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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Preparing Makes Sense.

Get Ready Now.

www.ready.gov

"Terrorism forces us to make a choice.
We can be afraid. Or we can be ready."

—Secretary Tom Ridge, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

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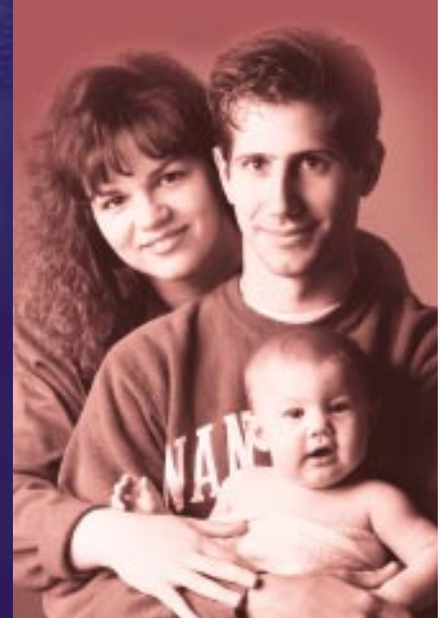
Preparing makes sense.

The likelihood of you and your family surviving a house fire depends as much on having a working smoke detector and an exit strategy, as on a well-trained fire department. The same is true for surviving a terrorist attack. We must have the tools and plans in place to make it on our own, at least for a period of time, no matter where we are when disaster strikes. Just like having a working smoke detector, preparing for the unexpected makes sense. ***Get ready now.***



Potential Threats

Terrorists are working to obtain biological, chemical, nuclear and radiological weapons and the threat of an attack is very real. Here at the Department of Homeland Security, throughout the federal government, and at organizations across America we are working hard to strengthen our Nation's security. Whenever possible, we want to stop terrorist attacks before they happen. All Americans should begin a process of learning about potential threats so we are better prepared to react during an attack. While there is no way to predict what will happen, or what your personal circumstances will be, there are simple things you can do now to prepare yourself and your loved ones. Some of the things you can do to prepare for a terrorist attack, such as assembling a supply kit and developing a family communications plan, are the same for both a natural or man-made emergency. However, as you will read below, there are important differences among potential terrorist threats that will impact the decisions you make and the actions you take. With a little planning and common sense, you can be better prepared for the unexpected.

Emergency Supplies

Just like having a working smoke detector in your home, having emergency supply kits will put the tools you may need at your fingertips. Be prepared to improvise and use what you have on hand to make it on your own for ***at least three days****, maybe longer. While there are many things that might make you more comfortable, think first about fresh water, food and clean air. Remember to include, and periodically rotate, medications you take every day such as insulin and heart medicine. Plan to store items in an easy-to-carry bag, such as a shopping bag, backpack or duffle bag.* ***Consider two kits.*** *In one, put everything you will need to stay where you are and make it on your own. The other should be a lightweight, smaller version you can take with you if you have to get away.*

Photo courtesy of DAKINE

Water

Store one gallon of water per person per day for drinking and sanitation in clean plastic containers. If you live in a warm weather climate more water may be necessary.

Food

Store food that won't go bad and does not have to be heated or cooked. Choose foods that your family will eat, including protein or fruit bars, dry cereal or granola, canned foods and juices, peanut butter, dried fruit, nuts, crackers and baby foods. Remember to pack a manual can opener, cups and eating utensils.

Clean Air

Many potential terrorist attacks could send tiny microscopic "junk" into the air. For example, an explosion may release very fine debris that can cause lung damage. A biological attack may release germs that can make you sick if inhaled or absorbed through open cuts. Many of these agents can only hurt you if they get into your body, so think about creating a barrier between yourself and any contamination.

Be prepared to improvise with what you have on hand to protect your nose, mouth, eyes and cuts in your skin. Anything that fits snugly over your nose and mouth, including any dense-weave cotton material, can help filter contaminants in an emergency. It is very important that most of the air you breathe comes through the mask or cloth, not around it. Do whatever you can to make the best fit possible for children. There are also a variety of face masks readily available in hardware stores that are rated based on how small a particle they can filter in an industrial setting.

Given the different types of attacks that could occur, there is not one solution for masking. For instance, simple cloth face masks can filter some of the airborne "junk" or germs you might breathe into your body, but will probably not protect you from chemical gases. Still, something over your nose and mouth in an emergency is better than nothing.

Have heavyweight garbage bags or plastic sheeting, duct tape and scissors in your kit. You can use these things to tape up windows, doors and air vents if you need to seal off a room from outside contamination. Consider precutting and labeling these materials. Anything you can do in advance will save time when it counts.

Basic Supplies

Store a flashlight, battery powered radio, extra batteries, a first aid kit, utility knife, local map, toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, soap, garbage bags and other sanitation supplies, plastic sheeting, duct tape, as well as extra cash and identification. Periodically rotate your extra batteries to be sure they work when you need them.

