

Developing a Family Disaster Plan

SECTION KEY



Preparing your Family for Disasters



Basic Steps to Disaster Preparedness



Natural Disaster Facts

The family is the domestic church and is integral to the life of the parish. As such, families should be as prepared as the parish to face a disaster.

Attached are two different preparedness guides that can be distributed to families. The first is a family readiness guide

produced by Catholic Charities USA that will prompt families to begin thinking about preparing themselves for disaster. The second is a comprehensive guide produced by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Galveston-Houston, which provides more detailed planning for families. This guide also provides basic facts about specific disasters.

We encourage parish staff to distribute these materials to all families within the parish. The Parish Disaster Committee could then host informal meetings with parishioners to review elements of a family disaster plan. The more involved and knowledgeable parishioners are in the preparation for a disaster, the better their ability to respond to such a disaster will be, resulting in less loss of life and property damage.



Basic Steps to Disaster Preparedness



Preparing your Family for a Disaster

Unfortunately, disasters are familiar to many Texans. We have experienced terrible flooding, damaging hail storms and tornadoes; we have provided shelter to others escaping hurricanes, seen space shuttle debris rain down across the state, and become aware of the threat of terrorism to the community as it grieved with a nation on September 11, 2001.

Having experienced these disasters, we have learned that we can take some simple steps to protect our families and ensure the safety of our children, while at the same time making it easier to recover. This family readiness guide is designed to help you and your family be prepared for future disasters.



Find Out What Can Happen To Your Family

From experience, we all know that the Central Texas region is susceptible to natural disasters such as floods, tropical storm force winds, and tornadoes. However, risk does vary depending on where you live. We recommend gathering the following information:

- ❑ Contact your Local Emergency Management Office or your local American Red Cross Chapter to find out which disasters could affect you specifically.
- ❑ Determine what types of disasters are likely to happen near you and how to prepare for each.
- ❑ Identify what your community's warning sirens sound like and what to do if you hear them.



Create a Family Emergency Plan

Hold a family meeting: Keep it simple and work as a team!



It is important to warn children - without overly alarming them - about potential disasters. Use the following guidelines to teach children about disaster and to make them feel as if they are helping in disaster planning.

- ❑ Tell children that a disaster is something that could hurt people or cause damage. Explain that “sometimes nature provides too much of a good thing”, like fire, rain, and wind.
- ❑ Explain how important it is to make a Family Disaster Plan.
- ❑ Tell children there are many people who can help them in a disaster.
- ❑ Have a common plan in case family members are separated:
 - ❑ Choose a place to go outside of your neighborhood in case you cannot go home.
 - ❑ Choose someone out-of-town to be your family contact.
- ❑ Fill out the local emergency phone numbers and child identification cards.
- ❑ Keep emergency phone numbers by each phone.
- ❑ Teach Children:
 - ❑ How to call for help (emergency numbers).
 - ❑ When to call each emergency number.
 - ❑ How to dial long distance.
 - ❑ How to memorize the names and numbers of local and out-of-state- emergency contacts.
- ❑ Show everyone how and when to turn off the utilities.
 - ❑ Locate the main electric fuse box, water service main, and natural gas main.
 - ❑ Keep a wrench near gas and water shut-off valves.
- ❑ Remember: if you turn off the gas, you will need a professional to turn it back on again.
- ❑ Do a home hazard hunt for items that can move, fall, break, or cause a fire.
- ❑ Plan home escape routes – two from each room.

- ❑ Find safe places in your home for each type of disaster.
- ❑ Designate “rally points” where you and your family can meet if a disaster happens when you are all away from home.
- ❑ Have all adults take a Red Cross First Aid and CPR Class.

If you have to evacuate...

If you are told to evacuate, please take the following steps:

- ❑ In Texas, there is no such thing as a mandatory evacuation, however if the Emergency Management Office recommends evacuating, take their advice and do so immediately. It could save your life.
- ❑ Listen to the radio, TV, or a NOAA Weather Radio for instructions from local officials. They will provide instructions on evacuation routes and shelter openings.
- ❑ Shut off water, gas, and electricity if told to do so.
- ❑ Leave a note telling when you left and where you are going.
- ❑ Call your family contact to tell them where you are going.
- ❑ Make sure you have all of your disaster supplies (see checklist)
- ❑ Secure doors and garage doors from the inside.
- ❑ Fill up your car with gasoline.
- ❑ Use evacuation routes recommended by officials.

Hurricanes and Evacuation

You will have more time to prepare for evacuation in the event of a hurricane than during hazardous materials spill. However, it will take more time to prepare your home and your family for this type of evacuation. Here are some steps to take before evacuating.

