

PLANNING FOR DISASTERS

*Your Guide to
Emergency Preparedness*

City of Schenectady



Dear Citizen:

*As Mayor of the City of Schenectady, I am pleased to provide you with this pamphlet entitled **Planning for Disasters – Your Guide to Emergency Preparedness.***

I encourage you to review the valuable material contained within this publication, and take some simple steps to make you and your family better prepared for emergencies.

It just might save your life and the lives of your loved ones.

Sincerely,

*Brian U. Stratton
Mayor*

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Why You Need to be Prepared

Disasters can happen with little or no warning and cause a significant disruption of our lives. Although emergency personnel usually respond quickly, they might not be able to reach you immediately. Because of this possibility, you need to be prepared.

Being prepared can reduce fear, anxiety and losses that accompany disasters. You need to know what to do if a disaster occurs and be ready to be self-sufficient for several days. This may mean providing your own shelter, food, water, sanitation and first aid because electricity, water and sewer services may be interrupted.

During a disaster, be prepared to assess the situation, use common sense, and whatever resources you have to take care of yourself and your family.

The City of Schenectady has developed this guide to protect and assist you and your family if a disaster strikes. By applying the information and tips contained in this guide, you are taking the necessary steps to be prepared if a disaster occurs.

This guide addresses the incidents that are most likely to happen here.

Making an Emergency Plan

Making a plan *before* a disaster strikes is very important and is part of being prepared. Involve your entire family in your planning.

Find out how you will be notified of a disaster occurring in your area. Traditional methods are by radio and television broadcasts.

Call the Albany Chapter of the American Red Cross (458-8111) or the Schenectady County Office of Emergency Management (370-3113) for emergency information that applies to your area.

Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another and discuss what you will do in different situations.

Consider a plan where everyone calls the same person, preferably an out-of-town person who is not affected by the disaster. Make sure everyone knows the contact's phone number or e-mail address, and has coins or a pre-paid phone card to call the contact.

Talk to your children's schools and your employer about emergency plans, and find out how they will communicate during an emergency. Also talk to your neighbors about how you can work together.

You will be better prepared to safely reunite your family during an emergency if you think ahead and communicate with others in advance.

Creating a Disaster Supply Kit

You should have some basic supplies available in order to survive for at least 3 days if a disaster occurs.

It is a good idea to have 2 supply kits: a full kit for your home and a portable kit that you can take with you if you have to evacuate.

Water and food are the 2 most important components of your supply kit, and you will need enough for each person in your family for 3 days.

Water

- 1 gallon for each person each day, for drinking and sanitation
 - Water is essential to survival, so each person should drink at least 2 quarts of water daily
- Best stored in tightly sealed, non-breakable plastic containers

Replace after 6 months of storage

Food

- Non-perishable foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking, and little or no water
 - Ready-to-eat canned foods
 - Energy bars
 - Dry cereal or granola

- Peanut butter
- Dried fruit
- Nuts
- Cookies & Crackers
- Boxed or canned juices
- Non-perishable pasteurized milk

- Most people can survive easily on half the amount of food they normally eat
- Ration food for everyone except children, pregnant women, and the elderly
- Don't eat food that looks or smells bad

Other Items

- Prescription medications & medical supplies
- Eyeglasses, contacts & cleaners
- Infant formula, diapers, wipes, rash ointment
- Pet food and extra water for your pet
- Bathroom & facial tissue
- Important documents such as insurance policies, identification, financial and medical records > put everything in a waterproof, portable container
- Cash or traveler's checks and coin change (ATMs may not be working & banks closed)
- Emergency reference material from www.ready.gov
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person
- Several changes of clothing including a long-sleeved shirt, long pants and sturdy shoes
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Feminine supplies and personal hygiene items
- Paper cups, plates and plastic eating utensils
- Manual can opener

- Paper towels and napkins
- Paper, pens and pencils
- Toys, stuffed animals, books, games, puzzles and other activities for children

