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## September is National Preparedness Month

As difficult as it is to believe, it has been seven years since the tragedy that occurred on September 11, 2001. A lot has happened in those seven years: hurricanes, floods, tornados, and wild fires at home and two wars abroad have emphasized the need for emergency preparedness. This September is the fifth National Preparedness Month, a time set aside to remind people that emergencies happen all the time, so it is best to be prepared to protect ourselves, our loved ones, and our property.

To help people focus on the need for preparation and the steps to be taken to minimize injuries and damage as well as to recover from such an event, the federal government launched the *READY* campaign, a national public service campaign to increase the level of preparedness in the country. The message of *READY* is that people need to do three things in preparing for an emergency: make a family emergency plan, assemble an emergency supply kit, and stay informed about the types of emergencies that are likely to occur in your particular area.

In making an emergency plan, the first step is to communicate with all family members and allow for input from everyone. The family should discuss the types of emergencies they could encounter and what to do if an emergency occurs. Although this may seem obvious, research commissioned by the Home Safety Council found that despite talking with their children about emergency preparation, few mothers (less than 1/3 in the study) had “developed and discussed a family communications plan. . . “ and fewer still had prepared readiness kits. Perhaps some parents are concerned about frightening their young children, but adults can help children feel safe by educating them about different types of weather, by assuring them a parent or other adult will be there to help them, and by keeping a list of emergency telephone numbers next to every phone in the house.

When developing a family emergency plan, certain points must be included. First, decide on places where the family will meet, both within your neighborhood and outside of your neighborhood. Designate a friend or relative that lives out-of-state, if possible, as the family’s emergency contact. Have every member of the family memorize the telephone number of that person so he or she can be contacted to help family members find each other if they become separated. Be sure each member of the family has either a cell phone, a prepaid phone card, or coins for a pay phone so that the emergency contact can be reached.

The second task in preparing for an emergency is to put together an emergency supply kit. Items such as non-perishable food, water, cash, batteries, a flashlight, a radio, a first-aid kit, a cell phone, moist towelettes, garbage bags, local maps, a can opener, and pliers should be included. The quantity of those items will depend upon the anticipated length of time the emergency is likely to last and whether sheltering will be in place or an evacuation is necessary. Additional items such as clothing, blankets, pillows, and games or other amusements might need to be included. Depending upon the needs of each person, medications, eyeglasses, extra hearing aid batteries, medical equipment, baby food and formula, diapers, and personal hygiene products should be included. If pets are involved, pet food, leashes, collar, and extra water will be needed. Important papers like bank account records, insurance policies, birth certificates, and other forms of identification should be packed in portable waterproof containers. If possible, each family member should be responsible for their own personal evacuation package, consisting of keepsakes that have sentimental value or would be difficult to replace, like family photos.

In general, every family member should be aware of the types of emergencies that are likely to occur in their

area – for example, hurricanes in coastal communities. When an emergency occurs, stay informed by tuning in to local radio and television stations; both battery operated radios and televisions are available in the event of a power outage.

Emergencies occur all the time and in every locale, and they are often unpredictable. The best way to minimize the damage and disruption from disasters caused by man or nature is to be prepared in advance. For assistance in preparing for an emergency, contact the Department of Homeland Security at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) (1-800-237-3239) or the Home Safety Council at [www.homesafetycouncil.org](http://www.homesafetycouncil.org). Additional information is available at the Central Connecticut Health District at [www.ccthd.org](http://www.ccthd.org) (860-721-2822).