Warmth

If you live in a cold weather climate, you must think about warmth. It is possible that the power will be out and you will not have heat. Have warm clothing for each family member in your supply kit, including a jacket or coat, long pants, a long sleeve shirt, sturdy shoes, a hat and gloves. Have a sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person.

Special Items

Think about your family's unique needs. Pack diapers, formula, bottles, prescription medications, pet food, comfort items, books, paper, pens, a deck of cards or other forms of entertainment.

Unique Family Needs

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Emergency Planning

*You should **plan in advance** what you will do in an emergency. Be prepared to assess the situation, use common sense and whatever you have on hand to take care of yourself and your loved ones. Think about the places where your family spends time: school, work and other places you frequent. Ask about their emergency plans. Find out how they will communicate with families during an emergency. If they do not have an emergency plan, consider helping develop one.*

Develop a Family Communications Plan

Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another and review what you will do in different situations. Consider a plan where each family member calls, or e-mails, the same friend or relative in the event of an emergency. It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-state contact may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members. Be sure each person knows the phone number and has coins or a prepaid phone card to call the emergency contact. You may have trouble getting through, or the phone system may be down altogether, but be patient.

Deciding to Stay or Go

Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the attack, the first important decision is whether you stay put or get away. You should understand and plan for both possibilities. Use common sense and available information, including what you are learning here, to determine if there is immediate danger. In any emergency, local authorities may or may not immediately be able to provide information on what is happening and what you should do. However, you should watch TV, listen to the radio or check the Internet often for information or official instructions as it becomes available. If you're specifically told to evacuate or seek medical treatment, do so immediately.

Staying Put and "Shelter-in-Place"

Whether you are at home, work or elsewhere, there may be situations when it's simply best to stay where you are and avoid any uncertainty outside. In fact, there are some circumstances where staying put and creating a barrier between yourself and potentially contaminated air outside, a process known as "shelter-in-place," is a matter of survival. Plan in advance where you will take shelter in this kind of an emergency. Choose an interior room or one with as few windows and doors as possible. Consider precutting plastic sheeting to seal windows, doors and air vents. Each piece should be several inches larger than the space you want to cover so that it lies flat against the wall. Label each piece with the location of where it fits.

Use available information to assess the situation. If you see large amounts of debris in the air, or if local authorities say the air is badly contaminated, you may want to "shelter-in-place." Quickly bring your family and pets inside, lock doors, and close windows, air vents and fireplace dampers. Turn off air conditioning, forced air heating systems, exhaust fans and clothes dryers. Take your emergency supplies and go into the room you have designated. Seal all windows, doors and vents with plastic sheeting and duct tape or anything else you have on hand. Listen to the TV, the radio or check the Internet for instructions.

Getting Away

There may be conditions under which you will decide to get away, or there may be situations when you are ordered to leave. Plan in advance how you will assemble your family and anticipate where you will go. Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency. If you have a car, keep at least a half tank of gas in it at all times. Become familiar with alternate routes as well as other means of transportation out of your area. If you do not have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to. Take your emergency supply kit, unless you have reason to believe it has been contaminated, and lock the door behind you. Take pets with you if you are told to evacuate, however, if you are going to a public shelter, keep in mind that they may not be allowed inside. If you believe the air may be contaminated, drive with your windows and vents closed and keep the air conditioning and heater turned off.

Working Together

Schools, daycare providers, workplaces, neighborhoods and apartment buildings, like individuals and families, should all have site-specific emergency plans. Ask about plans at the places where your family spends time: work, school and other places you frequent. If none exist, consider volunteering to help develop one. You will be better prepared to reunite your family and loved ones safely during an emergency if you think ahead, and communicate with others in advance.

Neighborhoods and Apartment Buildings

A community working together during an emergency also makes sense. Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together. Find out if anyone has specialized equipment, like a power generator, or expertise such as medical knowledge, that might help in a crisis. Decide who will check on elderly or disabled neighbors. Make backup plans for children in case you can't get home in an emergency. Sharing plans and communicating in advance is a good strategy.

Schools and Daycare

If you are a parent, or guardian of an elderly or disabled adult, make sure schools or daycare providers have emergency response plans. Ask how they will communicate with families during a crisis. Do they store adequate food, water and other emergency supplies? Find out if they are prepared to "shelter-in-place" if need be, and where they plan to go if they must get away.

Employers

If you are an employer, make sure your workplace has a building evacuation plan that is regularly practiced. Take a critical look at your heating ventilation and air-conditioning system to determine if it is secure or if it could be feasibly upgraded to better filter potential contaminants. Be sure you, and others, know how to turn off the system if necessary. Think about what to do if your employees can't go home, and make sure you have appropriate supplies on hand.