Equipment

- Cell phone and charger
- Flashlight
- Battery-powered radio and NOAA Weather Radio
- Several fresh batteries
- Fire extinguisher (small ‘A-B-C’ type)
- Whistle to signal for help
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities (*Know where your shut-off valves are located*)
- Dust mask to help filter contaminated air
- Plastic sheeting and duct tape to seal off doors, windows and vents so that contaminated air cannot enter your home
- Scissors
- Moist wipes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Waterless hand cleanser
- Local maps and compass

First Aid Kit

In a disaster, you or a family member may sustain injuries. If you have a basic first aid kit and manual, you will be better prepared to help injured people.

Many injuries are not life threatening and don't require immediate medical attention. Having basic knowledge to treat injuries can make a difference in an emergency, so consider taking a basic first aid and CPR class.

Having the following items available can help you stop bleeding, prevent infection and help decontaminate:

- Several pairs of latex or other sterile gloves
- Sterile dressings to stop bleeding
- Cleansing agent (such as hydrogen peroxide) and antibiotic wipes to disinfect
- Antibiotic/burn ointments to prevent infection
- Adhesive bandages in a variety of sizes
- Eye wash solution to flush the eyes or as a general decontaminant
- Thermometer
- Tweezers
- Tube of petroleum jelly
- Aspirin and non-aspirin pain reliever
- Anti-diarrhea medication
- Antacid
- Laxative
- Electrolyte tablets
- Instant chemical cold packs
- Cotton tip applicators

When You Have to Evacuate

- Plan in advance how you will assemble your family. Plan places where your family will meet, both inside and outside of your immediate neighborhood
- Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options in an emergency
- If you have a car, always keep the gas tank at least half full. Become familiar with alternate routes as well as other modes of transportation out of your area
- If you do not have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to
- If you leave, take your emergency supply kit and make sure your house is secured
- Listen to your radio or TV for instructions
- Take your pets with you, but understand that only service animals may be permitted in public shelters. Plan how you will care for your pets in an emergency
- Call the emergency contact person in your family communications plan to tell them where you are going
- If instructed to do so, turn off water, gas and electricity before leaving (*A professional must turn the gas back on*)
- Leave a note telling others when you left and where you are going
- Check with neighbors who may need a ride

Handling Specific Disasters

Toxic chemicals are used, stored and transported throughout our city every day. Chemical spills do happen occasionally and can have widespread effects.

You can be exposed to a chemical in 3 ways:

- 1) Breathing in the chemical
- 2) Swallowing contaminated food or water
- 3) Touching the chemical or contact with clothing/things that have touched the chemical

You can be exposed to chemicals even though you may not be able to smell or see anything unusual.

In the event of a major chemical emergency, be prepared to evacuate with little or no notice. Listen carefully to radio or TV emergency alert stations (EAS), and strictly follow instructions. Your life may depend on it!

During A Major Chemical Emergency

- You will be told:
 - The type of health hazard
 - The area affected
 - How to protect yourself
 - Evacuation routes (if necessary)
 - Shelter locations
 - Type and location of medical facilities
 - Phone numbers to call if you need help
- Evacuate immediately if instructed by authorities
- If not evacuating, get people and pets inside as quickly as possible
- If you're advised to stay inside:

- Close all windows and doors
- Turn off fans, heating and air conditioning systems
- Seal off vents and fireplaces
- Go to an above-ground room with the fewest windows and doors
- Take your Disaster Supply Kit with you
- Wet some towels and jam them in the crack under the doors
- Tape around doors, windows, exhaust fans and vents
- Stay in the room and listen to the radio or TV
- Don't leave until you are told it is safe or are told to evacuate

After A Major Chemical Emergency

- Seek immediate medical treatment if you were exposed
- Seal exposed clothing and contact authorities about proper disposal
- Contact authorities to learn proper clean up of your property
- After returning home, open all windows and turn on fans and vents to flush chemicals and gases from your home

Earthquakes

An earthquake is a sudden movement of the earth caused by

the abrupt release of strain, and is one of nature's most frightening and destructive forces. Earthquakes can cause many deaths, injuries and extensive property damage.

