

## **Family First**

Adapted and modified for the Gulf Coast area by Earl Pack – AE5PA. Base material from an 8/22/2007 Cook County ARES training article by Gregory D. Rosenberg AB9MZ. Used with the permission of Gregory D. Rosenberg.

It is great that many of us give of our time and volunteer in ARES or similar organizations. However, all too often many volunteers run out the door to help other and leave their family stranded, in peril, or at risk.

We are responsible to ensure the safety and well being of our families and ourselves first and foremost during any disaster. Doing otherwise could cause you to become part of the problem, instead of part of the solution. Not taking care of your family first can also create a serious distraction because you are thinking about them and wondering if they are OK. This is dangerous to those you serve and those you are trying to help.

### 1) Identify and learn about potential hazards and emergencies your family could face

Identify the risks you face where you live: thunderstorms (lightning), tornados, micro-bursts, torrential downpours, floods, hail, wind storm, freezing rain, fire, wildfire, winter storms, extreme heat, extreme cold, droughts/famine, earthquakes, nuclear power plant emergency, explosion, hazardous materials spill, chemical plant explosions and hazardous gas releases, terrorism (CNBR, social engineering), medical epidemic, rail car derailment with unknown potential for exposure. Think about those incidences that could cause you to be separated (1-2 day) from you family if you work in a different part of town than where you live.

### 2) Pray for he best and plan for the worst.

Prepare for the surprises that mother nature can muster up for us, as well as those events induced by man-kind (Hazardous material spill, Terrorism, accidents, carelessness, complacency, and acceptance.)

### 3) Be proactive and mitigate any risks you can

If at all possible, mitigate any known risks you might face beforehand. Having to act reactively does not produce the best result. Clearly you can not mitigate every situation that can occur, but you should take steps to remedy as many potential issues as you can. Maybe you have ignored a crack in your roof, which could expand and cause structural damage during the next heavy rain.

Make arrangements with someone, with the needed skills, who lives and works near your family that could check on and help them out if you can not get home for some reason. You may need to do the same thing for someone else that has family close to where you work. Make sure you have the supplies with you incase you can not get home for a few days.

### 4) Does your community, school, or workplace have an emergency plans

- A) Shelters
- B) Public transportation
- C) Medical facilities

### 5) Create a family disaster plan

- A) Decide to evacuation or sheltering in place
  - 1) Keep gas tanks topped off, spare 5 Gal tanks

- 2) Alternative transportation
  - 3) Listen to a radio for instructions
  - 4) Evacuate if instructed, use established routes, and exercise caution in case of washed out roads, down power lines, flood waters, hazardous gas releases...
  - 5) Don't leave and get trapped.
  - 6) Keep maps, compass, GPS in your car.
  - 7) Have cash available.
- B) Warning systems and signals
- C) Emergency communications plan for your family incase communication where you live fail. Use someone outside your geographical area as a message center for your family.
- D) Insurance and other vital or medical records
- E) Utility shutoff, protecting your water supply
- F) Special needs
- 1) Hearing impaired
  - 2) Mobility impaired
  - 3) Visually impaired or blind
  - 4) Mentally handicapped, young children, or the elderly
  - 5) Special medical needs
  - 6) Single working parent
  - 7) People with no vehicles
  - 8) Special dietary needs
  - 9) Non-English speaking
- G) Caring for animals
- 6) Assemble a disaster kit or kits.
  - 7) Practice the plan
  - 8) Talk about what might happen and what the family will do in a disaster.
  - 9) Test and maintain your communications plan.

In some ways, living here in the gulf coast has put us in a less prepared or handicapped position because most of the disaster we have responded to or been involve in have had several days of notice ahead of time. However, there are several disasters that we could experience that will not give any lead time. Learn from the preparations that those who live in earth quake areas have made. Also remember that no matter how well you prepare you are going to need to be flexible for the specific situation. Ensure that you have what is needed to allow and facilitate that flexibility both in knowledge, ingenuity, and materials. Use the Boy Scout motto: Be Prepared.