



UNP-0033

# Emergency Preparedness: What Should You Do?

*These terrorist and severe weather alerts and actions can help you be prepared for natural and manmade disasters and emergencies.*

## **NATIONAL ELEVATED AND IMMINENT ADVISORIES**

In April 2011, the United States Department of Homeland Security replaced the colored coded alert system with the National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS). Under the NTAS, the public is notified when there is credible information regarding a terrorist threat. The alerts will be classified as elevated or imminent. An ***elevated threat advisory*** is issued when a threat has been made; however, there is no specific information regarding a time or location. An ***imminent threat advisory*** is issued when there is an immediate impending threat (USDHS, 2011).

Public announcements and general guidance for threats to civilians are made by the United States Secretary of Homeland Security in consultation with other government officials and emergency response teams on the state and local levels.

## **WARNING SIGNS FOR SEVERE WEATHER**

Weather alerts are provided by local and regional authorities and passed on to you by the media when threatening climate conditions arise. Meteorologists are trained professionals equipped to analyze natural indicators of weather conditions that may be threatening and advise you to seek safety when necessary. But do you know what those alerts mean? You hear the warnings but might ask, "Now does that mean we are in the midst of bad weather or is bad weather just a possibility?"



In the event of severe weather predictions, always stay tuned to your radio or television and become familiar with the warning signals they pass on to you from the National Weather Service. While it's good for you to be able to judge cloud formations and other natural signs, don't assume you will have time to assess weather conditions and to act properly in the event of bad weather. It's more important to be prepared to take shelter when advised and to pay attention to the warning process. Do NOT put your family's life at risk by relying solely on the outdoor siren systems since they are designed only

by relying solely on the outdoor siren systems since they are designed only to alert people participating in outdoor activities. You should have a weather radio at home or rely on your television or radio weather reports — and **FOLLOW THEIR INSTRUCTIONS!**

Just as most things in life have become more complicated — from smartphones to televisions — so have weather reports. Beginning on page 3 is an updated list of terms used by the United States National Weather Service that describes severe weather you and/or your family may one day face. Post this list somewhere handy so you can reference it when you hear one or more of these watches, advisories, or warnings announced. That way you can be ready and **STAY SAFE!**

## **OTHER EMERGENCY-PREPAREDNESS STRATEGIES**

### **Develop a Family Emergency Plan**

Identify a place in your home that can be used for indoor shelter in case of emergency. Also, develop an evacuation plan in case you need to escape to safety. Your evacuation plan should always include a gathering spot where everyone comes together for roll call. Avoid places such as fire hydrants and utility poles. First responders may need access to these utilities. Hold practice drills at home so that you and your family are ready to act quickly when emergencies strike. You may be advised by local authorities to evacuate to a safer location. Plan ahead by mapping out at least two evacuation routes. Your first choice may be blocked or closed.

### **Be Prepared**

While manmade or natural disasters may be unpredictable, being prepared will help you and your loved ones to act decisively when such incidences occur. It's important to have two separate levels of preparedness kits in place: 1) a "shelter in place" disaster kit in the event that you stay in your home or a shelter possibly without utilities or outside assistance for up to a week; and 2) a "go bag" in case you need to evacuate your home due to unsafe conditions. Be certain to take the "go bag" wherever you go.

Your "shelter in place" disaster kit should contain 1 gallon per person per day of drinking water and 2 gallons per person per day of water for sanitation (brushing teeth, washing dishes and bathing). Don't forget an extra gallon of water per day for any pets. You can't rely on your home's water supply staying safe. For example, you may have to shut off your incoming water valve if you hear reports of broken water or sewage lines to stop contaminated water from entering your home.

You will also need an assortment of shelf stable foods that require little or no cooking and are protein rich, such as soups, stews, protein bars, canned fruit, and chocolate for energy. Snack foods are good for quick consumption or an emotional lift, so include some crackers, cookies, and hard candies. If you have a cook stove of some kind, a hot pot of coffee, tea, or hot cocoa is always a plus. If your home was not destroyed, a cook stove is a great resource to use during emergency situations.

## NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE — SEVERE WEATHER ALERTS

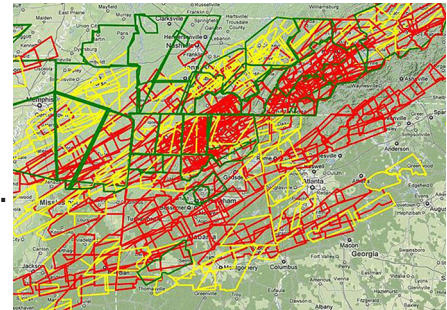
(Post in a visible place)

### SEVERE STORMS

- **Tornado Watch:** Tornado watches are displayed in **RED** boxes on your television screen. A tornado watch means that conditions are favorable for severe thunderstorms and tornadoes in the watch area. Watch areas are large geographic areas and a tornado watch is valid for 5 to 8 hours. **Note:** A *particularly dangerous situation tornado watch* means that a major (EF-4 or EF-5) tornado outbreak is possible.

- **Tornado Warning:** A tornado warning means that a tornado has either been indicated by Doppler radar or actually sighted by trained personnel. Tornado warnings are currently issued to areas within a designated polygon-shaped area and not countywide as in the past.

**Note:** A *particularly dangerous situation tornado warning* is issued only when a large tornado is currently producing damage and moving through the warned area. A previous tornado warning may be reissued.



Severe weather warning map showing parts of Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee & Georgia for April 27, 2011

- **Tornado Emergency:** A tornado emergency is an upgraded tornado warning indicating that a violent tornado is expected to hit a heavily populated area.
- **Severe Thunderstorm Watch:** Severe thunderstorm watches are displayed in YELLOW OR BLUE boxes on your television screen. It means that conditions are favorable for the development of severe thunderstorms within the watch area. Severe thunderstorm watches may include large damaging hail 1-inch in diameter or larger and/or damaging winds in excess of 58 mph. Isolated tornadoes may occur but are not expected. Watch areas involve large geographic areas and a severe thunderstorm watch may be valid for 5 to 8 hours. **Note:** A *particularly dangerous situation thunderstorm watch* is rare and issued only when conditions are favorable for severe thunderstorms with winds greater than 90 mph. It also means that isolated tornadoes are possible but not expected. Again, watch areas include large geographic areas; a severe thunderstorm watch is valid for 5 to 8 hours.
- **Severe Thunderstorm Warning:** A severe thunderstorm warning is indicated by Doppler radar or sighted by trained spotters. It may contain large damaging hail 1 inch or larger and/or damaging winds in excess of 58 mph. Severe thunderstorm warnings are now issued in polygon-shaped areas and not countywide as in the past.
- **Significant Weather Advisory:** Significant weather advisories are issued when a strong thunderstorm is indicated by Doppler radar that may contain hail smaller than 1 inch and/or strong winds of 39-57 mph. A significant weather advisory is issued on a county by county basis as a short-fused warning.

**WINTER STORMS:** Winter storms are weather hazards associated with freezing or frozen precipitation such as rain, sleet, snow and possible strong winds.

