

Opinion: Emergency preparedness is critical

By Tracy Franklin

Are you prepared for an emergency? South Lake Tahoe has developed a 12-month emergency preparedness tool to help you prepare.

As part of the city's continued initiative to increase communications, we will be offering a 12 part monthly series throughout the year highlighting emergency preparedness. Use these tools to prepare yourself for an emergency. More information is available **online**.

Emergency Preparedness—Month 1 – Create a Family Disaster Plan

Your family needs a plan that tells everyone: where to meet if you have to evacuate; who you've identified as an out-of-state "family contact"; how to get emergency information in your community; and how to take care of your family pets.

When preparing for an emergency, plan on having enough supplies to get you and your family through at least the first 72 hours. After a major emergency, there's a good chance that traditional emergency response teams will be too busy to take care of you and your family. You need to prepare your home and neighborhood.

- Stock up on at least a three-day supply of food, water, clothes, medical supplies and other necessary equipment for everyone in your family.
- Make sure everyone knows where to find them.
- Decide where and when to reunite your family should you are apart when a disaster strikes.

- Choose a person outside the immediate area to contact if family members are separated. Long distance phone service will probably be restored sooner than local service. Do not use the phone immediately after a major emergency.
- Know the policies of the school or daycare center your children attend. Make plans to have someone pick them up if you are unable to get to them.
- If you have a family member who does not speak English, prepare an emergency card written in English indicating that person's identification, address and any special needs such as medication or allergies. Tell that person to keep the card with him/her at all times.
- Conduct Earthquake: Duck, Cover and Hold drills every six months with your family.
- Practice Stop, Drop and Roll drills for fire, as well as emergency exit drills in the house regularly.
- Know the safest place in each room because it will be difficult to move from one room to another during an earthquake or explosion.
- Locate the shutoff valves for water, gas and electricity. Learn how to shut off the valves before an emergency. If you have any questions, call your utility company. Remember not to shut off utility valves unless directed to do so by your utility company.
- Make copies of vital records and keep them in a safe deposit box in another city or state. Make sure your originals are stored safely.
- Before a major emergency occurs, call your local Red Cross chapter and Office of Emergency Services to find out about their plans for emergency shelters and temporary medical centers in case of a disaster.

- Establish all the possible ways to exit your house. Keep those areas clear.
- Know the locations of the nearest fire and police stations.
- Take photos and/or videos of your valuables. Make copies and keep them with a friend or relative in another city or state.
- Include your babysitter and other household help in your plans.
- Keep an extra pair of eyeglasses and house and car keys on hand.
- Keep extra cash and change. If electricity is out, you will not be able to use an ATM.

Sign up to receive emergency notifications **online**.

Tracy Franklin is the public information officer for South Lake Tahoe.