

Preparing Your Neighborhood For Disasters



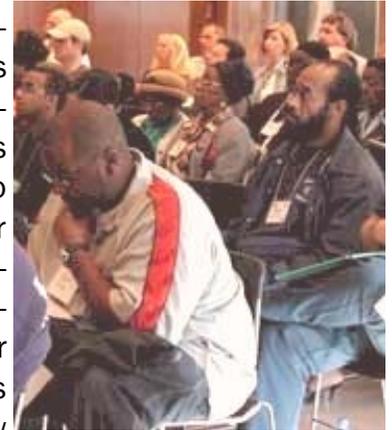
How-To-Guide

Organize Your Team

Duracell/Harris Interactive
Study of Disaster Preparedness (2004)

- Sixty-two percent of households lack a disaster supply kit
- Fifty-one percent of households don't have an evacuation plan.
- Forty-two percent said the one disaster all households should prepare for is fire, regardless of where they live, and only sixteen percent said terrorism is the one disaster all households should prepare for.

At the heart of any community that is ready to effectively respond to and recover from a disaster's devastation is a group of well-organized volunteers. Organized, prepared neighborhood groups know what to expect, what to do, and how to come together to help ensure the safety of their families and communities. Most disaster preparedness educational material are designed primarily for families and/or individuals. Whether your neighborhood already has an active volunteers group (block association) or not, you can follow the basic steps below to form a neighborhood disaster preparedness team and take some concrete steps now to enhance your family's and neighborhood's readiness for the future.



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1. Build a Core Group of Concerned Neighborhood Residents

- If there is an existing block, neighborhood or civic association: Work with current members to form a disaster preparedness committee.
- If you do not have an existing group to work with: Talk to your neighbors, local religious leaders, merchants, etc, and ask for their involvement. It only takes a handful of volunteers to get started!
- Survey your neighborhood: Whether you are working with an existing neighborhood group or starting a brand new disaster preparedness team, distribute a simple one-or two-page confidential survey to generate interest and recruit volunteers.

SAMPLE "NEIGHBORHOOD DISASTER SURVEY" QUESTIONS:

1. Are you concerned about future terrorist attacks or other disasters such as blackouts or hurricanes?
2. Do you have an emergency plan for your family?
3. If you have children, are you familiar with the school's evacuation procedures?
4. Would you want to be notified about your neighborhood's disaster preparedness plans?
5. Are you interested in volunteering to create and implement a disaster preparedness plan for your neighborhood?

2. Plan Your First Meeting.

► Research :

In preparation for your first meeting, do some homework:

1. What geographic area can you realistically cover? Start small - one building or block at a time, depending on how many volunteers your team has and how many you think you can recruit. Keep in mind that the area your group covers should be kept within walking distance in the event of a disaster.
2. What, if anything is already being done in your neighborhood regarding disaster preparedness and who is doing it?
3. Who are key local players and who could potentially help? Think about individual leaders and residents with particular skills, and key neighborhood institutions, such as police precincts and firehouses, medical centers, churches/synagogues/mosques, schools, businesses, and social services agencies.
4. Organize and write-up the results of your research, including responses if you conducted a survey, for use at your first team meeting.

► Outreach :

- **IF YOU ARE WORKING WITH AN EXISTING NEIGHBORHOOD GROUP:**

Outreach and recruitment should be easy in an existing group. Discuss at your general membership meeting the urgency of individual, family and neighborhood preparedness and propose creating a disaster preparedness committee. Take names, phone and e-mail numbers of interested members.

- **IF YOU ARE NOT WORKING WITH AN EXISTING NEIGHBORHOOD GROUP:**

Pick a date, time and convenient location, such as a local church, library, or community center. Consider inviting a guest speaker as a “hook” to generate interest from your neighbors, but make sure the date works for your speaker before you begin publicizing the meeting. Possible speakers include a representative from your local police precinct or fire department.

Put together a simple but eye-catching flyer announcing the meeting and distribute the notice throughout the neighborhood in stores, community buildings and school bulletin boards, etc. Make sure you included the basic details including date, time, location, purpose of meeting, guest speaker (if you are having one), and a phone number for more information.

► Meeting Agenda:

To ensure a successful meeting, preparation is essential! Your core group will be your temporary steering committee or leadership body until more volunteers get involved, and a more formal structure can be put in place. The core group should create a meeting agenda and divide up who will prepare and lead a discussion on each agenda item. Designate times for each item, and prepare any material you plan to distribute, including a copy of the agenda for each participant. (Put the date and your contact information on the agenda, so everyone has the same information when they leave). A great, free resource to distribute at the meeting is [NJOEM: A Family Preparedness Guide](#) produced by the New Jersey State Office of Emergency Management. Plan to start and end on time. Don't forget to include some social time after the meeting - it's a great way to get to know your neighbors and learn about their skills, experience and interests. Lastly, ask a local merchant to donate refreshments—food always helps!

SAMPLE AGENDA FOR FIRST DISASTER PREPAREDNESS TEAM MEETING:

- Welcome, introductions, purpose of meeting, review agenda.
- Guest speaker or presentation (Sample Topic: “How To Prepare Your Family For A Disaster” Speaker: local first responder, Office of Emergency Management, UVSO, Red Cross) Distribute “ NJOEM: A Family Preparedness Guide “.
- Brainstorm and prioritize initial disaster preparedness project ideas (see below).
- Discuss initial goals, structure and functioning of team (see below).
- Identify next steps and sign-up volunteers for specific tasks.
- Set next meeting date (Make sure everyone has signed in so you have their contact information).

