

CREATE A FAMILY EMERGENCY PLAN

When disaster strikes, there's often little time to plan carefully. In many cases, all family members may not even be together in one place. To protect your family, draw up an emergency plan now and rehearse it. Your plan should identify:

- Safe spots.** The safest locations in your home include load-bearing interior walls or doorways during an earthquake and the basement during a tornado.
- Key tasks.** Teach family members how and when to turn off the water, gas, and electricity in case of damaged utility lines.
- Meeting places.** Designate two places where your family will reunite after a disaster—one near your home and another outside your neighborhood. Provide family members with a wallet card with relevant addresses and phone numbers. Also, be sure those numbers are stored in cell phones.
- Communications.** Establish a long-distance point person as central command. This person should know how you and family members are likely to communicate—by phone, e-mail or cell phone text messages—and how to use the technology of choice.
- Share secrets.** Be sure family members know where emergency kits, key documents, medications and cash are located.
- Practice fire drills.** Replace batteries in smoke alarms annually and practice safe home-evacuation drills. Own a fire extinguisher and be sure all family members know where it is and how to use it effectively. Also store a hose that can reach into your house.

DRAW UP AN EVACUATION PLAN

Planning escape routes and targeting destinations in advance of a disaster can help minimize stress when evacuating. Follow these tips:

- Know your destination.** List hotels, homes of family and friends, and public shelters in a 100-mile radius from your home.
- Buy a local map.** Highlight your evacuation route and likely destinations. Avoid waterside roadways along the seashore, lakes and canals.
- Drive the route.** Observe how much fuel you use and note the gas stations along the way. Plot the stations on your local map.
- Plan to leave early** when the weather is still nice. Roadways may be jammed.
- Prepare to stay local**, if possible, with family or friends. Go to your target hotels if family or friends also have evacuated.
- Consider public shelters** only as a refuge of last resort.