

What constitutes an emergency? A small leaking pipe can be catastrophic because of the damage it can do depending on when, where and for how long.

Being prepared for all emergencies includes national catastrophes, tornados, severe weather, power outages, floods, winter storms, furnace breakdowns, broken pipes and everything else except screaming babies. It may seem to be paranoid but as the saying goes, "Knowledge is king" and knowing what to do and being prepared will make people shout at you "Long live the king!"

Tornado / Severe Weather

- **Tornado watch means conditions are ripe for a tornado**
- **Tornado warning means a tornado has been sighted – take shelter immediately!**

- ❑ You should start by having a "safe area" that should be stocked with necessities as well as conveniences to make time pass as easily as possible,
- ❑ The safe area for our region is in the lowest portion of your house, or if you do not have a basement, go to the center of the house away from windows and furniture that could topple and cause injury or death.

Emergency Food

Any safe area should always have food. Most tornados occur between 3 and 9 p.m. You and your kids will want something to eat.

- ❑ Non-perishable foods such as crackers, peanut butter, beef jerky, canned tuna, soups, fruits and candy are perfect choices
- ❑ "Meals Ready to Eat" (MRE's) is pretty decent and can be stored from 3 to 7 years. It's available from the Brigade Quartermasters catalog. You can get a catalog by calling 1-800-338-4327 or going onto their website at www.actiongear.com.

- ❑ The best long-term storage food I've ever tasted is from Backpacker's Pantry (www.backpackerspantry.com). They have gourmet dinners, snacks and all kinds of meals that last for years and are prepared with just boiling water.
- ❑ The "safe area" should be supplied with long-lasting canned and dry foods, in case you have to stay there for an extended period of time.
- ❑ Don't forget about your pet. Have food and water available.
- ❑ Paper plates
- ❑ Paper towels
- ❑ Cups
- ❑ Plastic silverware
- ❑ Can opener
- ❑ Zip lock bags
- ❑ Aluminum foil
- ❑ Salt, pepper and sugar
- ❑ A supply of water (for drinking or boiling) can be purchased from your grocery store in 1 and 2-gallon jugs. Allow 1 to 2 gallons of water per person and plan for a minimum 3-day supply.
- ❑ Small propane cooking stove
- ❑ 1 to 2 inexpensive pots and utensils
- ❑ Make a plan and discuss it with family members and school officials how everyone is to respond and stay in contact.
- ❑ If not at home, make a plan that everyone should meet at home or at a safe structure. Periodically review the plan with family members.
- ❑ A friend or relative in another area of the state should be designated for everyone to call to check in to say if they are safe and ok.
- ❑ Check on neighbors and the elderly to see if they need assistance.

Medical

- ❑ There should be a complete first aid kit dedicated solely for the "safe area"
- ❑ Rotating supply of prescription medicines and other miscellaneous medications such as aspirin and allergy pills. The Brigade Quartermasters has all kinds of survival and first aid equipment that you can check out on their website (www.actiongear.com) or by calling 1-800-338-4327 for one of their catalogs.
- ❑ Family members should take first aid and CPR classes. Check with the local adult education classes or the American Red Cross for information.

Miscellaneous Items for the "Safe Area"

- ❑ Extra fresh batteries
- ❑ Small portable television
- ❑ Battery operated radio
- ❑ Flashlights
- ❑ Candles
- ❑ Matches/lighters
- ❑ Deck of cards, games and books to keep the family entertained
- ❑ Lawn chairs, sleeping bags, pillows and blankets
- ❑ Tool kits
- ❑ Baby needs
- ❑ Large & medium plastic garbage bags
- ❑ Needle & thread
- ❑ Fire extinguisher
- ❑ Battery operated clock
- ❑ Chlorine bleach
- ❑ Old pair of reading glasses and necessities
- ❑ Porta-potty (which you can make yourself using a 5-gallon bucket, plastic garbage bags and an inexpensive children's toilet seat).
- ❑ Air freshener
- ❑ Sanitary items such as soap, washcloth, towels, moist wipes, toothbrush, toothpaste and sanitary napkins.