Specific Terrorist Threats

It is important to remember, there are significant differences among potential terrorist threats that will influence the decisions you make and the actions you take. By beginning a process of learning about these specific threats, you are ***preparing yourself to react*** *in an emergency.*

Biological Threat

A biological attack is the deliberate release of germs or other biological substances that can make you sick. Many agents must be inhaled, enter through a cut in the skin or be eaten to make you sick. Some biological agents, such as anthrax, do not cause contagious diseases. Others, like the smallpox virus, can result in diseases you can catch from people.

Unlike an explosion, a biological attack may or may not be immediately obvious. While it is possible that you will see signs of a biological attack, as was sometimes the case with the anthrax mailings, it is perhaps more likely that local health care workers will report a pattern of unusual illness or there will be a wave of sick people seeking emergency medical attention. You will probably learn of the danger through an emergency radio or TV broadcast or some other signal used in your community. Perhaps you will get a phone call or emergency response workers may come door-to-door. If you become aware of an unusual or suspicious release of an unknown substance nearby, it doesn't hurt to protect yourself. Quickly get away. Cover your mouth and nose with layers of fabric that can filter the air but still allow breathing. Examples include two to three layers of cotton such as a t-shirt, handkerchief or towel. Otherwise, several layers of tissue or paper towels may help. Wash with soap and water and contact authorities.

In the event of a biological attack, public health officials will provide information on what you should do as quickly as they can. However, it can take time for them to determine exactly what the illness is, how it should be treated and who is in danger. What you can do is watch TV, listen to the radio or check the Internet for official news including the following: Are you in the group or area authorities consider in danger? What are the signs and symptoms of the disease? Are medications or vaccines being distributed? Where? Who should get them? Where should you seek emergency medical care if you become sick?

At the time of a declared biological emergency, if a family member becomes sick, it is important to be suspicious. However, do not automatically assume you should go to a hospital emergency room or that any illness is the result of the biological attack. Symptoms of many common illnesses may overlap. Use common sense, practice good hygiene and cleanliness to avoid spreading germs, and seek medical advice.

Chemical Threat

A chemical attack is the deliberate release of a toxic gas, liquid or solid that can poison people and the environment. Watch for signs of a chemical attack such as many people suffering from watery eyes, twitching, choking, having trouble breathing or losing coordination. Many sick or dead birds, fish or small animals are also cause for suspicion. If you see signs of a chemical attack, quickly try to define the impacted area or where the chemical is coming from, if possible. Take immediate action to get away from the affected area.

If the chemical is inside a building where you are, try to get out of the building without passing through the contaminated area. Otherwise, it may be better to move as far away from where you suspect the chemical release is and "shelter-in-place." If you are outside when you see signs of a chemical attack, you must quickly decide what is the fastest way to get away from the chemical threat. Consider if you can get out of the area or if it would be better to go inside a building and follow your plan to "shelter-in-place."

If your eyes are watering, your skin is stinging, you are having trouble breathing or you simply think you may have been exposed to a chemical, immediately strip and wash. Look for a hose, fountain or any source of water. Wash with soap, if possible, but do not scrub the chemical into your skin. Seek emergency medical attention.

Nuclear Blast

A nuclear blast is an explosion with intense light and heat, a damaging pressure wave and widespread radioactive material that can contaminate the air, water and ground surfaces for miles around. While experts may predict at this time that a nuclear attack is less likely than others, terrorism by its nature is unpredictable. If there is a flash or fireball, take cover immediately, below ground if possible, though any shield or shelter will help protect you from the immediate effects of the blast and the pressure wave. In order to limit the amount of radiation you are exposed to, think about *shielding, distance* and *time*. If you have a thick shield between yourself and the radioactive materials, it will absorb more of the radiation and you will be exposed to less. Similarly, the farther away you are from the blast and the fallout, the lower your exposure. Finally, minimizing time spent exposed will also reduce your risk.

Radiation Threat or "Dirty Bomb"

A radiation threat or "Dirty Bomb" is the use of common explosives to spread radioactive materials over a targeted area. It is not a nuclear blast. The force of the explosion and radioactive contamination will be more localized. While the blast will be immediately obvious, the presence of radiation may not be clearly defined until trained personnel with specialized equipment are on the scene. As with any radiation, you want to try to limit your exposure. Think about *shielding, distance* and *time*.

In all Cases, Remain Calm.

Be prepared to adapt this information to your personal circumstances and make every effort to follow instructions received from authorities on the scene. Above all, stay calm, be patient and think before you act. With these simple preparations, you can be ready for the unexpected. If you have a working smoke detector, you understand that preparing makes sense. ***Get ready now.***

This common sense framework is designed to launch a process of learning about citizen preparedness. For the most current information and recommendations, go to **www.ready.gov** or call **1-800-BE-READY.**

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