following information in your binder.

- Family ID information: Current photos, fingerprints from each family member, birth certificates, etc.
- Favorite emergency recipes
- Emergency protocols and evacuation plans and evacuation routes
- Survival instructions for the family members to turn to if an emergency occurs: first aid, constructing a shelter, filtering water, etc.
- Contact information for relatives and close friends
- Veterinary records for pets (you might have to prove they have been vaccinated during an evacuation scenario)
- Medical information for all family members: medications they are taking, medical conditions, allergies, blood types, etc.
- Important documents such as wills, social security cards, custody orders, car registration, marriage license, mortgage
- Maps of the area
- Insurance information: Home inventory (written and video inventory) insurance papers, policy and account numbers, property titles (homes, autos, boats)

SPECIAL DOCUMENTS

Disasters cause things to go awry very quickly, and in some cases, families can become separated. When a family member is separated from the others, providing pertinent information to medical personnel or first responders can be more challenging due to heightened emotions from the stressful situation.

To deal with these unintended separations, disaster organizations have suggested that every family have personal information for the other members of the family before a disaster occurs. Having this information will help responders and medical personnel render aid more quickly, as well as assist you in getting your loved one back safe and sound.

Make Personal I.D. Cards

The Center for Missing and Exploited Children has created a free print out for families to fill out for family members to have on hand. The cards provide a quick reference for phone numbers, personal information and even has a place for fingerprints to be documented. This document will easily fit inside of your emergency binder.

Personal I.D. Cards should include:

- Work and cell numbers for both parents
- The phone numbers for your out-of-area contact
- Doctor's phone number
- The location of your family's designated meeting place
- Any emergency medical needs

You can find printable identification cards for the family at this link:

http://www.take25.org/~media/Take25/ResourceDocuments/Child_ID_2013-EN.pdf

Creating contact information cards can give your children or vulnerable loved ones an extra layer of protection during any time you are unable to be with them. These cards can help loved ones to reconnect in the aftermath of a crisis.

Emergency documents provide vital information to first responders in case a loved one goes missing. They also provide an extra layer of preparedness for the family. These are especially important for children, the elderly, those with serious medical conditions, and those who are mentally disabled.

Likewise, when you are in an evacuation situation, carrying around a bunch of paperwork (along with all of your other gear) is the last thing on your mind. Thanks to the power of technology, you have options for storing and backing up pertinent data.

What Documents to Back Up

There are a few documents that you obviously should keep in a secured location (a fire safe or safe deposit box). That said, backups can be made by scanning them into computers and saved on other backup storage systems. Some of the information you should consider backing up are:

- Identifying information: Social Security card, driver's license, birth certificate, passport, Marriage certificate
- Financial accounts: Bank, investment, and credit card/loan accounts information, including institution names, phone numbers, and account numbers
- Health records: Immunization records, allergies, dietary restrictions, medications, medical/surgical treatments
- Pet information: Description of each pet, vet contact information, and any important medical notes
- Property: Car information, home purchase papers/deeds, and other home inventory items.
- Insurance documents (depending on the disaster you may need to make a claim before you can return to your home)
- Wills and medical directives
- Special sentimental items like photographs, certificates, jewelry or small heirlooms

Protect Your Identity

Emergency contacts, as well as information in your emergency binders, can also be stored online in case you forget your binders or they are lost.

Be aware that if you plan on storing these important documents online, they can be stolen, and your identity along with them. It's a good idea to encrypt the files after they have been scanned in and share them with only trusted sources. If you encrypt the digital files, use an encryption tool such as TrueCrypt.

Flash drives – USB Flash drives are miniature hard drives that you connect to your computer using a USB port. Typically, the capacity for a Flash drive is between 128MB to 1GB. Flash drives are portable, convenient, low cost and easily accessible. A 256-megabyte drive, which runs for \$20 or even less, gives you enough space for this type of storage. One of the best ways to prevent data theft and improve information security is to encrypt your data.

Mozy – This is a backup storage system you can use online. It works by syncing your files to the cloud and securely saving it. This eliminates that need to hold onto bulky hard drives or concerns about losing flash drives. This method can store up to 125 GB of data for \$120 per year. You could store all of your pertinent documents, family photos, and more with ample storage to spare.

Google Docs – After you have scanned your documents into your computer, simply upload them to Google Docs and share the files with your loved ones. Remember that you can encrypt documents to keep them safe.

Dropbox – This is a free service that lets you store your photos and documents and share them with others. An added incentive to this storage choice is that it gives you a few gigabytes of storage for free.

NAS Drives – If you'd rather store your data with someone you trust, buy two 2 TB network-attached storage (NAS) drives for about \$200 each and split them both into two equal partitions. Give one drive to a relative or trusted friend and then have the drives back up to each other over the Internet using rsync software. Both you and your relative/friend will get local backup and a mirrored remote backup.

PREPS TO BUY:

- 3 ring binder
- Flash drives
- Document protector sleeves
- Pens
- Labels
- Printer paper
- Photographs of family members

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Involve your children in your family preparedness efforts. Educate them on the different types of disasters and on your family's disaster plans. [Ready Kids¹](#) is a great website for fun methods and games to teach your children about what to do in the event of an emergency.
2. Ask your child's school and/or day care about their disaster plans. Here are a few questions that I asked our school: How will you communicate with a child's family during a crisis? Are you prepared for a shelter-in-place situation? If you have to evacuate, where will you go?
3. Find up-to-date pictures of each family member in case one of them gets separated from you during a disaster event, put the pictures in a waterproof or Ziploc bag, or sleeve for a three-ring binder and place it in your [emergency kit²](#).
4. Get organized, and create an emergency binder using the information provided above. Remember to include a [personal information card³](#) and a contact information card for each family member.
5. For family members who have special needs, ensure that those needs are accounted for in your emergency plan.

¹ <http://www.ready.gov/kids/>

² http://readynutrition.com/resources/are-you-ready-series-72-hour-kits_29082013/

³ http://readynutrition.com/resources/keep-kids-safe-with-emergency-id-cards_29042011/

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Play it Safe

Protecting your personal information and your child's personal information is a must these days. Therefore, when creating emergency ID cards, provide the essential information only.

1. Never include any sensitive information or financial information, such as social security number,
2. Put the card in a place that is not easily seen by strangers, such as a wallet or inside of a back pack keeps the card holder safe.
3. If a child is the card holder, only print the initial of their first name. For example: J. Smith
4. There is no need to print the birth date of the child. Just state was year they were born to give first responders an idea of how old he/she is.
5. During an actual emergency, if a child is too young to carry a card, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children suggest writing only the necessary information (name, contact number and parents' names) directly on the back of the child with permanent marker.