3. Create a Structure for Your Team

Most groups are started by a handful of concerned residents who identify a problem and are motivated to do something about it. Use your initial core group of volunteers to get your neighborhood's disaster preparedness efforts up-and-running. Decide on a regular meeting schedule for this leadership body and divide up key responsibilities. The point is not to do every single task yourself, but to make sure it happens through recruiting volunteers and delegating responsibilities.

As you organize and get more residents involved, a more formal structure and process for functioning will become necessary. What follows are the essential building blocks you will need to ensure your team's success. By having them in place, you will be able to recruit new volunteers, carry out crucial disaster preparedness projects and manage the inevitable challenges that come your way.

- **Leadership:** As your team grows, it is important that new members feel that they have ownership and a voice in the disaster preparedness plans that are developed for your neighborhood. Your leadership body needs to be representative of the community—ethnically, culturally and politically, and should be democratically elected. This allows for trust and respect between members and leaders and helps ensure overall accountability for your team's efforts.
- **Committees:** Small groups are the most effective way to get work done. It allows volunteers to utilize their skills and experiences and plug into their interests. It fosters positive team attitude and it is a great way to get to know your members and develop new leadership.
- **By-Laws:** By-laws are the way to establish and maintain a democratically elected leadership body and a strong committee structure. A good set of by-laws include the following: your mission; roles/responsibilities/ rights of officers and members; decision-making process; membership eligibility; and how committees are established. The by-laws should be written clearly and concisely so everyone can understand them, and each new member should receive a copy. Contact UVSO for a copy of examples of by-laws.

Remember: people get involved for many reasons—concerns about their own safety and the safety of friends and family; their neighborhood is important to them; they believe they have the skills to help; they believe the team can make a difference. But ultimately, they will stay involved if they see that the group is effective and gets things done. Having a solid structure in place is an important way to help make that happen!

4. Implement Neighborhood Disaster Preparedness Projects

There is a lot of work to be done to create a disaster preparedness plan for your neighborhood, but don't get discouraged! There are some simple, immediate activities a small team can begin to implement right now to help prepare your neighborhood while you create a track record and recruit additional volunteers.

- **Outreach and Education** - Distribute NJOEM: A Family Preparedness Guide. Critical to any neighborhood preparedness is individual and family preparedness. Basic knowledge can literally save lives. A great way to raise public awareness, help get your team off the ground and build neighborhood support for your effort is to pair-up volunteers and distribute copies of the NJOEM: A Family Preparedness Guide to neighbors and local businesses. Start small, focus on a building or block. Set up an informational table on a busy corner. Use the opportunity to talk about your efforts and ask for support. Have a clipboard on hand for them to sign your mailing list if they are interested in getting involved. Make sure you stamp your contact information on the guide and hand out fliers with information about your team and next general meeting.
- **Create Registries** - This includes neighbors with special skills, translators, mental health providers and special needs. Every Ward of the City of Newark is comprised of a wealth of talent. Survey neighborhood residents and create your own "Emergency Skills Registry" of neighbors. Also include a list of emergency contacts for the registry.
- **Create a Directory of Local Response Agencies** - If a list is not already available, make a list of locations and contact numbers of your local precinct (s), firehouse (s), hospital (s) and social service agencies.
- **Develop an Emergency Communication System for Your Team** - The more informed your neighbors are during a disaster, the less likely they will panic. Start with your team. Set-up telephone, cell phone and e-mail communication systems, where each person calls others on the team to make sure everyone is reached. Identify local landline telephones in the community centers, libraries or other public locations that can be used if cell phones do not work. Establish a common out-of-state telephone number to call in the event local telephone service is disrupted as well as a local place to meet in the event all phone service fails. Once your communications plan is set for your team, begin to recruit other volunteers to be part of the communications system. For example, you could recruit floor captains in large buildings or block captains in areas you are organizing.
- **Team Training and Development** - Maintaining your team is vital! Discuss with your members what skills they are interested in learning. Take advantage of training opportunities offered by agencies like the Red Cross, FEMA, and other first responders.



Unified Vailsburg Services Organization
"Creating a Stable and Compassionate Community"

Preparing Your Neighborhood For Disasters

How-To-Guide

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WE'RE ON THE WEB!
WWW.UVSO.ORG

Are You Ready?

Be Prepared Not Scared!



Resources

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) : (www.fema.gov/areyouready). The Federal Emergency Management Agency is an agency within the Homeland Security Department. FEMA's mission is to reduce loss of life and property and protect our nation's critical infrastructure from all types of hazards through comprehensive, risk-based, emergency management programs of mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security: (1-800-be-ready or www.ready.gov). One of the primary mandates of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security is to educate the public, on a continuing basis, about how to prepare in case of a national emergency, including a possible terrorist attack.

New Jersey Office of Emergency Management: (609-882-2000 or www.state.nj.us/njoem). One of the primary missions of the NJ Office of Emergency Management is to coordinate state, county and local agencies before, during and after a disaster. As part of their mission, NJOEM provides training to first responders to better prepare. It is also mandated to coordinate "Citizen Corps", a four component volunteer program used to train and prepare residents for emergencies by providing valuable assistance to first responders.

City of Newark Department of Homeland Security: (973-733-5431). The Newark Homeland Department has a variety of functions related to the security and safety of the city and it's residents. One function is the implementation of the Citizen Corps model. Currently the department is recruiting residents for a variety of volunteer opportunities within the Citizen Corps program.
