

Are You Ready For Winter? Emergency Preparedness Tips

By Carol Salvage, PTSA Emergency Preparedness Chair

It's that time of year when we need to think about wind, snowstorms, flooding, and loss of power. While it is difficult to predict when disasters will happen, the consequences of disasters are predictable. Don't wait until the forecast calls for a storm to start getting ready. A storm may move in quicker than anticipated and you may find that you are unable to get to the store or that supplies are not available. A little time and effort before the storm season hits goes a long way in minimizing the damage and impacts of severe weather.

First, Make a Plan

- Discuss the types of disasters that could occur. Decide what you would need to do to prepare for each type.
- Determine how your family will stay in contact if separated by a disaster.
 - Pick two meeting places besides your home:
 1. A location that is a safe distance from your home in case of fire
 2. A place outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home
 - Identify an out-of town contact. It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-town contact may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members.
 1. Be sure every member of your family knows the phone number and has a cell phone, coins, or a prepaid phone card to call the emergency contact. If you have a cell phone, program that person(s) as "ICE" (In Case of Emergency) in your phone. If you are in an accident, emergency personnel will often check your ICE listings in order to get a hold of someone you know. Make sure to tell your family and friends that you've listed them as emergency contacts.
 2. Teach family members how to use text messaging (also known as SMS or Short Message Service). Text messages can often get around network disruptions when a phone call might not be able to get through.
- Show responsible family members how, and when, to shut off water, gas and electricity at the main switches.

Second, Build a kit for your home with these essentials (see the sample list of supplies for more details):

- Water – 3 day supply
- Food – 3 day supply
- Lighting – Avoid using candles. Not only are they easy to knock over but there is concern that scented candles may be hazardous to any birds that are in your home. Consider using battery lanterns. They let off a larger light area than candles or flashlights.
- Communication Supplies – Cell phone, car charger, radios.
- First Aid Supplies – For a quick solution, pick up a readymade first aid kit at Costco, Bartell's or Rite-Aid, Target, Staples, etc.
- Supplies/Tools – Make sure you have any tools necessary to shut off the utilities.
- Clothing/Bedding/Shelter – Old clothes are perfect for this, especially ski/snow clothes.
- Special Items – Don't forget to include essential medications for you and your pet.

Third, Above all, if you do lose power, stay warm, stay calm, get the board games out and have fun with your kids!