

THINK COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORTATION – JUNE 2013

There was a time not so very long ago where it was possible to go hours if not days being away from the possibility of being easily contacted by phone. If you were on a ship or on an airplane it would take a dire emergency to be able to contact you. Now there aren't too many places on the planet where you have absolutely no way to be able to stay in touch. This is a wonderful capability, but it does have a downside. During emergency situations, many of our normal modes of communication will be down. We are so used to being able to almost instantly contact our loved ones that we will experience a great deal of stress when we are not able to. We have raised a whole generation that has come to expect nearly instant everything. The psychological impact of not being able to reach you by some means will be very distressing to them. **You can help prepare for this situation by developing a Family Plan in advance.** Rather than making your children worry about it more by discussing it, you actually empower them and lessen their anxiety. The goal is to reassure them that you will be doing everything possible to get to them, but that it may take time.

HAVE A FAMILY PLAN

A good family plan will take into account, 1.) the possible places the family members may be when a disaster occurs, 2.) what the responsibilities of each family member would be depending upon where they are at the time, and 3.) the routes those away from home would take to get home. It would also **establish different places for the family to regroup according to the extent of the disaster** (ie. by the mailbox if just the house was damaged, a place in town if it was just your neighborhood affected, or somewhere further away if the whole area had to be evacuated.) The plan would also have an **in state and an out of state contact person** and arrangements for everyone to have constant **access to those phone numbers** and possibly their email addresses too. You should also have **an agreed upon place to leave a message for family members who may arrive home after you have evacuated.**

In preparing your plan, first **make your home as safe as possible.** (see APRIL 2013) Make sure your children know how to protect themselves and take shelter in whatever room they are in. **Make certain everyone knows where the emergency supplies are kept so whoever is at home knows where they are and how to use them.** Then make sure those away from home have a **“Get Home Bag”** in their car or office in case roads are impassable by car and they have to walk. It should include a pair of good walking shoes and socks since we often wear what I call “stupid shoes” like heels or sandals in our daily lives. You may not be walking on nice smooth sidewalks in order to be able to get home. It should also have some water and high-energy food and a jacket or raingear according to the weather in your area. It could be a smaller and lighter version of your 72 hour kit with a flashlight, gloves, knife, etc. If your work is very far from home, you may want to have your entire 72 kit with you. **You should map out several routes to get home.** Scout them out ahead of time and see if there are any bridges or overpasses that could be out or large power lines that could fall across the road. Also see what kind of neighborhoods they pass through. Make sure you would feel safe walking through them, or pick another route. List which route would be your first choice, second choice, etc., in case your family is able to come looking for you. **Do you know your kid's school's emergency plan?** Make sure all children in elementary school know who is authorized to come and pick them up. The school will keep them until you or your designated person comes for them. Make arrangements with neighbors so there is more of a chance someone will be home to pick them up quickly. The longer it takes, the more their anxiety can build.

Plan to have everyone report in to the designated out of state contact person as soon as they are able to. Knowing where everyone is and that they are safe allows everyone to breathe a sigh of relief and concentrate on what they need to do in their particular situation. (Even State Emergency Management Team members as well as firefighters, policemen and healthcare workers will be heading home or trying to make sure everyone in their own families are safe before they will be able to fully concentrate on their jobs.) So wherever you are, don't forget to check in. You should also **let the contact person know what your plans are and when you will try to check back with them so they can relay the information to others.**

COMMUNICATION

So how do you keep in contact? **If the power is out, cordless phones do not work.** If you have an old corded phone that you can plug in, it may work if the lines aren't overloaded with everyone trying to make calls. Local calls actually tie up two lines at a time - one for sending and one for receiving. A long distance call accesses the fiber optic network which can handle many thousands of calls at a time. That is why **you may be able to contact someone out of state, but not the neighbor down the street.** Cell phones may work if the cell towers aren't down, but only until your phone battery dies. In a pinch you can use your car charger to get it working again. Or you can purchase one of the many types of cell phone chargers that you wind up to recharge it. These work pretty well for short calls. **If you can't get a call through on your cell phone, try a text message. It takes a narrower band width and just may get through.** Make sure everyone's cell phone has the emergency contact person programmed in. It can be put in the phone directory under "I" as ICE as in "In Case of Emergency". This can also be used by emergency personnel to find an emergency contact for an unconscious or incapacitated individual. Also have this number on a laminated card by the phone and a copy in each person's 72 hour kit, children's school backpacks, etc. It would also be good to **have family pictures in each kit** for comfort or if necessary to help find or identify missing members. (ie. Have you seen this person?)