- ✓ If you live in a mobile home, **LEAVE**.
- ✓ If it is recommended you evacuate, take the advice and **LEAVE**.
- ✓ Cover windows, skylights, and sliding doors with shutters/boards.
- ✓ Wrap up irreplaceable items (family photos, videos, etc.) in plastic and pack them so you can take them if you evacuate.
- ✓ Take your family records and documents. If your home is damaged in a disaster, you will have to prove home ownership to the American Red Cross and FEMA.
- ✓ Move furniture away from windows and cover with plastic.
- ✓ Move lawn furniture inside with other loose outdoor items.
- ✓ Remove TV and Cable antennas and turbines from the roof.
- ✓ Secure dumpsters and land-docked boats by filling them with water.
- ✓ Leave as early as possible – being stuck on an evacuation route as a hurricane strikes is not only scary but also dangerous.
- ✓ Remember any special dietary needs of your family.
- ✓ For the elderly or disabled, take all walkers, wheelchairs, extra oxygen or other special health care needs.
- ✓ Arrange for pets’ safety. **DO NOT** leave pets tied up outside.
- ✓ Take bedding and essential clothing.
- ✓ Bring enough food/water/medicine to last for 3 days.

If you stay at home...

If you decide to stay at home during a disaster, do the following:

- ❑ Only stay at home if you have NOT been ordered to leave.
- ❑ Prepare your home as if you were evacuating (see Hurricanes and Evacuation Checklist).
- ❑ Stay in a large center room with few windows.
- ❑ If flooding occurs, move to higher floors.
- ❑ Keep all windows and doors closed tightly.
- ❑ Monitor radio for news and weather reports continuously.
- ❑ Turn off propane tank. Unplug all unnecessary appliances.
- ❑ Fill bathtub and large containers with water for sanitary purposes.
- ❑ Use flashlights instead of candles. Cook with Canned Heat; DO NOT USE charcoal or pressurized gas inside!
- ❑ Turn refrigerator to maximum cold and open only when necessary.
- ❑ Turn off utilities if told to do so by authorities.
- ❑ If you are in a multiple-story building and away from the water, go to the first or second floors and take refuge in the halls or interior doors.
- ❑ Stay inside until “all clear” is announced. If seeking shelter during a hurricane, do not leave your home when the eye of the storm passes – Eye wall winds, the strongest of the storm, can start to back up with very little notice.
- ❑ Be alert for and ready to seek shelter from tornadoes, which can happen during a hurricane or a severe thunderstorm.



Create a Disaster Supply Kit

Use kit if evacuating or staying put in a disaster!



When preparing for a disaster, use the “15 minute rule”. This rule states that essential things you need to evacuate or prepare for a disaster should take you 15 minutes or less to get together. To make sure that items are readily accessible: (a) assemble the supplies in easy-to-carry containers like backpacks and duffle bags, (b) have important papers already packed in waterproof containers, and (c) have plastic sheeting easily available if needed.

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Use this checklist to prepare your family disaster supplies kit.

Household Items

- Battery-powered radio
- Battery-powered flashlights
- Extra batteries
- Cash or Travelers Checks and change
- Map to follow evacuation routes/ find shelters
- Minimum 3-day supply of nonperishable, packaged or canned food (e.g. Canned or dried juice mixes, powdered or canned milk, peanut butter, jelly, crackers, unsalted nuts, trail mixes, cereals, rice, cookies, hard candies, instant coffee, tea bags)
- Basic food seasoning (salt/pepper)
- Manual can opener
- Paper plates
- Cups
- Minimum 3-day supply of bottled drinking water – one gallon of water per person per day. Don't forget water for pets. Store water in sealed unbreakable containers. Replace every 6 months.
- First Aid Kit
- Fire extinguisher (small ABC type)
- Duct tape
- Waterproof matches
- Sewing kit
- Plastic storage containers
- Paper, pencils and pens
- Aluminum foil
- Plastic sheeting/tarps
- Basic tool kit (adjustable wrench, screwdrivers, hammer, etc.)



Family Documents (stored in a water-proof container):

- Birth Certificates
- Marriage Certificates
- Death Certificates
- Ownership Documents
- Insurance Policies
- Passports/ Visas
- Social Security Cards
- Bond/Stock Issues
- Wills/ Living Trusts
- Medical Records/ Children's vaccinations histories
- Photocopies of all cards carried in wallet
- Backup disks of computer information
- Irreplaceable photographs/videotapes/family heirlooms
- Inventory of personal property for filing insurance claims. List everything and include receipts of big-ticket items.
- Videotape or photos of home(s) contents to supplement your written inventory of your home.