Other Miscellaneous Emergency Supplies & Preparedness Necessities

- ❑ Extra firewood
- ❑ Fire extinguishers

- ❑ Smoke & Carbon Monoxide detectors
- ❑ Indoor-safe propane heaters
- ❑ Whole-house surge protector
- ❑ Corded telephone that can be used if the power goes out.
- ❑ List of emergency phone numbers i.e. doctors, repairmen, poison control, neighbors, close relatives and veterinary.
- ❑ Emergency plan for family and babysitters.
- ❑ Emergency fire escape plan (which should be rehearsed).
- ❑ Make sure everyone in the house knows the location of and how to shut off the gas, water and electricity at the mains.
- ❑ Annually review your household insurance policy and make sure you have enough needed coverage.
- ❑ Keep copies of important papers such as copies of birth certificates, drivers license, social security numbers, passports, wills, deeds, household inventory of personal belongings, insurance papers, bank and credit card account information etc. in a different location i.e. work, relatives, out-of-state or bank deposit box.
- ❑ Keep a small amount of cash at home for emergency use.
- ❑ Make a plan and discuss it with family members and school officials how everyone is to respond and stay in contact.
- ❑ If not at home, make a plan that everyone should meet at home or at a safe structure. Periodically review the plan with family members.
- ❑ A friend or relative in another area of the state should be assigned for everyone to call to check in to say if they are safe and ok.

No Heat

- ❑ Check to see if the thermostat is turned to heat and is set up high enough.
- ❑ Check the battery in the thermostat.
- ❑ Check the fuse or circuit breaker in the electrical box.

- ❑ Make sure the service safety switch is turned on. It is the toggle switch (identical to a light switch) on or near the furnace. It may have been inadvertently switched off.
- ❑ Check to see if the gas is on to the furnace.
- ❑ Make sure the furnace cabinet doors are securely on the furnace. Many furnaces have safety switches, which will not allow the furnace to come on if the door is off or loose.
- ❑ If you have an electronic pilot that sparks to ignite the gas, it may be defective if it is not sparking or it sparks longer than 14 seconds and the burner does not come on. It usually means it is defective or its a 24-volt wiring problem, which requires a call to a service technician.
- ❑ If you have a ceramic glowing pilot valve and it does not glow or is broken, it should be replaced. Also check for a loose wire going to the valve.
- ❑ If you have a standing pilot light and you have no heat, replace the thin copper thermocouple leading from it to the gas valve.
- ❑ If the burner ignites but goes off, check for a broken fan belt. If ok, call for service.
- ❑ If the electronic pilot comes on and you do not have heat, you may have any number of problems such as defective wiring, gas valve, gas pressure, solenoid, terminals, sensor, circuit board, etc. In any case, keep the number of a trusted mechanical contractor close by.
- ❑ Never use a gas stove or oven for heat. Every year people die from doing so from carbon monoxide poisoning.
- ❑ Bundle up and wear layers of clothes as well as a hat.
- ❑ Never refill a kerosene heater indoors or while it is hot.
- ❑ If your house has a fireplace – keep a supply of seasoned firewood for emergencies.

Power Outages

- ❑ Turn off all circuit breakers or unplug fuses to major appliances and sensitive electronics. Doing so will prevent damage from brownouts or power surges when the power is restored.
- ❑ Make sure you have at least 1 flashlight with fresh batteries for every family member.
- ❑ If you think there is a chance your basement could flood, turn off the main breaker for all electricity going into your house. That will allow you to go into the basement without getting electrocuted.
- ❑ If the power lines are down in the yard or neighborhood advise the utility company and keep everyone advised and away from the area.

- ❑ When the power goes off in the winter, close all blinds and curtains at dusk to help the house retain some of its heat. Open the blinds during the day on the sunny side only.
- ❑ In the summertime, keep all the blinds closed during the day to keep the house cooler.
- ❑ Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to keep food from spoiling. Open them only if absolutely necessary. Know what you want to grab before you open the door.
- ❑ If you think the power will be off for a while in the winter consider turning off the water and draining the plumbing system. Pour 1 to 2 cups of antifreeze into all sink traps and toilets.
- ❑ Portable Lighting
Everyone knows you should have a flashlight handy but companies like 'Stanley Tool' (www.stanleyworks.com) or the Gerber Legendary Blade Company (www.gerbergear.com), to name a few, have brought portable lighting up another notch.

Stanley's 'MaxLife 369' is an LED flashlight that can generate more than 200-hours of continuous light on just one set of batteries. This \$24.99 flashlight has a four-position switch to control the amount of light generated, as well as a low power indicator to indicate when you only have 6 to 8 hours remaining of useful light.

