

Natural Disasters: How prepared are you?

Living in the Tri-State area, in particular The Hudson Valley, we are not as susceptible to natural disasters as some other counties or states in this country. This fact although true does not make us immune to experiencing them, as most are still recovering from the wrath of hurricane Irene, a week before this, an earthquake was felt in the area, and as those who have lived in this area in 2006 remember that a tornado touched down in Westchester County and caused a vast amount of damage. So the question is, if another tornado, flood, earthquake, or hurricane occurred, how prepared are you and your family? Natural disasters are possible so bringing awareness to the possibility that any one of them could happen again is crucial. No one can control where or when a natural disaster might occur. But good emergency planning can help reduce a disaster's impact on your family's health and safety.

Federal emergency management in the United States has existed in one form or another for over 200 years. The primary purpose of FEMA is to coordinate the response to a disaster that has occurred in the United States and that overwhelms the resources of local and state authorities. The governor of the state in which the disaster occurs must declare a state of emergency and formally request from the president that FEMA and the federal government respond to the disaster. FEMA states, **"Preparation helps; when people feel prepared, they cope better and so do children."**

Natural Disasters:

HURRICANE

Hurricanes are severe tropical storms that form in the southern Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and in the eastern Pacific Ocean. Hurricanes gather heat and energy through contact with warm ocean waters. Evaporation from the seawater increases their power. Hurricanes rotate in a counter-clockwise direction around an "eye." Hurricanes have winds at least 74 miles per hour. When they come onto land, the heavy rain, strong winds and heavy waves can damage buildings, trees and cars. The heavy waves are called a storm surge. Storm surges are very dangerous and a major reason why you MUST stay away from the ocean during a hurricane warning or hurricane.

FLOOD

Flooding happens during heavy rains, when rivers overflow, when ocean waves come onshore, when snow melts too fast or when dams or levees break. Flooding may be only a few inches of water or it may cover a house to the rooftop. Floods that happen very quickly are called flashfloods. Flooding is the most common of all natural hazards. It can happen in every U.S. state and territory.

Important terms to know:

Flood Watch or Flashflood Watch -- Flooding may happen soon. Stay tuned to the radio or television news for more information

Flood Warning -- You may be asked to leave the area. A flood may be happening or will be very soon. If you have to leave the area, remember to bring your Disaster Supply Kit and make arrangements for your pets.

Flashflood Warning -- A flashflood is happening. Get to high ground right away

Flood hazards are everywhere and happen regardless of where you live so be aware of all the potential hazards. Flash floods can develop in a matter of seconds. Just 6 inches of water reaches the bottom of most passenger cars and could cause someone to lose control. Just a foot of water could make a car float.

TORNADO

Tornadoes are nature's most violent storms. Tornadoes can be very dangerous -- sometimes even deadly. They come from powerful thunderstorms and appear as rotating, funnel-shaped clouds. Tornado winds can reach 300 miles per hour. They cause damage when they touch down on the ground. They can damage an area one mile wide and 50 miles long. Every state is at some risk, but states in "Tornado Alley" have the highest risk. Tornadoes can form any time of the year, but the season runs from March to August. The ability to predict tornadoes is limited. Usually a community will have at least a few minutes warning. The most important thing to do is TAKE SHELTER when a tornado is nearby.

Important Terms To Know:

Tornado Watch -- Tornadoes are possible. Stay tuned to the radio or television news.

Tornado Warning -- A tornado has been sighted. Take shelter immediately!

EARTHQUAKE

Earthquakes are the shaking, rolling or sudden shock of the earth's surface. Earthquakes happen along "fault lines" in the earth's crust. Earthquakes can be felt over large areas although they usually last less than one minute. The intensity of an earthquake can be measured. One measurement is called the Richter scale. Earthquakes below 4.0 on the Richter scale usually do not cause damage, and earthquakes below 2.0 usually can't be felt. Earthquakes over 5.0 on the scale can cause damage. A magnitude 6.0 earthquake is considered strong and a magnitude 7.0 is a major earthquake. The Northridge Earthquake, which hit Southern California in 1994, was magnitude 6.7.

FIRE

It is very important to prepare for both building fires and wild fires. Fires in buildings are very dangerous. Every year, about 5,000 people in this country are killed by building fires. FEMA has a Web site dedicated to teaching kids what to do about building fires. One of the most important things to remember is that your house should have a working smoke detector. Look around your house to see if you have a smoke detector on every floor in the house. Check if your smoke detectors are working. Check also to see if your family has a working fire extinguisher. Your family should have a fire plan of how to escape from your house if it is on fire. If you are caught in a fire REMEMBER, stay low to the ground where the smoke is not so heavy. NEVER hide during a fire. Always get out. And once you are out, stay out. Wildfires are a danger for people who live in forest, prairies or wooded areas. These fires are sometimes started by lightning or by accident. They can move very fast and burn many acres. Remember, if there is a wildfire near you and your family is told to evacuate -- go right away! And remember to bring your pets with you!

How do you prepare your family?

The FEMA (www.fema.gov) and AAP website (AAP – Children and Disasters) has an immense amount of information that could help you prepare you and your family for a natural disaster. The three basic steps to get your family ready for a natural disaster regardless of where you live are the following:

Get Informed- contact your local emergency office (i.e. American Red Cross) to understand what hazards your family could encounter by your house, school, park, etc.

Create a Family Disaster Plan- Be open and honest with your family about the potential risks around your home/community. Create an emergency meeting location, have an emergency contact individual that everyone in your house remembers, include your pets in this plan and always practice it. You can never be over prepared.

Assemble a disaster supplies kit- This kit should be readily available to anyone in your house and should always be up to date. Some of the items that it should include are: whistle, blankets, three day supply of water, clothing, flashlights, special need items and much more

For more information regarding this topic please visit the following sites:

www.fema.gov

www.aap.org

www.ready.gov

www.redcross.org

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