- Clothing and Bedding (For Each Family Member)
- Sturdy shoes or work boots
- Rain gear
- Blankets and sleeping bags
- Hat and work gloves
- Thermal underwear
- Sunglasses
- Insect repellent and sun screen

Sanitation Supplies

- ❑ Toilet paper, towelettes
- ❑ Soap, liquid detergent
- ❑ Feminine supplies
- ❑ Personal hygiene items
- ❑ Plastic garbage bags with ties
- ❑ Plastic bucket with tight lid
- ❑ Disinfectant
- ❑ Unscented household bleach



Baby Needs

- ❑ Disposable Diapers
- ❑ Formula
- ❑ Bottles
- ❑ Powdered milk
- ❑ Medications
- ❑ Changes of clothing



Adult/Elderly Needs

- ❑ Extra Months' supply of prescription medicine refills (Store in easily accessible bag in medicine cabinet, rotate pills as prescription is refilled).
- ❑ Walkers/ Wheelchairs/canes
- ❑ Denture Needs
- ❑ Extra set of prescription glasses/ contacts.
- ❑ Don't forgot these odds and ends...
- ❑ Entertainment – Books, Toys, and Games
- ❑ Extra set of car keys.

Storing your Kit

Choose a cool, dark location in which to store your kit (i.e. a closet or “safety corner” in the garage). If you live in an apartment or have limited space, be innovative. Other possible storage locations include under stairways or in a large box or plastic tub that can be covered with a tablecloth and used as an end table.

Layer and Monitor Your Supplies

Layer supplies and keep them together in a container such as a plastic garbage can with wheels. Check the items every 6 months for expiration dates, changes in your children's clothing sizes and weather requirements. A good way to remember to inspect your kit is to do it when you set your clocks back and change your smoke detector batteries.

Use What you already have



Use what you already have and prepare as if you are going camping for 3 days in the mountains with no facilities. If you are a camper, you have a head start: camping supplies, tent, camp stove, and water jugs can double as emergency supplies.



Tips for Storing and Using Water

Purify water by boiling it for 5 –10 minutes or by adding drops of unscented household bleach containing 5.25% hypochlorite. FEMA recommends using 16 drops of bleach per one (1) gallon of water. Purification tablets or a filter system designed for backpackers also work well. Store water in plastic three-liter soda bottles instead of plastic milk-type jugs. Milk jugs will breakdown over time, while soda bottles last considerably longer. Consider freezing water so it will last until needed. Frozen water also can be used for non-emergency situations like camping, fishing, hunting, etc. However, don't forget to replace the water jugs when you get home.



Practice and Maintain Your Plan.

Without practice and maintenance, your family risks forgetting its disaster plan, and your disaster supplies will expire or be ruined. Use this schedule to remember to practice and maintain your plan.

Every Month

Test Your Smoke Alarms.

Every 6 Months

Go over Family Disaster Plan and do escape drills. Quiz children. Replace stored food and water. Make sure to rotate clothing according to the season.

Every year

Wash blanket/clothing supplies. Replace batteries in smoke alarms.



Disaster Facts – Hurricanes and Tropical Storms

A **Tropical Storm** sustains winds of 39 to 73 miles per hour; a storm is assigned a name when it reaches tropical storm strength.

A **Hurricane** sustains winds of 74 miles per hour or more and is accompanied by heavy rain. Hurricanes are designated from categories one through five as they increase in wind strength and the height of expected storm surge. Katrina in 2005 was a category 4 storm.

A **Storm Surge** is a rise in tide caused by a hurricane as it moves over or near the coastline, often with breaking waves on top. A storm surge can cause devastating damage: entire buildings can collapse once the storm surge wipes away the foundation; millions of fish are killed by the crash of the storm surge against the coastline, and many people drown in the strong current produced by the storm surge.

A **Hurricane Watch** is issued when hurricane conditions pose a possible threat to an area within 36 hours.

A **Hurricane Warning** is issued when a hurricane is expected to strike within 24 hours.

The **Hurricane Belt** is described as the area along the Atlantic coast from Virginia south to Key West, Florida, and along the Gulf of Mexico from Key West to and including Texas.

Tornadoes often accompany hurricanes.