Terms to Know

Aftershock > an earthquake of similar or less intensity that follows the main earthquake

Epicenter > the place on the earth's surface directly above the point on the fault where the earthquake rupture began

Fault > fracture in the earth's crust caused by the quake

Magnitude > amount of energy released during an earthquake that is measured by the Richter Scale

Seismic Waves > Vibrations that travel outward from the earthquake fault at speeds of several miles per second

Before an Earthquake Happens

- Secure large appliances to the floor and wall
- Move large/heavy objects to lower shelves
- Fasten shelves, mirrors, pictures, etc. to walls
- Install flexible pipe fittings to minimize leaks
- Choose a safe place in every room to seek shelter: under a sturdy table or desk – or against an inside wall where nothing can fall on you – and away from windows
- Practice DROP, COVER AND HOLD ON: *Drop* to the floor, *Cover* your eyes by pressing your face against your arm, and *Hold On*

During an Earthquake

- If inside a building, stay there and DROP, COVER & HOLD ON
- If outdoors, stay there and move away from buildings, power lines and anything else that can fall
- If in a moving vehicle, stop as quickly as possible and stay in the vehicle with your seatbelt fastened – avoid stopping near or under buildings, trees, power lines and bridges

After an Earthquake

- Stay where you are until the shaking has stopped and you are sure moving is safe
- Be prepared for aftershocks – they can do additional damage to weakened structures
- Don't use open flames (in case of gas leaks)
- Inspect your home for damage and leave if unsafe
- Tune to radio or TV for emergency information

Fires

Each year more than 350 000 house fires occur in the

United States, killing 4,000 people and injuring 25,000.

Fire spreads very quickly, so there is no time to gather valuables or make a phone call. In just 5 minutes, a house can be engulfed in flames.

A fire's heat and smoke can be more dangerous than its flames, producing poisonous gases that make you disoriented and drowsy. **Asphyxiation is the leading cause of fire deaths.**

Before a Fire Happens

- Smoke Alarms
 - Install them on every level of your house
 - Test and clean them once a month
 - Replace batteries every 6 months
 - Replace alarms every 10 years
- Fire Extinguishers
 - Install an A-B-C-type on every level of your house and teach your family how to use them
 - Check gauges monthly & replace if needed
- Practice Fire Safety
 - Review escape routes with your family and practice escaping from each room
 - Teach family members to stay low to the floor - where the air is clearer & cooler – when escaping
 - Consider escape ladders if your house has more than one level
 - Make sure windows are not painted or nailed shut,

- Inspect electrical cords for damage and replace if needed
- Don't overload extension cords or outlets
- Make sure outlets have cover plates
- Don't run cords under rugs
- Don't use flammable liquids indoors
- Keep matches/lighters out of sight and reach of children
- Have heating units inspected and cleaned annually by a certified specialist

If A Fire Happens

- If your clothes catch on fire, STOP, DROP and ROLL until the fire is extinguished
- Get out quickly and stay out
- Check closed doors for heat before you open them, using the back of your hand to feel:
 - *Hot Door*: Don't open. Escape through a window. If you can't, hang a light-colored sheet outside the window to alert others you're there.
 - *Cool Door*: Open slowly and ensure that fire/smoke are not blocking your escape route. If blocked, close the door and use another escape route, such as a window. If clear, leave immediately and close the door behind you. Be prepared to crawl.

Floods

Floods are one of the most frequently occurring hazards in

Some floods develop slowly, sometimes over a period of days (Mohawk River melting in spring), while flash floods can develop very quickly, sometimes in just a few minutes (thunderstorms). Flash floods often have a dangerous wall of roaring water that carries debris and can sweep away most things in its path.

