

**Your family members may be in different areas when disaster strikes, so planning how to communicate before a potential disaster helps. Explore ways you might contact one another and review what you will do in different situations. Use the following check list to develop a family communications plan for disasters.**

- Meet with your family and discuss why you need to prepare for a disaster and know the best way to communicate with each other if separated.
- Talk with your family about how to respond to potential emergencies that could take place in your area. First, find out what kinds of disasters, both natural and man-made, are most likely to occur in your area. Be aware of how to get emergency information, and be ready to adjust your plans according to officials' instructions. One common method is to broadcast via emergency radio and TV. You might hear a special siren, or get a telephone call, or emergency workers may go door-to-door.
- Plan how your household would stay in contact if you were separated. Identify two meeting places:
  - Near your home – in case of fire, perhaps a tree or telephone pole that are at a safe distance.
  - Away from your neighborhood in case you cannot return home.
- Ask a friend or relative who lives outside of your area (preferably out of state) to be your "family contact." After a disaster, it may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-state contact may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members. And if you know exactly who to call, fewer telephone lines will be tied up while you search for more information.
  - Be sure every member of your family knows the phone number and has coins or a prepaid phone card to call the emergency contact.
  - You may have trouble getting through, or the telephone system may be down altogether, but be patient.
- Discuss what to do in an evacuation. Plan how to take care of your pets.
- Post emergency telephone numbers by phones (fire, police, ambulance, etc.).
- Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local Emergency Medical Services number for emergency help.
- Check with your family members every six months and update contact information if necessary.
- You may also want to inquire about emergency plans at places where your family spends time: work, daycare and school. If no plans exist, consider volunteering to help create one. Talk to your neighbors about how you can work together in the event of an emergency. You will be better prepared to safely reunite your family and loved ones during an emergency if you think ahead and communicate with others in advance.
- If you would like a family communications plan worksheet, please visit DHS' *Ready.gov* Web site and download the prepared worksheet at [http://www.ready.gov/Emergency\\_Ref\\_Card.pdf](http://www.ready.gov/Emergency_Ref_Card.pdf)

**Information gathered from:**

The American Red Cross' *Family Disaster Planning* ([www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0\\_601\\_,00.html](http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_601_,00.html))  
The Federal Emergency Management Agency's *Are You Ready?* ([www.fema.gov/areyouready](http://www.fema.gov/areyouready))  
The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's *Ready.gov* ([www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov))