

Principles of Emergency Planning

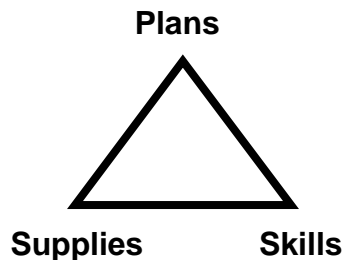
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“If you’re failing to plan, your planning to fail”

Introduction

As a Certified Hazard Control Manager and Safety Manager for a large chemical facility, I was involved in hazard analysis and emergency planning for multi-million dollar facilities with hundreds of employees and effecting millions in adjoining communities. The assumption that we knew what could happen and/or that we were ready enough was never accepted. Constantly doing self-inspections, “what-if analysis”, emergency planning and replanning was the only way to reduce the probability of and the damages from potential disasters. In today’s world, the individual and family must apply these same principles or face inevitable and unnecessarily sever loss, injury, and hardships.

A great deal of attention is given to what equipment to have (e.g. Survival Kits) and to the specific skills (e.g. first aid, shelter building, etc.) needed for emergencies. Less attention is given to emergency planning principals and techniques. Government agencies and industry are required to maintain up-to-date emergency plans for every anticipated emergency. The responsible citizen and family would be well advised to make their own emergency plans for those situations that may endanger their lives and safety. Having the right emergency equipment and skills is important but having a plan for their effective and timely use is a key element in the preparedness triangle.



What to Plan For?

Detailed hazard analysis is the first step to emergency planning in order to identify those emergencies that are the most likely to happen to you and would have the most serious consequences to your life, property and freedom. These will be different for every individual and family. You may live in a high crime area, an earthquake zone, or down wind of a chemical plant. You may work in a terrorist target zone or you may have enemies with violent natures. If you smoke, a home fire is much more probable than a tornado. Consider the things that have happened in your area. What trends are developing in the areas where you live and work? Consider long-term national trends such as economic instability, climate change and fuel depletion. More severe storms, power outages and epidemics are predictable events in the next decade or sooner. It should be easy to come up with a number of emergencies you would want to have a plan for.

Answering the Questions

Once you have a short list of potential emergencies the process of planning for each one can begin. Emergency planning is the process of answering questions before fate asks them. These questions are:

- 1. WHAT events would trigger the plan?** It is critically important that everyone understands that a certain event or combination of events will trigger your emergency plans without their asking anyone. The smoke detector goes off, the lights go out, and an intruder is heard in the house, etc. should trigger immediate action by every family member even if they are in different rooms. You are at work while your wife is at home and the kids are at school. Suddenly there is a toxic chemical spill upwind of your home and the school. Each of you has to know what to do and hopefully where to meet when that trigger event happens. When event "A" happens everyone executes his or her part of the plan *for* event "A". Overloaded hospital emergency rooms may indicate an epidemic. Rising prices may indicate a coming shortage of fuel or food. Civil unrest in one or two areas may indicate a general breakdown of law in all areas. Immediate area situation awareness of your immediate surroundings is a critical survival skill, but situation awareness of national economic, political and environmental conditions is equally important
- 2. WHAT actions are required in what order?** This is the most complicated part your the plans. You must cover all the critical actions but keep it simple and fast. The first element of the plan must be to stop or escape the immediate danger. This could be escaping from a home fire, taking shelter from a tornado, or calling 911. Gathering critical emergency items for continued survival would be next. You may need respirators, protective clothing, medical supplies or weapons to stay alive. Having survived the immediate threat and provide protection against continuing hazards, your next priority is reaching and/or gathering your family and providing continued safety. Having gathered loved-ones and equipment you can move-on to long-term survival activities as needed. In the event of a home fire, escape and gathering of the family is probably all that is needed. Surviving and escaping a civil disorder in your community or large-scale epidemic (for example) would require a series of additional actions such as preparing the home for defense and fire extinguishing or gathering survival packs and following a pre-planned rout to safety.
- 3. WHERE will you be and where will you go?** Obviously the location you are in when disasters strikes will greatly effect your planning. A plan to react to a Nuclear, Biological or Chemical attack will be very different if you are at work or on the road than if you are at home. You also have to consider your primary shelter or escape destination and your main rendezvous location where you will meet others and access your survival equipment. You may have selected a number of temporary storm or blast shelters (culverts, basements, etc) along your daily rout. You can hang-on in these with your small (carry along) survival items for a few days and then make your way to your home or other long-term shelter. Never assume that everyone will be at home and have access to all your supplies when disaster strikes!

Note: Use Google Earth to trace potential escape and evacuation routes. If possible walk, drive or bike-ride the most probable routes.

4. **WHO is responsible for what actions?** In any emergency, it is critical that everyone “does his or her job”. Who locks up the house? Who turns off the gas and electricity? Who gathers the children? Who brings the supplies? Who calls 911 while who provides CPR? Make sure everyone can do each job (cross-train) if necessary but clearly assign tasks.
5. **WHEN to act and when to meet?** It could be hours or days before family or group members can move from shelter, evacuate the danger area and get to a designated assembly point or rendezvous. You should have several alternative meeting places’ and a time each day that plan members would be there. Your plan might say that you would meet at the abandoned gas station on highway 12 at noon four days after the plan trigger event and every day after that until all are assembled or 10 days. If that location is unsafe (e.g. occupied, contaminated) the alternate location is the cluster of trees near the Wilson farm.
6. **HOW each action will be achieved?** While some actions may be self-evident (run, hide, carry) some actions may require more detail. How to crawl out of a burning house or specifically what protective equipment to put on to protect against biological contamination may need to be included. Good training requires less detail included in the plan. When fear and chaos reign it is too late to be reading instructions!
7. **WHAT IF there are problems with the plan?** No plan survives the first few minutes of a disaster. Plan on things going wrong and *try* to have a plan that can get you past these inevitable problems. What if your route is blocked? What if you have to walk? What if you can’t get to your survival pack? What if you have to evacuate? What if someone is injured? What if you or someone else cannot safely get home? You need alternate plans and backup equipment to deal with these inevitable challenges

Emergency Plan Examples

Here are a few examples of basic emergency plans.

Example #1 Home Fire that Started While You Slept

Trigger: Smell smoke; see flames, smoke detector activated

What Action: Get to floor. Call 911. Test doors for heat before opening. Escape via crawling (route practiced) or through window, etc. Get to neighbors (rendezvous). Direct Fire Dept and inform of missing family members. If neighbors not home run to the 7/11 Store at corner. Note: always have your cell-phone, car keys, wallet, and a flashlight in your bedside drawer. You will need these once you have escaped.

NOTE: *A different plan would be required for a fire that develops while you are home. You still need to call 911, but you may be able to use a fire extinguisher if the fire is small. Once the room starts to fill with smoke everyone needs to get out fast.*

Example #2 A Terrorist Attack Resulting in Civil Disorder

Trigger: Terrorist attack within 100 miles of home followed by riots, power failures, spreading fallout or epidemics, state of emergency, etc.

What Action: All members are to access personal emergency items and self-defense items. And put on best available respiratory and skin protection. Escape hazard areas if possible via railroad tracks, back roads and other preplanned routes. If escape is not possible take shelter in a preplanned location that minimizes exposure and is defensible or well concealed. When safe to do so, evacuate to home shelter or other designated location. Persons at home will establish shelter and defense if possible or evacuate with as much gear (see priority list) to rendezvous point #1. If home has been abandoned others will continue to rendezvous point #1 and meet there at noon each day until contact is made. Recover food, water and medical supplies at rendezvous point #2 and establish shelter until emergency is over.

Of course these plans would probably include much more detail about the specific routes, equipment and assignments but all the basics are covered.

Getting It Done

We play all kinds of video games and watch all kinds of highly unlikely adventure/survival videos while we put off real emergency planning and preparedness. Survival planning can be a game for the whole family that will be interesting and can save lives. A family planning session for a home fire, home invasion, tornado or, yes even “the Big One” is time well spent. Do not overlook the slow developing disasters such as developing shortages, inflation, job loss, etc. Plan and prepare to minimize the impact of these inevitable trends.

Critical Equipment

No attempt is made here to cover emergency equipment or survival kits but obviously the availability of equipment must be considered throughout the planning process. Your first plan must be made based on what you have at the time. Planning will probably highlight the need for additional items and/or the relocation of things you may need in a hurry. Plan to improve and then plan again. One of my mantras is “it’s not what you have, it’s what you have with you that counts”. Pocket items and small survival kits that you carry must be part of your plans.

Don’t Guess; Know!

How long will it take to crawl out of smoke filled room* to your front door? Can you really build a filtered air shelter quickly in a biological attack? Can you really carry your survival gear 5-miles in an emergency? How long can you actually hold out in your home without access to groceries, running water, fuel and emergency services? Test your equipment, practice your actions and test your plan against the “worst case” scenarios.

**try this blindfolded with the lights out.*

Emergency Planning Tools

Here is a form you can use to guide your emergency planning efforts.

EMERGENCY PLANNING GUIDE

Emergency Situation (what is this plan for?)

Trigger Event (what events will cause this plan to be activated?)

Activation Code Word (optional) _____

Emergency Actions

Order/ Priority	Actions, By Whom? With What? How?	Notes /Alternatives
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Emergency Routs

From	To	Rout Description and Alternates
Work	Home	
Work	Point #1	
Home	Point #1	
Point #1	Point #2	

Meeting Places and Rendezvous Points

Number	Location Description	Time to Meet
1		
2		
3		

NOTES:

Plan reviewed (date) _____