The 'Gerber Portable Lighting' catalog has some of the coolest, state of the art flashlights and lanterns available and is well worth checking into for camping, cars and emergencies.

Generators

- ❑ If your house has a generator, stored gasoline should be recycled by using it in your car every 3 to 4 months and replaced.
- ❑ Use 'Stabil' or gasoline additives in stored gasoline so it doesn't go bad. Never store gasoline in the basement or house.
- ❑ Start your generator every month and let it run for 10 to 15 minutes.
- ❑ Never use a generator indoors or in a garage. Keep it away from any vents such as exhaust or dryer vents.
- ❑ Never fill a generator if it is running or hot.

Flooding/Water Damage

- ❑ If you have large trees on your property, periodically have the sewers snaked out.
- ❑ If you have old galvanized plumbing expect to replace the pipes very soon before they burst.
- ❑ If you have a water heater that's older than 10 years old, plan on replacement soon.
- ❑ Do not put rags on the side of the laundry tubs when doing laundry.
- ❑ Replace rubber washing machine hoses with steel braided hoses.
- ❑ Slope the ground away from around the exterior of the house.
- ❑ Keep the gutters clean.
- ❑ Install downspout leaders and use splash blocks.
- ❑ Put plastic covers over the basement window wells.
- ❑ Add water alarms.

Sump Pump

If your house has a sump pump, a water or battery alternative energy system should be installed. The Wayne Water Systems manufactures one of the finest, if not the finest, sump pump I have ever inspected and used. It is not only a sump pump, but it has its own battery backup. It can move up to 3300 gallons per minute, which is more than most pumps. If it becomes clogged or obstructed, it will automatically reverse its impellers to dislodge the obstruction. If it goes into its backup mode, it will sound an alarm and will even call you on the phone wherever you are to let you know. More information on Wayne Sump Pumps is available on their website www.waynewatersystems.com.

Water Alarms

You don't need a national catastrophe to have a major emergency. Your toilet or laundry tub can overflow. A floor drain can back up and the basement could flood. At the very first sign of leaking, you can be alerted with an inexpensive, \$20.00 water alarm. The 'Wayne Water Sensor' and the 'Rialco Flood Alarm' are just two of the alarms that I've tested. They each operate on a 9-volt battery and can safeguard your property and possessions against water damage. Water alarms are available at hardware and home centers.

Car Emergency Kit

- ❑ Jumper cables
- ❑ Rain gear
- ❑ Gloves/mittens
- ❑ Blanket
- ❑ Spare fuses
- ❑ Assorted tools and electrical tape
- ❑ Flares
- ❑ Umbrella
- ❑ Ice scraper/snow brush
- ❑ Rags
- ❑ Shovel
- ❑ Snack food
- ❑ Flash light
- ❑ Tow chain or rope
- ❑ Bag of de-icing salt or sand
- ❑ Cell phone or CB radio
- ❑ Keep automobile fueled. Do not let gasoline go below 1/2 tank.

If a blizzard traps you in your car, pull off the highway and turn on your flashers and remain in your vehicle. Do not leave the vehicle unless you see a building where you can walk to safely and take shelter. Only run the engine 10 to 15 minutes per hour to keep warm and conserve fuel. Keep the window open slightly when the car is running.

Fire Emergency

- ❑ Make sure you have several smoke detectors throughout the house and test them periodically. Place the detectors outside sleeping areas, in any room with a fireplace, at each stairwell and in the laundry and mechanical room.
- ❑ You should have two escape routes from each room that should be rehearsed with all family members. Have a meeting place outside designated as the meeting area.
- ❑ Teach children how and when to call 911.
- ❑ Always leave the house immediately and call 911 from a neighbor's house.
- ❑ If you have a colonial (2-story) house purchase escape ladders which can be used from second floor windows.

To Reduce Fire Hazards

- ❑ Inspect wiring and cords.
- ❑ Never run extension cords under carpet.
- ❑ Do not store gasoline, flammables or combustibles indoors.
- ❑ Never leave candles unattended.
- ❑ Make sure candles are in sturdy holders.
- ❑ Have the heating system inspected annually.
- ❑ Inspect and clean fireplace chimney.
- ❑ Install a screen in front of fireplaces.
- ❑ Remove debris, and old newspapers etc.
- ❑ Keep matches and lighters away from children.
- ❑ Do not leave portable heaters unattended.
- ❑ Install A-B-C fire extinguishers.
- ❑ Install smoke and fire detectors throughout.

