

Opinion: Plan to rough it a bit after disaster

By Tracy Franklin

This is the fifth of a series of articles highlighting emergency preparedness. Use these tools to prepare yourself for an emergency. More information is available in the city's website.

Choosing comfort over inconvenience:

Coping with the impact of a disaster is never fun. However, much of the inconvenience and discomfort the disaster causes can be reduced by planning alternative ways to take care of your needs.

Acquiring emergency supplies:

At first glance, the list below may seem totally overwhelming. At second glance, you'll find that you probably already have many of these items.

Lighting:

Caution: The use of candles is no longer recommended as a source of emergency light. Experience shows they are responsible for too many secondary fires following the disaster. Additionally, they are very dangerous in the presence of leaking natural gas.

- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Camping lanterns—store extra fuel, wicks, mantles and matches
- Lightsticks—these can provide light for 1 to 12 hours and can be purchased at many camping supply

Cooking:

Caution: Never burn charcoal indoors. This could cause carbon monoxide poisoning.

- Camp stoves, sterno stoves, or barbecues – store extra propane, charcoal or sterno, lighter fluid, and matches,
- Fireplaces—do not use until the chimney and flue have been inspected for cracks. Sparks may escape into your attic through an undetected crack and start a fire.
- Paper plates and cups
- Plastic utensils
- Paper towels

Pets:

Always keep a week's supply of food and water for your pet on hand. Toilet bowl water is an excellent supply of water for pets following an emergency event.

Protecting stored foods when the power goes out is very important.

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- A full refrigerator will maintain safe temperatures for up to six hours.
- A full freezer will maintain safe temperatures for up to two days.

Foods to be concerned about are categorized into groups:

- Potentially hazardous foods are the most important. These include meats, fish, poultry, dairy, eggs, soft cheeses, cooked beans, cooked rice, cooked potatoes, cooked pasta,

custards, puddings, etc.

- Some foods may not be hazardous but the quality may be affected. These foods include salad dressings, mayonnaise, butter, margarine, produce, hard cheeses, etc.
- Some foods are safe. These are carbonated beverages, unopened bottled juices, ketchup, mustard, relishes, jams, peanut butter, BBQ sauce, etc.

How do I know if the food is unsafe to eat?

- You cannot rely upon appearance or odor. Never taste food to determine safety.
- Some foods may look and smell fine but they've been warm too long, food poisoning bacteria may have grown enough to make you sick.
- If possible, use a thermometer to check the temperature of the foods. If potentially hazardous foods are colder than 45 degrees, they are safe.

Sanitation:

- The lack of sanitation facilities following emergency events can quickly create secondary problems unless basic guidelines are followed. If the water lines are damaged, or is suspected, do not flush the toilet.
- Avoid digging holes in the ground and using these. Untreated raw sewage can pollute fresh ground water supplies. It also attracts flies and promotes the spread of diseases.
- Store a large supply of heavy-duty plastic bags, twist ties, disinfectant and toilet paper.
- A good disinfectant that is easy to use is a solution of one part liquid bleach to ten parts water.
- If the toilet is not able to be flushed, it can still be

used. This is less stressful for most people than using some other container. Remove all the water. Line bowl with a heavy-duty plastic bag. When finished, add a small amount of deodorant or disinfectant, securely tie the bag, and dispose of it in a large trash can with a tight fitting lid.

- Portable camp toilets, small trash cans, or sturdy buckets lined with heavy-duty plastic bags can be used. Those with tight fitting lids are best.

Emergency information:

Obtain a battery powered radio and supply of extra batteries.

South Lake Tahoe emergency preparation:

As part of the city's initiative to increase communications, we will be offering a 12 part monthly series during 2013 highlighting emergency preparedness. Use these tools to prepare yourself for an emergency.

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