

Opinion: Now is the time to prepare for a disaster

By Trista Cunningham

With this being National Preparedness Month, the American Red Cross Capital Region Chapter is calling on families, businesses, schools and organizations to take steps now to become better prepared for the next emergency or disaster.

Disasters can strike at any time – from earthquakes to wildfires to terrorist attacks like those that occurred on 9/11 10 years ago. National Preparedness Month provides our nation with the opportunity to remember the victims and honor those who responded, and to make a renewed commitment to being better prepared for the future.

“We all must do what we can to prepare our families and make our communities ready for the next emergency” said Christy Woods, director of preparedness for the Capital Region Chapter. “Everyone can take three key action steps to get started: build a kit, make a plan, and be informed.”

Emergency preparedness kits should include enough supplies for at least three days in case you have to evacuate. Water (one gallon per person, per day), nonperishable food, a flashlight, battery-powered or hand-crank radio, extra batteries, a first aid kit, a seven-day supply of medications, a multipurpose tool, sanitation and personal hygiene items and copies of important personal documents should go in every kit. The Red Cross also recommends having at least two weeks worth of supplies at home. A variety of emergency preparedness kits, first aid kits and other supplies are available online.

All members of the household should work together on an emergency plan. Designate a meeting place right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency like a fire. Each person

should know how to reach other members of the household. The plan should also include an out-of-area emergency contact person, and a location where everyone should meet if they can't go home.

People should be informed about what types of disasters are most likely to occur where they live and how local authorities will contact you in the event of a disaster. First aid and CPR/AED training empowers individuals with the confidence and skills to respond to health emergencies in case advanced medical help is delayed.

“We have learned from previous disasters that the government, communities and organizations like the Red Cross will never be big enough to do it all in every disaster,” Woods said. “Every person, business, school and house of worship must be prepared to take care of themselves and their neighbors in an emergency.”

Severe weather, power outages and water main breaks can happen anytime. Throughout the year, the Red Cross offers programs to help people be prepared. The “Do More Than Cross Your Fingers” campaign, featuring Jamie Lee Curtis, makes it easy for people to prepare for emergencies, starting with how to customize their emergency kits. The “Ready When the Time Comes” program trains employees from corporations and mobilizes them as a community-based volunteer force when disaster strikes. “Be Red Cross Ready” is a web-based interactive tutorial that teaches people how to be ready for emergencies.

In addition, because up to 40 percent of businesses fail following a man-made or natural disaster, the Red Cross developed the Ready Rating Program. Ready Rating is a free, self-paced, web-based membership program that measures how ready businesses, organizations and schools are to deal with emergencies. Members receive customized feedback on how they can improve their efforts. The program is designed for those who are in the beginning stages of planning for emergencies as

well as those who have already done so and want confirmation on their preparedness level. It gives these groups ideas of what they can do to better prepare themselves for the next emergency or disaster.

No one can predict where or when the next large disaster will strike, but preparedness steps taken today can save lives and livelihoods tomorrow. People can contact their local Red Cross or go online to learn what steps they should take to be ready when emergencies strike.

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