

STATE SENATOR TONI BOUCHER

Emergency Preparedness What every person should know- the basics

An emergency situation can occur at any time. An emergency preparedness plan should not be considered at the time of a crisis. The ideal situation would have every family prepared with at least a basic emergency procedure.

We will soon be entering the late summer and fall hurricane season. Dr. Katherine Rathbun, a board certified public health physician and mother, wrote the emergency preparedness guide “Being Prepared” after experiencing several disasters, including Hurricane Katrina.

She presents three basic alternatives; preparation, evacuation, and staying home. Realizing that very few people have the time to implement an extensive or complex procedure when a dangerous situation arises, Dr. Rathbun keeps her guide simple, with easy to follow tips that are briefly outlined in the following summary.

1. Preparation

Dr. Rathbun recommends integrating your emergency plan and supplies into daily life, so that when needed, all supplies are easily found. Top priorities include:

- Food, Water, Clothing: there should be enough canned food to last a family a minimum of seven days
- Shelter: Keep a list of emergency shelters that you can go to in case of an emergency. Most shelters are the public schools in the area.
- Medical Care: Identification/ Contact-
 - Everyone should carry identification and contact cards at ALL times.
 - For adults: although most adults carry their license with them, more identification is needed if something happens. An emergency information card with contact phone numbers, allergies, and other vital information should be carried at all times.
 - For children: The local DMV makes ID cards for children, something that too few residents take advantage of. Along with the ID, a contact card with important numbers should be with the child at all times, even if he or she is out with a parent. On school days, there should be a copy of the contact card in their backpack.
 - Every family should have some contacts; some in town, and some out of town. The out of town contacts are important for big emergencies which can drive families out of their houses.
 - A meeting place: every family should have a meeting place discussed if a disaster strikes in the town and the family is separated. This saves people from wandering around in a disaster zone trying to find their families. Everyone if the family should be very clear of where the safe place is.

Some families should also discuss a back up safe place in case the primary safe place is also affected by the disaster.

- Insurance:
 - Keep insurance policies up to date; cover big ticket items a family needs to replace after any disaster.
 - Flood insurance is required for some houses because of their location, but homeowners may want to take it out even if it is not required.
 - Earthquake insurance- in the Connecticut area earthquake insurance is cheaper because of the rarity of earthquakes, but that does not mean it that earthquakes cannot occur.
 - 3 important web sites that will help reduce your insurance rates- www.disastersafety.org , www.ProtectingAmerica.org and www.ibhs.org (Institute for Business and Home Safety)

- Communication:
 - Landlines: are usually more reliable than cell phones in a disaster area, they are harder to knock out. However, portable or cordless phones won't work if the power is out for a long time. In this situation it is good to have at least one phone that plugs into the wall.
 - Cell phones: cell phones can be very handy, but they also require more maintenance. Having a car charger can help during an emergency. Also having a contact in a cell phone address book under the name of "In Case of Emergency" (ICE) will be helpful to authorities if something happens where the person is rendered unconscious.
 - Citizen Band Radios: this is helpful for people living in rural areas because they have a range of 5-10 miles. If landlines and cell phone lines are down, CB radios are beneficial.
 - Walkie-talkies: these are short range radios, but can be useful if someone has gotten lost in a crowd, or a huge safe place like an arena. They are also useful in day to day activities.
 - Radios: A weather band radio is the most useful in emergency situations. It can also be something that is small and regular battery. Keep it near a flashlight or near a bed.
 - Emergency Numbers- often during a disaster, the emergency help number 9-1-1 gets overwhelmed or goes down. In this situation it is important to have a list of other emergency services numbers.

 - For our area these are:

 - Bethel

 - Town Hall: (203) 794-8501
 - Bethel Fire Department: (203) 778-7414
 - Stony Hill Fire Department (Bethel) (203) 778-7417
 - Police Department (203) 743-5500

- New Canaan
- New Canaan Town Hall: (203) 594-3000
- Ambulance Corps 203-594-3535
- Emergency Management (203) 594-4101
- Fire Department (203) 594-3140
- Police Dept (203)-594-3500

- Redding:
- Town Hall: 203-938-2002
- Fire District #1 - Redding Ridge: 203-938-2520
- Fire District #2- West Redding: 203-938-2518
- Georgetown Fire District: 203-544-8800
- Police: 203-938-3400

- Ridgefield:
- Town Hall: 203-431-2700
- Fire Department: 203-431-2724
- Police: 203-438-6531

- Westport:
- Town Hall: (203) 341-1000
- Fire Department: 203-341-5000
- Police: 203-341-6000
- Emergency Services: 203-341-6081

- Weston:
- Town Hall: (203) 222-2500
- Fire Department: 203-222-2647
- Weston EMS: 203-222-2649
- Police: 203-222-2600

- Wilton:
- Town Hall: (203) 563-0100
- Ambulance: (203) 834-6245
- Fire: (203) 834-6246
- Police: (203) 834-6260

- Others:
 - 211- Info line, a database of 4000 health service providers for food, energy, housing, transportation, or shelters.

