TOWNSHIPS TODAY

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER BROUGHT TO YOU BY YOUR TOWNSHIP

Take Action Now to Keep Your Family Connected During a Disaster

Disasters don't usually strike at convenient times. That means that as you and your family members go their separate ways each day, you have to have a plan — a plan to communicate and eventually reunite.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is stressing this need throughout September, which is **National Preparedness Month.** The 2015 theme is: "Don't wait. Communicate. Make your emergency plan today."

FEMA is urging everyone to take action now by planning how to stay safe and in touch during the natural and manmade disasters that could affect our township.

To help jump start your preparations and plans, we've included a number of helpful tips from FEMA below.

Your family talks every day, but what about when disaster strikes? Do you have a plan to reach everyone and make sure they are safe and accounted for? If not, the Federal Emergency Management Agency says you need to take action today.

Stay 'alert'

Technology has made communication lightning fast, but even a good old-fashioned radio comes in handy during an emergency. To guarantee you know exactly what's happening around you, take the following steps:

- Confirm that your mobile device can receive Wireless Emergency Alerts, which

are messages sent by authorized government authorities through your mobile carrier. These warnings can be sent to your mobile device when you may be in harm's way and don't require you to download an app or subscribe to a service.

• Sign up for text and/or email alerts from municipalities where you live, work, and send children to school and from local first responders, such as police departments, fire companies, and emergency management agencies (EMA). ***(Note:*** *Every county in Pennsylvania has an EMA, and every municipality is required to have an emergency management coordinator.)*

• Consider purchasing a NOAA weather radio *(all hazards),* which is a nationwide network of radio stations broadcasting continuous weather information from the nearest National Weather Service office. With one of these radios, you'll be able to receive official warnings, watches, forecasts, and other hazard information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

• If you do not have a landline, check to see if your county has options for VoIP and mobile phones to be connected to an Electronic Tracking Network (ETN), such as Reverse 911. This will help emergency responders pin down your location if you drop or need to leave your mobile phone behind in an emergency.

• Sign up for listservs and alerts for workplaces, schools, churches, and other community organizations you'll want to hear from in an emergency.

• Download relevant hazard alerts and warnings apps.

• Create a list of all the alert systems available to you and make sure everyone in the household receives the alerts as part of your household communication system.

Tips for keeping in touch

Your family may not be together when disaster strikes so you'll need to think about how you will communicate in different situations. Taking the following precautions will give you a good start:

• Complete a contact card, including daytime addresses and phone numbers, for each adult family member. Have them keep these cards handy in a wallet, purse, or briefcase, etc. Additionally, complete contact cards for each child in your family. Put the cards in their backpacks or book bags.

• Check with your children's day care or school, which should include identification planning as part of their emergency plans.

• Identify an out-of-state contact, such as a friend or relative, whom household members should contact to notify they are safe. In certain instances, it may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than a call across town. Therefore, an out-of-town contact may be in a better position to facilitate communication among separated family members.

• Be sure every family member knows the phone number of your out-of-state emergency contact and has a cellphone or a prepaid phone card to call them. If you have a cellphone, program that person(s) as your "in case of emergency" (ICE) contact. If you are in an accident, emergency personnel will often check your ICE listings to reach someone you know. Be sure to tell your family and friends that you've listed them as an emergency contact.

• Teach family members how to use text messaging, which can often get around network disruptions that may otherwise interrupt phone service.

Want more information?

While this information is a good starting point for your family's emergency preparation and planning, it's just the tip of the iceberg. Much more preparedness information is available at **www.readypa.org,** where you'll be able to download a PDF version of the "Family Communication Plan for Parents and Kids."

"We urge residents to take three main steps," says Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency Press Secretary Ruth Miller. "Be informed … be prepared … and be involved."

September is National Preparedness Month, but any month is the right one to develop a plan to help your family stay in touch during an emergency.