Terms to Know

Flood Watch > Flooding is possible in the next 12-36 hours

Flash Flood Watch > Flash flooding is possible, so be prepared to move to higher ground if you're at risk

Flood Warning > Flooding is or soon will be occurring – evacuate immediately if advised to do so

Flash Flood Warning > A flash flood is occurring – move to higher ground immediately if you're at risk

Before A Flood Occurs

- Consider buying flood insurance. Flood losses are not covered by homeowners insurance.
- Learn how to get to higher ground
- Elevate the furnace, water panel and electrical panel if susceptible to flooding
- Install “check valves” in sewer traps to prevent floodwater from backing up into your drains
- Construct barriers to stop floodwater from entering the building
- Seal basement walls with waterproofing to avoid

seepage

During A Flood

- Stay tuned to the radio or TV for information.
- If there is any possibility of a flash flood, move to higher ground immediately without waiting for instructions
- If you have to leave your home:
 - Evacuate if instructed and don't return home until authorities say to
 - Secure your home if you have time
 - Move essential items to upper floors
 - Turn off utilities at the main switches if instructed to do so
 - Disconnect electrical appliances, but not if you are wet or standing in water
 - Don't walk through moving water more than 6 inches deep and try to walk where the water is not moving
 - Don't drive into flooded waters
 - If your vehicle stops running, leave it and move to higher ground, if possible

Heat Wave

Heat kills by pushing the body beyond its limits. In extreme heat and high humidity, evaporation is slowed and the body

must work harder to maintain a normal temperature.

Most heat disorders occur because the victim has been overexposed to heat or has over-exercised for their age and physical condition. The elderly, young children, and those who are sick or overweight are more likely to succumb to extreme heat.

Terms to Know

Heat Wave > Prolonged period of excessive heat, often combined with excessive humidity

Heat Index > How hot it feels in degrees when the relative humidity is added to the air temperature

Heat Cramps > Muscular pains and spasms due to heavy exertion, and often the first signal that the body is having trouble coping with the heat

Heat Exhaustion > A mild form of shock caused by heavy exertion and loss of body fluids

Heat Stroke > A life-threatening condition in which the body's temperature control system stops working, and can cause brain damage and death if the body is not cooled quickly

During A Heat Emergency

- Slow down! Avoid strenuous work during the hottest

- Use a buddy system when working in extreme heat and take frequent breaks
 - Drink plenty of water, even if you aren't thirsty
 - Limit intake of alcoholic and caffeinated beverages – they speed dehydration
 - Eat small, light meals frequently
 - Stay indoors as much as possible and limit exposure to the sun
 - If air conditioning is not available, stay on the lowest floor out of the sunshine
 - Use electric fans if you have them. They don't cool the air, but they help sweat evaporate, which cools the body
 - Spend the warmest part of the day in public buildings that have air conditioning
 - Dress in loose-fitting, lightweight and light-colored clothes
 - Never leave children or pets alone in closed vehicles
 - Check on family, friends and neighbors who don't have air conditioning and who spend much of their time alone
- ❖ **If at any time you don't feel well, seek medical attention immediately.**

Influenza Pandemic

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak that occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which there is little or no

cause serious illness and then spreads easily from person-to-person.

If a pandemic occurs, it is likely to be a prolonged and widespread outbreak that could require temporary changes in many areas of society, including schools, work, transportation and other public services.

If A Pandemic Occurs

- Keep informed through radio and TV news reports
- Encourage sick employees and students to stay home, and anticipate how to function without a significant portion of the workforce and school population
- Practice good health habits, including eating a balanced diet, exercising daily and getting sufficient rest
- Take common-sense steps to stop the spread of germs, including frequent hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying away from people – as much as possible – when you or they are sick
- Consult www.pandemicflu.gov frequently for updates on national and international information on pandemic influenza

Power Outages

Power outages can occur at any place at any time, and can be localized or widespread. They can last from several minutes