Another way to keep in contact may be a set of Family Radios. The Family Radio Service (FRS) is an improved walkie talkie radio system that uses frequencies in the UHF band. It doesn't suffer as much interference as the CB radios that truckers use, and also doesn't require a license to operate. It has limited power, so also limited range, but it does have provisions for filtering out unwanted chatter from other users on the same frequency. This is accomplished by so called "privacy codes," but they offer no protection from eavesdropping and are only intended to help share busy channels. The manufacturer may advertise that they have a range of 40 miles, but that is under perfect conditions, ie. you are both standing on hilltops on a perfectly clear day. The reality is that buildings and trees significantly decrease the range you will get. The suggested actual range is probably a mile or less. But that could keep you in contact within the neighborhood during an emergency and would probably be valuable in coordinating activities after a disaster. You can purchase a set of these for under \$100.

There are also **amateur radios or HAM radios** for more advanced communication abilities. These have more range and require more power to transmit, so they also **require a license to operate.** You used to have to know Morse code to obtain a license, but that is no longer the case. The beginner level or "Technician" license doesn't require passing a Morse code test, but does require passing a written test and paying a fee. If you are a quick learner and a good test taker, this might just involve taking one of the Saturday Prep classes that are offered periodically and then taking the test and paying your fee. You are then issued a call sign which is how you identify yourself when transmitting over the radio. There are strict rules that are followed when using your radio and if you don't abide by them, they know exactly where you are transmitting from and you will probably receive a knock at your door within a short time asking what your problem is. HAM radio operators take their responsibilities very seriously and are a great help in coordinating communications in emergencies and during community events. They do not wish to jeopardize their transmitting privileges, so they follow their rules and etiquette in using the radio band widths assigned to them. This isn't a toy but can make a fun and helpful hobby for anyone interested. Most HAMs (as they are called) have battery powered transmitters and receivers and usually have planned for some way to recharge them even when the power is out so these are a great option in an emergency. This can become an expensive hobby, but you can get an adequate handheld radio for between \$100 - 200 depending on what features you want. You don't have to have a license to *listen* to the transmissions on a HAM radio, but it isn't legal to transmit without one. (Go to arrl.org/licensing-education-training for info on getting a license.)

If you have lots of money with nowhere else to put it, **a satellite phone** is the way to go. These are the big guns of disaster communication. They are powered by batteries with heavy charge capacity and they beam directly up to satellites, completely bypassing all the jammed and damaged equipment in a disaster. But they

are not cheap. Even a low-end reconditioned model may cost over \$400 plus you have to have a monthly calling plan. An Emergency Only plan would be more than \$30 a month plus \$1.50 per minute. Ouch!

Another way to bypass local lines, towers and poles is with the latest **internet access from your satellite TV provider**. A dish email service using one of the new supersize dishes and a well charged laptop would theoretically allow you to communicate through any disaster. After the earthquake in Japan, many people couldn't make calls, but some could email, so keep that option in mind if you have access to the internet and a working computer.

Besides communicating with others, **you need a way to gather information pertinent to your situation. You should store a battery powered radio and have spare batteries as well as a way to recharge them.** Solar powered radios, hand-crank radios or a combination of the two would be great. Designate it for emergencies only (just like your emergency flashlight) so the batteries won't be dead when you need it. In an emergency you wouldn't listen to it all the time. You would listen for short periods at a time to conserve the battery power. In choosing a radio, remember that the bigger it is and the more it does, the more power it uses. Also remember you have a radio in your vehicle that you can use in a pinch.

In an emergency, the authorities would communicate important information over the EAS or Emergency Alert System. KALL 700 AM in Herriman is one that broadcasts at 50,000 watts and serves as a Primary Entry Point (PEP) station that is connected to FEMA operations centers and would be able to get information directly from the president in the event of a national emergency. A Primary Source (SPS) station for a statewide emergency is KSL 1160 AM. And local primary source stations (LPS) in addition to KSL would be KWDZ 910 AM and KNRS 570 AM. These local stations have special emergency power generators and broadcasting equipment and are designated to give official information and warnings, such as what roads are blocked, where shelters are opening up, etc. There are a few stations that are actually "hardened" against an Electro Magnetic Pulse (EMP) that would be present in a nuclear explosion. While an EMP will not harm you with radiation, it would disrupt most electronic circuitry that was not specially protected. If you turn on the radio and it still works and you can only find one or two stations, you may need to consider this possibility. If your power is out **and** you also have no dial tone on your *corded* phone, it is a very good possibility. This would be a very serious situation with many repercussions. The power would likely be out for a very long time due to our lack of access to the repair parts that are now manufactured mostly overseas.