- CL&P: 860-947-2000
 - United Illuminating: 203-499-3333
 - National Weather Service: www.nws.noaa.gov
 - Hurricane Info: www.nws.noaa.gov, www.ready.gov,
 - American Red Cross: www.redcross.org
 - Mid Fairfield County: www.midfairfieldredcross.org
 - Pandemic Flu: www.pandemicflu.gov, www.cdc.gov
 - State Police: 1-800-575-6330
 - Poison Control: 1-800-343-2722
 - FEMA: www.fema.gov 1-800-480-2520
 - For more information or links: check out www.wiltonct.org
 - Department of Emergency management and Homeland Security: Commissioner James Thomas. Toll Free: 1-800-397-8876; Main 860-256-0800; Command Center 860-566-3180. Emergency Regional offices: 203-696-2640
 - Homeland Security: Terrorism: 860-706-5500; Fax: 860-566-1927; Tips line: 866-457-8477 National Homeland Security: www.dhs.gov; 1-800-237-3239
 - Urban Search and Rescue Unit (CT): Locates, extricate, and provide immediate medical attention to victims trapped in collapsed structures. Call local police and fire for collapsed structures who will request the specialized services of the Urban Search and Rescue Unit. The US&R is part of the CT Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security.
- Money:
 - Cash should be readily available during an emergency, about thirty dollars per person
 - All people should carry an emergency \$20 bill, to be tucked away in a back pocket, in case the person is out of the house when a disaster strikes. The money should be immediately replaced if it is used. This tip is especially important for children once they are allowed to go out without a parent.
 - Emergency money should also be placed in the house, only enough to sustain necessities if the banks are unreachable.
 - Transportation:
 - If mass transit is available in the disaster area, try using that before using your own car. Mass transit is usually safer. If you live in an area where there are tokens for public transit, make sure to keep extra tokens available.
 - If you need to use private transportation, check in with a neighbor before a disaster strikes. Try to help people without transportation.
 - Cars: Car use is the most popular and often the only means of transportation. Have extra gasoline on hand. An emergency kit is also important, especially if you are stranded in your car during a snow storm.
 - Gasoline: keep your gas tank at least half full at all times. Not only does this help during emergency situations, but it also lessens the chance that

you are stranded in the middle of the road on any other day. Keep gas stored safely if you have a generator. Do not ever try to siphon gas into a generator using a hose.

- Car Emergency Kit: spare tire and jack for changing a flat; one quart of the car oil; flashlight with extra batteries; basic tools such as pliers and screwdrivers; mechanic's wire; duct tape; jumper cables; rags; baby wipes; heavy trash bags; nylon rope; blanket; flares or light sticks.
 - In addition, keep a box of matches in your pocket in the winter in the event of frozen door lock. Heat the key in the flame and insert into the lock. Leave it for a minute to defrost. Try not to bend a hot key. Also keep extra sweaters or jackets in the car for heat in case you are stranded.
- Documentation: an important facet of preparation includes documentation. Every household should document all possessions for insurance purposes. Whether it is by photography or video camera, everything in the house should be on camera to facilitate government reimbursements.
 - After taking pictures or a video, two DVD's should be made. One of the DVD's should be sent to a friend or family member out of state, and one should be kept with the important documents in the house.
 - Keep special documentation for valuable items such as cars, jewelry, or paintings.
 - Keep all these papers in a place that is easily accessible if you must leave in a hurry. Keeping them in a plastic bag in the freezer keeps them safe in a fire, and is easily retrievable.

2. Evacuation

- When to go: If there is a significant chance that your home will be destroyed or if there is a significant chance that your family will not be able to stay safe in the conditions. As trite as it sounds, it *is* always better to be safe than sorry, so if there is a chance of danger to your survival, and there is a safer place you can go, it is better to leave rather than stay. Try to travel in the daylight.
 - Judge your situation as accurately as you can. Some common terms include:
 - Watch: There is a possibility of a weather disaster
 - Warning: The disaster is already occurring or is imminent
 - Do not wait for an evacuation to become mandatory
- Where to go: A friend or family's house is always the best option, but be careful that they can accommodate you and are not also being affected by the disaster. If this is not available, try going to a hotel, although it can be expensive. If neither is available, head to the local high school. High schools are usually set up as public shelters and the Red Cross is deployed there to provide food and sleeping bags. Listen to the radio to see where public shelters are being set up or take directions from local authorities.
 - Do not go to a hospital unless you are sick or hurt. Hospitals usually get overwhelmed by patients during disasters. If you are a medical professional, go to a hospital to volunteer for the disaster.