Hurricanes spiral counterclockwise around a relatively calm center known as the **eye of the storm**. Hurricane-force winds and torrential rains border this calm. Additional winds, rains, etc. will follow the calming down of the storm (eye of the storm). **Remain indoors until experts advise that the storm has passed.**

Hurricane winds do much damage, but huge waves can raise tides 15 feet or more. These waves often come rapidly and produce flooding and flash floods. **Drowning is the greatest cause of hurricane deaths.**

Vertical evacuation (moving to second or third floor) is not safe. Storm surges can wipe out the foundation and/or the first floor, destroying the upper floors in the process.

Board windows up instead of taping them. Broken windows can allow hurricane winds to enter a building and blow off the roof. Boarding up windows where strong winds are expected is a safer method to protect the roof, the interior, and the overall structure of the property and prevent flying glass.

Officials may advise that all utilities be shut off to homes and other property. **Locate shut off valve(s) in advance and know how to use them safely.** Write down step-by-step instructions and make sure more than one person knows how to use them.

When storm conditions arrive, **secure all outside items** such as lawn furniture, children's toys, etc. so they do not become airborne.

Important records such as tax documents, insurance policies, social security cards, birth certificates, passports, bonds, stocks, wills, and medical information **should be placed in a waterproof container and stored in a safe place.**

If sheltering at home, stay in the room or area most central to the home, preferably without windows.

Take pictures of your home and property before a storm hits. If your property is damaged, take more photos after the storm. Develop 2 sets and give one set to your insurance company. Keep one set and the negatives in a safe location. Do not begin clean up until an insurance agent has inspected the damage.

When flooding accompanies a hurricane, snakes and rodents can become a hazard. Stray dogs and cats can cause problems also. Pets can become hostile once they have endured the effects of a serious storm.

Disruption of garbage and trash pickup can pose a problem. Food that cannot be used or saved after a storm should be buried rather than left outside to attract animals.

To **avoid accidents** in the home after a storm, clean up a room where small children can stay safely.

Looting can also be a problem after a storm. Work with your neighbors and friends and consider taking turns standing watch if looting becomes a problem.

Check with local civil defense or emergency management authorities before using any water after a flood. **Water sources may have been contaminated.**



Disaster Facts – Floods and Flash Floods

Flash floods occur within a few minutes or hours of excessive rainfall, a dam or levee failure, or a sudden release of water held by an ice jam. Flash floods can roll boulders, tear out trees, destroy buildings and bridges, and scour out new channels. Rapidly rising water can reach heights of 30 feet or more. Flash flood-producing rains can also trigger catastrophic mudslides. You will not always have a warning that these deadly, sudden floods are coming. **Most flood deaths are due to flash floods.**

Floods claim an average of 263 lives every year. Flood waters only one foot deep can sweep you off your feet and a depth of 2 feet will float your car. Never try to walk, swim, or drive through such swift water. **If you come upon floodwaters, stop! Turn around and go another way.**

Officials will forecast flood(s) when the rainfall is heavy enough to cause rivers to overflow their banks.

Property damage and/or loss due to flood is not covered by regular homeowners' insurance policies. Flood insurance is available through the government's **National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)**. Your insurance agent should have further information about how to insure your property against flood damage, or call the NFIP at 1.800.427.4661.

Do not stack sandbags directly against the outside walls of a building. Pressure against the foundation can cause severe damage. Stack sandbags away from building walls to prevent floodwaters from reaching your home or business.

To avoid structural damage to the foundation of your home if you have a basement, some experts recommend permitting flood waters to flow into the basement or to flood the basement yourself if you are sure it will be flooded anyway. This equalizes the water pressure on the outside of the walls. Basements should be pumped out gradually (about one-third of the water per day) to avoid damage. The walls may collapse and the floor may buckle if the basement is pumped out while the surrounding ground is still waterlogged.

Be careful of electrical and gas utilities. Have experts inspect and reconnect utilities after a flood.

Check with local civil defense or emergency management authorities before using any water after a flood. **Water sources may have been contaminated.**

Hidden Dangers of Areas Flooded by Storm

Do not walk through flowing water - Drowning is a major cause of flood deaths. Use a pole or stick to make sure the ground continues in front of you.

Do not drive through a flooded area - If you come upon a road barrier, turn around and go the other way; the road or bridge may be washed out.

Stay away from power lines and electrical wires - Electrocutation is also a major killer in floods. Electrical current can travel through water. Report downed power lines.

Turn off your electricity when you return home - Some appliances, such as TV sets, can shock you even after they have been unplugged. Don't use appliances or motors that have gotten wet unless they have been taken apart, cleaned and dried by a professional.

Watch for animals – especially snakes - Small animals that have been flooded out of their homes may seek shelter in yours. Use a stick to poke and turn items over and scare away small animals.