- ❑ Do not overload cords or circuits.
- ❑ Do not keep rags soaked with paint remover or cleaning fluids in the house, even for a short time.
- ❑ If a door is closed, always touch it before opening the door. If it is warm or hot, **DO NOT** open the door and try to exit through a window.
- ❑ If you must go through a smoke filled room to escape, crawl low along the floor to avoid inhaling poisonous smoke and gasses.
- ❑ Try and close any door as you leave to slow the spread of fire.
- ❑ Keep a B-C fire extinguisher and/or a box of baking soda in the kitchen to put out grease fires.
- ❑ Never attempt to move a burning pot or pan. Put a lid on it or extinguish it with the baking soda or extinguisher.
- ❑ When using portable space heaters, keep them 3 feet from any walls or combustibles.
- ❑ Turn off space heaters when you go to bed or leave the house.
- ❑ Have a licensed electrician install Arc Fault Circuit Interrupters (AFCI.'s). They turn off electricity to protected circuits at very first spark or arc.

Poison Emergencies

- ❑ Always keep chemicals, pesticides, paint products, cleaning supplies, medicines and toiletries locked away and out of the reach of children and pets.
- ❑ Always store hazardous products in their original containers.
- ❑ Never mix chlorine bleach and ammonia.
- ❑ Keep the Poison Control Center emergency number by your phone: 1-800-222-1222.

- ❑ Keep 'Syrup of Ipecac' in your medicine cabinet to induce vomiting but only use it when you get the approval from a Poison Control professional.
- ❑ You should also have Pepto Bismol or Maalox on hand to bind up any poison that is swallowed instead of bringing it back up.

Terrorism

- ❑ Be alert to the people around you.
- ❑ Always make a mental note and be aware of the location of emergency exits.
- ❑ Store duct tape, scissors and 4-6-mil plastic to seal the windows and doors of your house or to a 'safe room'.
- ❑ If your 'safe room' is near the furnace, do not turn on the furnace or air conditioning. It could pull chemicals or biological agents into the 'safe room'.

Homeland Security Alert System

- ❑ **GREEN** Means there is an extremely low risk of a terrorist attack.
- ❑ **BLUE** Means there is a general risk of terrorist activity.
- ❑ **YELLOW** Means elevated condition. Means to be alert and there is a significant risk.
- ❑ **ORANGE** (We'll be seeing this more frequently.) Means a high risk factor and to start taking precautions and review your preparation and plans. Avoid major events if possible.
- ❑ **RED** This is the severe condition. Be extremely alert and avoid high-risk locations. Pay attention to news broadcasts on television and radio. Follow the instructions of public officials.

Robbery

- ❑ Keep doors and windows locked and use quality dead bolt locks
- ❑ Cut shrubs away from windows
- ❑ Keep exterior and house illuminated when dark.
- ❑ Keep garage and cars locked.
- ❑ Install glass block windows in basement windows.
- ❑ Keep a list or CD containing photos of all your valuables and store in a safe place.
- ❑ Be alert when pulling in your driveway and walking up to the house.
- ❑ Install motion sensor floodlights.
- ❑ Second story windows should be kept locked.
- ❑ Eliminate tree limbs that overhang near the house.
- ❑ If robbed, call the police and do not enter the house or touch anything until after the police investigate.

Emergency Phone Numbers:

Police	911	
Poison Control Center	800-222-1222	
Consumers Energy	800-477-5050	
Mich Con	800-947-5000	
Detroit Edison	800-477-4747	
FBI	248-879-6090	
Secret Service	313-226-6400	
US Marshall	313-234-5600	
	313-234-5655	
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives		
	800-ATF-GUNS	
Federal Emergency Management Agency		www.fema.gov
Department of Health & Human Services		www.hhs.gov
Environmental Protection Agency		www.epa.gov
National Weather Service		www.nws.noaa.gov
Center for Disease Control & Prevention		www.cdc.gov
American Red Cross		www.redcross.com



About Lon Grossman

Lon Grossman is a writer with the Detroit Free Press. He writes a weekly home repair column. He owns and operates Technihouse Inspections, Inc., which has performed residential and commercial inspections for over 30 years. Lon holds numerous licenses in the building field.

Lon is Chairman of the Board for The Leader Dogs For The Blind in Rochester, Michigan as well as being involved with other local and national charities.

He resides with his wife Barbara (of over 36 years) and their dog Sizzle, in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.