If A Power Outage Occurs

- Listen to your battery-operated radio for updated information
- Only use a flashlight or a fireplace for emergency lighting – candles are dangerous and can cause a fire
- Turn off electrical equipment you were using when the power went out
- Avoid opening the refrigerator/freezer – food will stay cold for several hours without power
- If you use a generator, do not run it inside a house or garage
 - Connect the equipment you want to power directly to the outlets on the generator
 - Do not connect a generator to your home's electrical system.
- Leave one light turned on so you will know when the power comes back on
- Don't call 911 for information – use it only to report a life-threatening emergency
- Avoid unnecessary travel, especially by vehicle – traffic signals and street lighting will stop working during an outage, creating a hazardous situation

Terrorist Attacks

Terrorists can attack us using various weapons:

- Bombings and hijackings
- Chemicals

- Radiological (radioactive materials, including nuclear weapons)

Terrorists usually strike without warning and tend to target highly populated places, large airports, popular tourist sites, major international events, business and government centers, and transportation systems.

Devastating terrorist attacks have increased our anxiety about what may happen next. However, there are things you can do to prepare for the unexpected and reduce the stress that you may be feeling.

Being Prepared

- Raise your awareness in public
- Be aware of your surroundings and note possible emergency escape routes
- Report suspicious behavior to police
- Stay away from and report unattended packages
- When traveling, don't leave your baggage unattended
- Leave the area if you feel something is wrong
- If an attack occurs, be prepared to do without services such as gas, electricity and phone for at least 3 days

During An Attack

- Stay calm
- Follow the instructions of emergency personnel
- If in a public place, exit as soon as safely possible
- If at home, stay inside and listen to radio and TV reports for information and instructions

- Radiological incident > Go to a basement or underground room
- Chemical incident > Go to the highest room possible with the fewest doors and windows
- Close all windows and doors, and turn off fans, vents, and heating and air conditioning systems
- Seal off rooms using duct tape and plastic sheeting

HOMELAND SECURITY ADVISORY SYSTEM

Low (GREEN) > Low risk of terrorist attacks

Guarded (BLUE) > General risk of attacks

Elevated (YELLOW) > Significant risk of attacks

High (ORANGE) > High risk of attacks

Severe (RED) > Severe risk of attacks

Thunderstorms & Lightning

Thunderstorms and the lightning they produce are dangerous. They can spawn tornadoes, strong winds, hail and flash flooding.

Warm, humid conditions are very favorable for

Lightning often strikes outside of heavy rain and can occur as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall.

Most lightning deaths and injuries occur when people are caught outdoors in the summer months during the afternoon and evening.

Terms to Know

Severe Thunderstorm Watch > Severe thunderstorms are likely to occur, so watch the sky and listen to NOAA Weather Radio, radio or TV for information

Severe Thunderstorm Warning > Severe storms have been reported and there is imminent danger to those in the storm's path

Before Storms Occur

- Cut down dead or rotting trees and branches from around your house
- Remember the 30/30 lightning safety rule:
 - If after seeing lightning, you can't count to 30 before hearing thunder, GO INSIDE
 - Stay indoors for 30 minutes after hearing the last clap of thunder

If A Thunderstorm Is Likely In Your Area

- Pay attention to darkening skies, lightning, increasing wind, and the sound of thunder
- Get inside a building or hardtop vehicle
- Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause

damage

- Close windows and shades to protect you from possible breaking glass
- Avoid showering or bathing
- Use a corded telephone only for emergencies – cordless and cell phones are safe to use
- Unplug electrical items and turn off the air conditioner
- Avoid hilltops, open fields, beaches, open water, isolated structures in open areas, and metal equipment

Protecting Yourself From A Lightning Strike

- Feeling your hair stand on end indicates that lightning is about to strike nearby, so make yourself into the smallest target possible
 - Squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet, and put your hands over your ears and your head between your knees
 - Don't lie flat on the ground

Tornadoes

Tornadoes are nature's most violent storms, and can cause fatalities and destroy an area in seconds.

