

Emergency Preparedness – Level 2

“Something bad is going to happen, and there's nothing you can do to stop it.”

Preparing to deal with a disaster is like going off of a ski jump. If you put off your planning until things start happening, it's far too late to make much of a difference. Once you're headed down that ski jump, the time for planning and preparation is over.

On the other hand, being prepared for a disaster does not have to be time-consuming or expensive. In this program we will give you the most effective ways to prepare for an emergency.

When disaster strikes, will you be prepared?

Despite what you may have gathered from reading guides to readiness from the government, the Red Cross, or other organizations, you should **not** begin with a spending spree at the local hardware store. When you down to the basics, there are three steps you must follow to be ready for disaster:

1. Assess
2. Plan
3. Prepare

In this level of the program we will discuss step 1, assessment of risks.

The psychology of disaster preparedness

In order to effectively prepare for disaster without becoming overwhelmed, you must be able to make realistic judgments about risks. On one hand, it is an effort for most people to "think the unthinkable", to contemplate scenarios which are far outside the routine of their daily lives. It is difficult for most people to imagine a world where fresh water does not flow from the taps, electricity is something you can't take for granted, and the grocery store shelves are empty, assuming the stores are even open.

On the other hand, there's a phenomenon to think of the unthinkable or extremely unlike events as real threats. We need to be realistic and use good judgment when considering risks. Keep in mind that your plan, at some point, will be shared with friends and family.

Assessing your risks: take a look around

Each city, state, and region of the country has its own unique set of risks. For example, California is unlikely to be threatened by a hurricane, but home to numerous fault lines. Many homes in America are subject to hidden or unseen dangers such as fault line, flood plains, etc.

Your first task in building a disaster-readiness plan is to assess the risks particular to the areas where you spend significant time. In America's mobile culture many people work 20 miles or more from their home. The risks at work and at home may differ considerably, and should be assessed separately.

Here is a brief listing of risks you may find useful in putting together your list of potential emergencies in your area:

- **Domestic risks** (house fire, carbon monoxide, medical emergency)
- **Industrial accident risk** (refineries, chemical plants, rail lines transporting hazardous cargo such as liquified chlorine)
- **Natural disasters** (heat waves, forest/grassland fires, earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis)
- **Secondary disaster risk** due to primary natural disaster (e.g. the reservoir dam which may fail in an earthquake and flood Fremont)
- **Civil disturbance** (riots, terrorist attacks, acts of war)

These risks are listed in the order in which you should consider them. Please note the "civil disturbance" category is last, this is because one of the principal goals of any disaster plan should be to minimize your exposure to civil-disturbance risks.

A good source for risk information is your city or state Office of Emergency Services website, or its equivalent. Other good sources for detailed risk information include the following local resources:

- building permit authority
- fire department
- police department and/or sheriff's office

There exists one more category of risk which you must consider: risks to your freedom of movement. As you go about your business for the next week, consider the following:

- Do you know of any alternate routes between work and home?
- Does your primary route include bridges or tunnels?
- Does your primary route pass under any high-voltage power lines?
- Do you regularly drive past refineries, chemical plants, or rail lines carrying tank cars?
- Does your neighborhood have above- or below-ground power distribution?
- If you need to leave your city or region, how many routes can you think of without consulting a map?
- Do you have reasonably current paper map of your region in each of your family vehicles?

Homework time!

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to make a list of as many disaster risks as you can think of. Get your family involved, and make it a competitive event. Be lenient, at first, when considering whether something is a likely risk. Be sure to include all of the places where you might find yourself when disaster strikes, home, work, school, church, shopping, and so forth. Don't consider the list closed until you've visited each of these places and looked, with a critical eye, at the risks we all ignore on a daily basis.