NOAA which stands for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration runs the National Weather Service and would be in charge of providing critical information about impending weather systems. Authorities may issue a "watch" if there is some time to prepare for something like a winter storm. A "warning" means that the danger is imminent. Police or CERT teams may be sent door to door in case there is a need to evacuate. **Now would be a great time to make a list of things you would grab if you had 5 minutes, 20 minutes, or an hour to prepare for evacuating.** You won't be able to think straight when you get that knock at the door. If you have a list, you won't miss taking the really important stuff. Depending on why you are evacuating, you may want your 72 kit, bad weather gear, spare clothing, any cash you have at home, your important identification papers, insurance papers, irreplaceable memory items, and comfort items (especially for small children.) You would also want to **include some kind of list or video of your home and belongings.** Make a digital video of each room in your home along with its contents. Download the video to your computer and then store the memory card or a flash drive with the video somewhere off the premises. The burden of proof of your possessions rests with you when it comes to filing insurance claims. The video would be invaluable as proof.

TRANSPORTATION

The advice to **never let your gas tank get below half full** is even better advice than you may think. In the event of a widespread emergency, a plan has been set in place that the governor would sign that would stop gasoline sales to anyone but first responders. So even if they had a generator to pump the gas, they couldn't sell it to you. You may want to keep a spare gas can or two and rotate them when you fill up your tank. Also have

equipment to siphon gas from different vehicles into one that you could evacuate in. But it's best to always have enough gas in the tank to get you to your out of town evacuation spot. And plan for roads to be jammed. What may have taken an hour when there was no emergency, may now take three hours and that much more gas.

The EMP mentioned earlier theoretically could also knock out your car's computer and stop you in your (car) tracks. There is debate over whether this would actually happen, but **the newer your car is and the more dependent it is on computer controls, the more vulnerable you may be.** It's the first time you may ever wish you had an old clunker vehicle. If suddenly everyone on the road stops simultaneously, you should consider this possibility. One thought on how to get your vehicle running again is to disconnect your battery cables from your battery. Touch the two ends together for a few minutes and then re-connect them to your battery – black lead first and then red. I haven't personally tried this way of resetting my car's computer, but if all the cars do ever stop, I will probably give it a try. Either that or I'll go get in my husband's old beater truck and see if it still works.

Have you ever thought of how you could get around if there was no gas available or cars weren't running? It's not something most of us have probably put much thought into. It seems inconceivable in our highly mobile society. Most cultures are used to traveling a substantial amount under their own foot power - but not ours. **We jump into our car to go anywhere!** Then we have to schedule a special time in our day to "go walking" or "running." What in most cultures is a necessary daily activity has become an **event** in ours. Consequently, **we would suffer more than most from a disruption in our transportation in an emergency.**

Think of all the things you have with wheels on them. In an emergency, thinking "outside the box" may give you helpful tools that aren't immediately obvious. A friend of mine went to Haiti after the earthquake to help. She said that anyone who had anything with wheels on it had a way to transport everything from water from the river; to taking produce to market; to bartering for things they needed by offering to transport things for others. In an emergency, **being able to haul things becomes of prime importance.** So think of all the things you have that have wheels on them. Bicycles, scooters, wagons, wheelbarrows, garden carts, appliance handcarts, luggage trolleys, and even wheeled luggage and coolers could all improve your transportation capabilities. Motorcycles and ATV's would also be great as long as you had gas, but don't try and talk your spouse into one for emergency preparedness purposes – unless you've covered all your other needs! (Think food storage.)

Once you have assessed your capabilities, you may see some gaping holes that need filling. If you have an old bike that would carry an adult, don't get rid of it. Think about repairing it to workable shape. It doesn't need to be stylish, just able to carry you and some supplies. If you have some type of cart you could hook up to it, you will be very popular indeed. Those fancy baby carriers that people hook to the back of their bikes look especially well suited for this. And don't forget spare parts. Those with small children may have bicycle pumps and tire patches lying around, but if you don't, you may want to include those things on your list of things to get this month. There are also hard rubber tires you can buy to replace inner tube tires. My husband got tired of having to pump up the tire on his wheelbarrow every time he went to use it and finally invested in one. Most hardware stores can get them for you. It is a little bit more expensive, but worth it. You probably wouldn't want to replace bicycle tires with hard rubber because they act as shock absorbers and make the ride much more comfortable. But any kind of wagon or wheelbarrow could really benefit from them.

If it is wintertime and the roads are bad, **some type of a sled would be very handy for hauling things.** If you are an outdoorsman and have snowshoes (or the know-how to make snowshoes), you may be able to get around easily when most people would be stuck indoors. And even in the very worst weather there will be times when you need to go outside.

There are probably many more ways to move things from place to place that I haven't covered, but you get the idea. You should be prepared to have some way to move yourself and some "stuff" in the event of an emergency.

Planning and preparation for worst case scenarios can provide peace of mind and confidence for our families in a real emergency. When we know what to do and when to do it, it will help keep ourselves and our loved ones safe and help us to reunite as soon as possible. That will be the payoff for all our planning and hard work before an emergency.