Look before you step - After a flood, the ground and floors are covered with debris, including broken bottles and nails, and may be slippery.

Be alert for gas leaks - Use a flashlight to inspect for damage. Don't smoke or use candles, lanterns, or open flames unless you are sure that the gas has been turned off and the area aired out.

Carbon monoxide exhaust kills - Use generators, gas powered machines, and camping stoves outdoors. Cook with charcoal outdoors only.

Clean everything that got wet - Floodwaters have picked up sewage and chemicals from roads, farms, factories and storage buildings. Spoiled food and flooded cosmetics and medicine are health hazards. When in doubt, throw them out.



Disaster Facts - Tornadoes

Tornadoes often accompany hurricanes, and while they can strike at any time of the year, they occur most frequently during April, May and June. In an average year, 800 tornadoes are reported nationwide, resulting in 80 deaths and over 1,500 injuries. A **tornado is defined as a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground.** The most violent tornadoes are capable of tremendous destruction with wind speeds of 250 mph or more. Damage paths can be in excess of one mile wide and 50 miles long.

What causes tornadoes?

Thunderstorms develop in warm, moist air in advance of eastward-moving cold fronts. These thunderstorms often produce large hail, strong winds, and tornadoes. Tornadoes occasionally accompany tropical storms and hurricanes that move over land. Tornadoes are most common to the right and ahead of the path of the storm center as it comes onshore.

Tornadoes may form during the early stages of rapidly developing thunderstorms. Tornadoes may appear transparent until dust and debris are picked up. Occasionally, two or more tornadoes may occur at the same time.

A **tornado watch** is issued when conditions are favorable for tornadoes to develop (often during severe thunderstorms). This **does not** mean that a tornado will occur, just that it is possible.

A **tornado warning** means that a tornado has actually been sighted on the ground or a funnel cloud has been spotted.

The safest place to be during a tornado is in a basement, under something sturdy like a workbench or strong table. If there is no basement, **go to a small interior room in the middle of the house, like a closet or a bathroom.** Stay away from outside walls and windows. **Never seek shelter in a car.**

Opening windows to equalize pressure during a tornado is ineffective in reducing damage, and adds to the risk of flying glass.

Hail often accompanies severe storms, so move cars inside a garage or carport if possible to avoid damage. Keep your car keys and house keys on your person.

If time permits, move lawn furniture and yard equipment inside so that they do not become airborne.

Environmental Clues - Tornadoes

Look out for:

- A dark, often greenish sky
- Large hail
- A loud roaring sound – similar to a freight train
- Some tornadoes appear as a visible funnel extending only partially to the ground. Look for signs of debris below the visible funnel.
- Some tornadoes are clearly visible while others are obscured by rain or nearby low-hanging clouds.

Other Hazards

- Flash floods
- Lightning
- Damaging straight-line winds
- Large hail – can reach the size of a grapefruit

Tornado Myths and Facts

Myth: Areas near rivers, lakes and mountains are safe from tornadoes.

Fact: No place is safe from tornadoes.

Myth: The low pressure with a tornado causes buildings to “explode” as the tornado passes overhead.

Fact: Violent winds and debris slamming into buildings cause most structural damage.

Myth: Windows should be opened before a tornado approaches to equalize pressure and minimize damage.

Fact: Opening windows allows damaging winds to enter the structure. Leave the windows alone; instead, immediately go to a safe place.



Disaster Facts - Fires

From 1900-1990 more Americans died in fires than were killed in all of the wars during that same period. Each year, **fire kills more Americans than all natural disasters combined.** Residential fires are the leading cause of accidental death for children under the age of five. (Source: "Are You Ready", FEMA publication).

Fire spreads quickly; you may not have time to grab valuables or make a phone call. In two minutes a room can become life threatening. In five minutes your house can be engulfed in flames.

A fire's heat and smoke are more dangerous than the flames. Inhaling the super-hot air can sear and scorch your lungs.

Fire produces poisonous gases that can cause you to be disoriented and drowsy. Instead of being awakened by a fire, you may fall into a deeper sleep.

Most injuries due to fire come from smoke inhalation rather than burns.

Working smoke detectors double your chance of surviving a fire. Experts advise that you clean smoke detectors regularly and replace batteries once a year.

Plan two escape routes from every room in the house. Visibility is severely limited during a fire. Practice escaping from rooms with your eyes closed or blindfolded, since during a fire, the house will be filled with thick, black smoke. Pick a place outside your home for the family to meet after escape.

Windows should be easily opened, not nailed or painted shut. If you have security bars on windows, have a fire safety opening feature so they can be easily opened from inside.