- **Blizzard Warning:** Blizzards are sustained winds or frequent gusts of 35 mph or greater with large amounts of falling or blowing snow. Visibility is reduced to ¼ mile or less for 3 hours or more. There is no temperature restriction, but the wind creates a sub-zero wind chill.
- **Blizzard Watch:** A blizzard watch means that sustained winds or frequent gusts of 35 mph or greater with large amounts of falling or blowing snow are possible along with reduced visibility to ¼ mile or less for 3 hours or longer is possible within the next 48 hours.
- **Winter Storm Warning:** Hazardous conditions with heavy snow, freezing rain, sleet or strong winds that threaten life or property are likely, imminent, or occurring.
- **Winter Storm Watch:** A winter storm watch involves significant accumulations of snow and/or freezing rain and/or sleet are possible in the next 48 hours.
- **Winter Weather Advisory:** Hazardous winter weather conditions are likely, imminent, or actually occurring over a specified area. Conditions include two or more of the following: snow, freezing rain or drizzle, sleet, and blowing snow. A warning may specify snow or blowing snow and caution must be exercised.
- **Freezing Rain/Ice**
  - **Ice Storm Warning:** Indicates that heavy ice accumulation (amount varies from ¼ to ½ inch of freezing rain) on trees and wires is imminent.
  - **Freezing Rain Advisory:** Indicates that a trace to ¼ inch of freezing rain is expected in the specified area.
  - **Freezing Drizzle Advisory:** Indicates that a trace to ¼ inch of freezing drizzle is expected in the specified area.
  - **Freezing Fog Advisory:** A widespread dense fog is in the area that reduces visibility to less than ¼ mile, occurring in a sub-zero environment and leaving a thin glazing of ice.
- **Wind Chill**
  - **Wind Chill Warning:** Extreme, life threatening wind chills are threatening or occurring over a specified area.
  - **Wind Chill Advisory:** Dangerous wind chills are coming or actually occurring over a specified area.
  - **Wind Chill Watch:** Life threatening wind chills might occur over a specified area.
- **Discontinued Terms**
  - **Heavy Snow Warning:** Replaced with **Winter Storm Warning**
  - **Sleet Warning:** Replaced with **Winter Storm Warning Heavy Sleet**
  - **Snow Advisory:** Replaced with **Winter Weather Advisory**



- **Blowing Snow Advisory:** Replaced with **Winter Weather Advisory for Blowing Snow**
- **Extreme Cold Watch:** Replaced with **Wind Chill Watch**
- **Extreme Cold Warning:** Replaced with **Wind Chill Warning**

## FLOODS

- **River Flood Warning:** Stream or river flooding is highly likely, imminent, or occurring. The warning is issued on a county by county basis and could be in effect for a couple of days or longer.
- **Areal Flood Warning:** General (areal) flooding of streets, low-lying areas, urban storm drains, creeks, and small streams is occurring or imminent. The warning is issued for flooding that occurs more than 6 hours after excessive rainfall OR when flooding is imminent or occurring but not rapid enough to call for a Flash Flood Warning. It is in effect for 6 to 12 hours and issued on a polygonal basis.
- **River Flood Advisory:** Stream or river flooding is highly likely, imminent, or occurring. A river flood advisory is issued on a county by county basis and remains in effect for a couple of days or longer.
- **Areal Flood Advisory:** Minor general (areal) flooding of streets, low-lying areas, urban storm drains, creeks, and small streams is occurring or imminent. The areal flood advisory is in effect for 3 to 6 hours and issued on a polygonal basis.



- **Urban & Small Stream Flood Advisory:** Ponding of water on streets, low-lying areas, highways, underpasses, urban storm drains and elevated creeks and small streams is imminent or occurring. This advisory usually occurs within 3 hours after excessive rainfall and is in effect for 3 to 4 hours when issued.

## OTHER HAZARDS

- **Fire Weather Watch:** Conditions are expected to become favorable for the rapid spread of wildfires.
- **Red Flag Warning:** Conditions are favorable for the rapid spread of wildfires
- **Fire Warning:** A fire is currently burning in the watch area and evacuation is necessary.
- **Heat Advisory:** Heat index forecast to exceed locally defined criteria for 1 to 2 days, typically between 100 to 105° and above 75° at night.
- **Freeze Warning:** Widespread temperatures at or below 32° during the growing season.
- **Hard Freeze Warning:** Widespread temperatures at or below 28° during the growing season.
- **Frost Advisory:** Widespread temperature forecast to be 33 to 36° during the growing season on nights with light winds and clear skies.
- **Dense Fog Advisory:** Widespread or localized fog reducing visibility to ¼ mile or less.

The first thing to do during an emergency without electrical power is to work to conserve what is in your freezer/refrigerator for as long as possible. Pack items tightly together on the lowest possible shelves and open the door as few times as possible. Eat any seafood and sandwich meats from your freezer/refrigerator first as these are the foods with the shortest shelf-life. If possible, add ice bags to your freezer or even dry ice to keep your food cold. Do NOT put or keep dry ice in a functioning freezer since the dry ice will ruin it.

