

Emergency Management

THINGS TO KNOW IMPORTANT EMERGENCY INFORMATION

Are You Prepared? "An Emergency Management Series" #1

We would like to inform the public of some disasters that could occur in Chester County and some measures that can be taken to prepare for them.

Covered topics will include:

1. What are some threats in Chester County?
2. Emergency Supplies for the home
3. Family/Home emergency plan
4. Sheltering in place
5. Evacuations
6. How will I be notified?
7. Family/Home checklist

What are some threats in Chester County?

Each county in the state maintains a "HAZARDS VULNERABILITY ANALYSIS". This analysis contains a list of possible hazards that could potentially affect our area. Each listed hazard is evaluated to provide a numerical scale to evaluate and rank the probability of the hazard of occurring.

In Chester County the top five potential hazards are ranked as follows: (#1 = Highest)

- #1 Transportation accidents involving hazardous materials (This includes road and rail)
- #2 Severe winter storm
- #3 Hazardous material accidents at fixed sites
- #4 Tornado
- #5 Structure fire

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Emergency Supplies for the home.

One part of being prepared is to have certain supplies available in your home. The supplies may be needed if utilities are lost, which may or may not involve damage to the home, or in the event evacuation is required.

It is normally recommended to keep enough supplies in your home to meet your needs for at least three (3) days. The supplies should be kept in sturdy easy- to-carry containers. (Backpack, duffle bags or plastic containers.)

Summary of supplies to consider include:

1. Three day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and food that won't spoil. As one method, a family or person could obtain prepackaged water in 1-gallon containers. Watch the shelf date by using and replacing a gallon each week.
2. One change of clothing and footwear, and one blanket or sleeping bag per person.
3. A first aid kit that includes your family's prescription medications. It is important to note that prescriptions should be filled to keep a supply on hand. Don't wait until you have run out. (Some insurance companies do not allow early refills. You may check with your Pharmacist.)
4. Emergency tools to include a battery- powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries.
5. Extra car keys, credit card, cash or travelers checks.
6. Sanitation supplies.
7. Special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members.
8. Extra pair of glasses or eyewear.

It is a good idea to keep important documents in a waterproof container.

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Family/Home emergency plan.

An Emergency Supply Kit can be standardized, to cover various types of emergencies. Another step in preparedness is to meet with your family and discuss why you need to prepare for disasters. Discuss the dangers involved with various hazards. Plan how to share responsibilities and work together as a team.

The following is a list of considerations for your planning.

1. Discuss the types of disasters that are most likely to happen. Explain what to do in each case.
2. Pick two places to meet
 - a. Right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire.
 - b. Outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home.Everyone must know the address and telephone number.
3. Ask an out - of - state friend or family member to be your "family Contact". After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Other Family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know your contact's telephone number.
4. Discuss what to do in an evacuation. Plan how to take care of your pets.
5. Locate a "Safe place" for tornado threat. Designated shelter, such as a basement or interior room or hallway on the lowest floor. Mobile homes, even if tied down, normally offer little protection from Tornadoes. They should be abandoned for a safer location. Near by shelter, basement, ditch or depression should be sought. Consider that ditches or depressions maybe flooded and adequate drainage may need to be provided ahead of time.

6. Plan two (2) ways out (escape route) of each room of your home in case of fire or similar emergency. Normal entrance doors and properly sized windows are commonly used. If the window in a room is too small, consider installation of larger window or exterior door to the outside. Doors directly to the outside are usually good for in ambulatory (Someone bed ridden) or disabled persons.

7. Ensure that properly installed smoke detectors are on each level of your home.

8. Ensure that properly installed Carbon Monoxide detectors are in the home. (Especially if fuel-burning heaters or cook stoves are used).

The SCEPD has also provided the following safety tips. The tips are applicable to various emergencies to include the increase threat of terrorism:

At home:

1. Remain calm; be aware of your surroundings and report highly unusual activities to local authorities.
2. Pre-designate a phone number and rally point for family members to use.
3. Have emergency services and law enforcement phone numbers close at hand. (911)
4. Secure your property, including your vehicles
5. Observe instructions of law enforcement and emergency services personnel.
6. Stay informed of what's going on in your community.
7. Don't make dramatic lifestyle changes.
- 8 Don't overreact to normal, everyday occurrences.

At work:

1. Be alert and aware of your surrounding areas. Once in your office, notice your immediate surroundings and be aware of heavy or breakable objects that could move, fall or break.
2. Learn where emergency/fire exits and staircases are located.
3. Learn the location of building fire extinguishers and how they operate.
4. Review your company or building emergency evacuation procedures.
5. Think ahead about how to evacuate public congested areas.

While traveling:

1. Be aware of conspicuous or unusual behavior.
2. Don't accept packages from strangers.
3. Don't leave luggage unattended.

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Shelter In Place (In-Place Protection)

During some hazardous material releases, there will not be enough time to evacuate. Airborne toxicants can be released and move downwind so rapidly that it would be no time or not safe to evacuate.