A tornado is a rapidly spinning, funnel-shaped cloud that can reach 300 miles-per-hour, and create a swath of damage one

Tornadoes generally occur near the trailing edge of a thunderstorm, and may strike quickly with little or no warning.

Peak tornado season in this area is late spring through early summer, and they are most likely to occur between 3 and 9 p.m., although they can happen at any time.

Terms to Know

Tornado Watch > Tornadoes are possible, so watch the sky, and stay tuned to radio and TV for information.

Tornado Warning > A tornado has been sighted, so take shelter immediately.

Before A Tornado (a Watch)

- Be alert to changing weather conditions and look for approaching storms
- Danger Signs: Dark, greenish sky, large hail and a loud roar similar to a freight train

During A Tornado (a Warning)

- Seek shelter immediately, preferably in a basement
- If there is no basement:
 - Go to the lowest floor and stay in an interior room away from windows and doors
 - Get beneath a sturdy piece of furniture, such as a desk or table

- If you're in a car:
 - Don't try to out-drive a tornado, or stop underneath a bridge or overpass – instead get out of the vehicle immediately and seek shelter
- If you're caught outside:
 - Watch out for flying debris
 - Lie flat in a ditch or depression and cover your head

After A Tornado

- Watch out for debris, especially downed power lines and broken glass
- Check the building for structural damage and leave immediately if there is

Winter Storms

Heavy snowfall and extreme cold are common to our area in the winter months.

As experienced as we are with winter conditions, storms can still create hazardous situations.

Winter Storm Watch > Severe weather is possible

Winter Storm Warning> Severe weather is approaching

Before Winter Storms/Extreme Cold Arrive

- Prepare for possible isolation in your home by having sufficient heating fuel
- If you have a fireplace or wood stove, store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood
- Winterize your home:
 - Insulate walls and attics
 - Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows
 - Wrap pipes in insulation or newspaper to keep them from freezing

[If you rent, ask your landlord about making these changes]
- Winterize your vehicle:
 - Make sure your battery and ignition systems are working properly
 - Ensure antifreeze levels are sufficient to avoid freezing
 - Ensure that the thermostat, heater and defroster are working properly
 - Check lights and flashing hazard lights – replace if needed
 - Check brakes for wear and fluid levels
 - Check oil level
 - Check exhaust system for leaks and crimps – repair/replace if needed (Carbon monoxide is deadly)
 - Consider using snow tires during the winter months – they are much better

suiting for the snow and ice than all-season tires

During A Winter Storm/Extreme Cold

- Stay indoors
- Keep pets indoors
- Listen to the radio or TV, or check the internet, for weather reports and information
- Eat regularly and drink ample fluids (avoid caffeine and alcoholic beverages)
- Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid build-up of toxic fumes
 - Refuel heaters outside and keep them at least 3 feet from flammable objects
- Drive only if absolutely necessary. If you must drive:
 - Travel in the day, don't travel alone and keep others informed of your schedule
 - Stay on main roads

If Your Heat Goes Off

- Call for help immediately and get to a heated shelter
- Until assistance arrives or if you can't travel safely:
 - Close off unused rooms
 - Use towels to seal off any drafts from under doors
 - Dress in layers of loose, lightweight, warm clothing
 - Keep hands and feet warm
 - Wear a hat

- Exercise lightly to warm up, but avoid sweating to prevent getting chilled

Links To More Information

Federal Emergency Management Agency
- *www.fema.gov/areyouready*

New York State Emergency Management Office
- *www.semo.state.ny.us*

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

- www.ready.gov

New York State Department of Homeland Security

- www.security.state.ny.us

American Red Cross

- www.redcross.org

National Weather Service

- www.nws.noaa.gov

Center for Disease Control & Prevention

- www.cdc.gov

Important Numbers

Police / Fire / Medical Emergency: 911

Sch'dy County Emergency Management: 370-3113

Sch'dy County Public Health Services: 386-2810

Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222