Remember to discard any perishables that were left at temperatures higher than 40° for longer than four hours. You cannot tell if something is bad by taste or smell, and you cannot cook the bad out! You have survived a disaster, now is not the time to succumb to food poisoning. Also, remove all food and dirt from surfaces and cookware. Use dish soap and warm water when cleaning your cookware and dishes. You might want to keep paper plates in your "shelter in place" kit to reduce the amount of clean-up, but this will increase garbage.

As the name implies, your "go bag" needs to be portable and able to hold all essential items you and your family will need. The larger your family, the larger your "go bag" will need to be, and the more likely it is that your family will need multiple bags. A main item the "go bag" should include is cash since ATMs won't be working if the power is out and businesses are less likely to accept a check or credit card during emergencies. You will also need a week's worth of medication in labeled bottles for all family members. Be sure to use the medications in your "go bag" on a scheduled basis and replace them, keeping them current and potent. Don't rely on memory as to who gets what medication. Someone other than the traditional parent may end up dispensing the medication and will need the directions on the bottle. Also, in times of stress it is easy to forget the dosage and time that medication needs to be given. Original bottles can help in case of evacuation and if the need arises to contact the doctor for another prescription.

While on the subject of medications, be sure to include contact information for ALL doctors and the type of doctor, such as a family practitioner, dentist, or an optometrist. It's also important to have an **emergency contact list complete with addresses and home, cell, and work numbers** of local, in-state, and out-of-state persons, if possible. Remember, you or someone in your stead will be contacting them during an emergency, which is usually an inconvenient time to look up phone numbers and addresses.

## **EMERGENCY KIT:**

Your well-prepared emergency kit should be kept where you have established your shelter in case of danger or environmental threats. Items to place in your kit are:

- Non-perishable food items including a variety of canned goods that require little or no heating; bottled water;



snacks such as crackers, dried fruit, chocolate, and hard candy; fluids such as canned or bottled fruit juices, canned or shelf-stable milk, and baby formula (if needed). Also, when packing food, be sure to take into account the special dietary needs of family members who may be diabetic or have nut and gluten allergies.

- A camp stove or portable grill and all that is needed to operate it, including instructions as to where it is safe to operate
- A charged cell phone and a back-up charger
- Plastic utensils, paper towels, and a hand can and bottle opener
- A battery-operated or crank weather radio
- Quilts, blankets, or sleeping bags for all family members
- Disposable cloths, hand wipes, and diapers (if needed)
- Personal hygiene items, including soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, disposable shavers, toilet paper, feminine care products, and deodorant
- Flashlight or lantern
- Glow sticks to use for low levels of light. Placing the stick in a clear container of water will refract the light, making the stick brighter and adding additional light. This is safer to use than a candle.
- Use solar-powered landscape lights to give light inside the house during the night, recharge them outside during the day.
- Batteries in various sizes for all the battery-operated equipment
- Scissors and duct tape
- A first-aid kit
- Medical supplies and prescriptions drugs for seniors and people with special needs including backups for individuals with vision and hearing aids. Don't forget non-prescription medications taken on a regular basis.
- Disposable garbage bags
- A working watch or clock
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- A sturdy, clean, dry change of clothes for everyone in the family
- A deck of cards to help pass the time for adults and older children, and a few toys for young children
- Important family documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification, and bank account records in a waterproof portable container.

## SUMMARY:

Hopefully the day will never come when you and your family experience a weather or manmade disaster or emergency that leaves you on your own, without power, and in need of your "shelter in place" disaster kit. But with the information given here, you should be better prepared to meet your basic family needs should such an occasion arise.

Also, don't forget to have that "go bag" ready and handy. It is a necessary supplement to your "shelter in place" kit while you are at home and what you have to take with you if you need to evacuate at a moment's notice. Always keep it available and stocked with personal items you and/or your family may need.

## INFORMATION RESOURCE LIST:

- "Get a Disaster Supplies Kit" – [www.extension.org/pages/9366](http://www.extension.org/pages/9366)
- "Tornado Safety" – [www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0983/index2.tmpl](http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0983/index2.tmpl)
- "Be Prepared for Disaster" – [www.aces.edu/eden](http://www.aces.edu/eden)
- "Reducing the Impact of Disasters through Education" – [eden/lsu.edu](http://eden/lsu.edu)

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**For more information,** call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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