If you are told to "Stay in doors" or Shelter-In-Place:

1. Go indoors of your home or building (Do not stay in a automobile).
2. Stay indoors until you are told it is safe to go out.
3. Close all windows and doors.
4. Turn off fans, air conditioners, heat system and forced air equipment that brings air from the outside.
5. Gather radio, flashlight, food, water, medicines, duct tape, etc. (Emergency supply kit)

6. Go to an interior room if possible and try to seal all cracks and openings around windows, doors, and other openings with duct or masking tape, towels or plastic sheets to seal out air leaks for better protection.
7. Stay still and quiet to minimize air use.
8. Do not call 911 for information. (This would tie up lines needed for emergency calls) Listen to local radio or TV station for information.
9. Wait for "All Clear" to be issued from emergency workers. Note: Do not use basements if toxic gases are heavier than air. You would be given this information when notified. An airborne cloud will frequently move past quickly.

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Evacuation of people from certain areas to prevent injury or death is sometimes an appropriate protective action. These areas may include those directly affected and those areas that may be potentially affected during the course of the incident. (e.g., through wind shift, a change in site conditions).

To safely evacuate an area, a significant amount of lead-time may be required. Time is a critical factor between "Shelter in place" and "Evacuation".

If evacuation is determined to be the safest action, the following may be expected for the general public.

1. A message will be given:
 - a. Describing area to evacuate.
 - b. What shelter(s) will be available?
 - c. What routes to use to clear the area and to shelter.
 - d. Other important information concerning the evacuation.
2. Emergency official may go door to door in some cases for notification.
3. Follow directions given.
4. Take emergency supply kit with you.
5. If you go to a friend or relatives home, instead of shelter, ensure other family members have a "Family contact" number, away from the evacuated area, for messages of where you are.
6. Law Enforcement and other emergency workers will secure access to evacuated areas.
7. Transportation will be arranged for those without. Normally a person can ride with a neighbor if needed.
8. Animal control will assist as much as possible with sheltering of pets.
9. Do not re-enter until "All Clear" is given.

Methods of notification will be discussed next.

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How will I be notified?

One common question among citizens may be; how will I know there is an emergency around my home? How will I get information of what to do?

Having and knowing about "warning systems" answer these questions. A warning system consists of two parts. A signal and a message. We will look at these two parts as they currently relate to Chester County.

Emergency Alert System (EAS)-(formerly: Emergency Broadcast System)- EAS exists to furnish instructions to the public in the event of a national, regional, or local crisis. Radio and television stations that are designated as EBS stations transmit alert tones and emergency information to the general public. A person would need to be listening or watching an EBS station to know that an alert has occurred. There is EBS radio monitors that may be purchased which allow the radio to remain muted until the tone is received.

NOAA Weather Radio- This type of tone- alert radio is configured to monitor one of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) continuous broadcast radio station. It may be used to listen to the local weather broadcast station, which is part of the NOAA system or it can be set to activate only when the station transmits a special weather alert tone. Some NOAA weather radios can be purchased to activate when there is a county or area specific tone transmitted or a regional tone is transmitted. The system is primarily used for weather hazard communications. The NOAA weather radio can be purchased from most retailers that handle electronic products. Ensure that it is properly listed by an approved testing agency, such as UL, and that the device will receive in your area.

Residential Route Alerting- Motor vehicles equipped with public address (PA) systems travel predestined routes to notify people of the emergency, The message may give instructions or advise to tune to an EBS station for the message.

Door-to-Door Alerting- Emergency personnel go to each home, alerting residents of the emergency and giving instructions.

Vehicle Sirens- Motor vehicles equipped with sirens travel predestined routes with sirens. Similar to route alerting, the citizens will need to tune to an EBS station for the message.

Hearing Impaired- A modified weather alert radio for the deaf can be purchased that activates a pillow vibrator at the onset of a weather warning. The system can alert the deaf during night hours to disasters. In addition, Tone Deaf Devices (TDD) can be purchased and coded for weather information. People with hearing difficulties should contact their local telephone company and electronic stores specializing in communications equipment to discuss their particular needs. Please note that special equipment is also available for smoke detection in the home.

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Family/Home checklist

The following checklist will assist you to verify your preparedness.

1. Post emergency telephone numbers by phones.
2. Teach children how and when to call 911 for emergency help.
3. Show each family member how and when to turn off the water, gas and electricity at the main switches.
4. Check if you have adequate insurance coverage.
5. Teach each family member how to use the fire extinguisher and where it is kept.
6. Install smoke detectors on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms.
7. Conduct a home hazard hunt.
8. Stock emergency supplies and assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit.
9. Take a recognized First Aid and CPR class, such as Red Cross.
10. Determine the best escape routes from your home. Find two ways out of each room.
11. Find the safest spots in your home for each type of disaster.

Once your plan is developed it is good to practice and maintain it.

1. Quiz your kids at least every six months so they remember what to do.
2. Conduct fire and emergency evacuation drills
3. Replace stored water every three months and stored food every six months.
4. Test and recharge fire extinguishers according to manufacturer's instructions.
5. Test smoke detectors monthly and change the batteries at least once a year.

Information provided is only a summary. For further information you may contact Chester County Emergency Management at 803-377-4632 or visit [FEMA'S website](#).