- Keep together in a disaster situation. If there is an older neighbor that needs help and you have taken her to the public shelter with you, keep her with you while you are there. Try to keep your family in one car. If this is not possible, keep both cars close and have checkpoints to meet up at if you are separated. Agree on where your destination is and keep making sure that everyone is together. If you are at a public shelter, register yourself with authorities as soon as you can so that officials can help you find your friends and family as soon as possible.
- What to take: Be sure to only take necessities.
 - Identification, money, and important papers- in a small parcel which can be packed easily. Emergency papers and the documentation that you prepared beforehand are essential
 - Cell phone/small radio- take this so that you can communicate and listen for news or instructions.
 - Medicines/ eyeglasses- if you have regular medicines be sure to take a bottle with the label on it. Also include a basic first aid kit.
 - Clothes: wear sturdy, simple clothes. Good walking shoes, jeans, and a long sleeved shirt are a must. Carry underwear, shirts, and socks in your backpack. Keep a waterproof jacket or winter jacket which you can tie across your waist. If it is possible, add a bedroll and pillow for each person. If you are tight on space, use clothes as a pillow.
 - Food and a mess kit- here the idea is not to have healthy food, instead you need high calorie foods which will fill you up but don't weigh much to carry. Cereal, peanut butter, candy, dried fruit, nuts, are all good examples. If you are traveling by car, carry canned goods and a can opener. A mess kit can be as simple as a fork, spoon, and plastic bowl.
 - Water- keep a gallon of water for each person if you are traveling by car. If you are walking, only keep as much as you can carry for a long period of time.

3. **Staying at Home:** Ask yourself if your house is a safe shelter or will you be trapped if something goes wrong. If the answer is yes, then get out. If evacuation is suggested do it. You can not protect your house if it can not protect you. If you stay at home remember these important tips:

- Know how to shut off utilities
- Store batteries in the refrigerator
- Never run a generator inside
- Too little power can damage an air conditioner
- Do not burn painted or treated wood
- Never use a smoking fireplace or stove
- Fireplaces, stoves and kerosene heaters need OUTSIDE airflow
- Gas stoves give off carbon monoxide
- Fire can hide in walls and attics
- Have a manual can opener
- Any food is OK for 2 hours

- Never build a fire in a car port
- Assume well water is unsafe until tested- Never use flood water
- Use drinking water to wash face or dishes
- If there is no safe drinking water or methods to boil water – do not stay
- Keep a month of medicines
- Take first aid kit with you if you evacuate- do not take antibiotics for diarrhea
- Stay dry in cold- do not get in bed if wet
- If toilets do not work do not use them- dig a latrine
- Houses need outside air for ventilation
- Dehydration kills animals more than cold- never leave tied up- leave a sign if they are left behind
- Fill your bathtub with water if you are on a septic system. You can then refill your toilet tank for flushing if your well stops working
- Keep any propane tanks full so you can cook outside when your power goes out
- Text first and call on your cell later (overloading the phone lines may prevent you from getting through the normal channels)

A few other tips to keep in mind when an emergency strikes:

- Heat emergencies: do take salt pills, keep babies undressed and unwrapped, don't leave anyone in a closed car. When working in the heat drink a quart of liquid an hour
- Winter Storms: Alcohol and caffeine worsen hypothermia and dehydration. If stuck on the road stay in the car. Leave front windows opened slightly and be sure exhaust pipe is cleared of snow.
- Floods: If driving - **turn around!** Don't drown! If your car stalls, leave it immediately. Don't stay with your house if there is rising water- know a way out. Hepatitis is not a risk from flood water but diarrhea is
- Tornados: Stay in basement or if no basement, interior closet, doorway or bathtub. Lock doors if you can. Do not stay in a trailer. If driving, do not go under a highway overpass- get out of the car lie face down in a ditch with your hands covering your neck

There is much more to learn from Dr. Kate and can be accessed by going to the author's web site at www.dr-kate.com . I would extend my thanks and appreciation to Dr. Kate for consenting to share these valuable tips with me and my constituents. Please explore the web sites mentioned to familiarize you self with the important information they contain. It can save your life or that of a loved one or neighbor.

Stay Safe,

Toni Boucher