

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS



Blackout!

We often think of tornadoes, earthquakes and fires when devising our emergency preparedness plans. But what about blackouts?

A loss of power can accompany many major storms and can often be the most dangerous part of the situation. Blackouts can downright cripple your living situation during the cold weather and can cause heat issues during the summer because they usually cut off power to heating and cooling systems.

BEFORE A BLACKOUT

To prepare for a blackout, the American Red Cross recommends you do the following:

- Build an emergency kit and share com-

munications plans with family members.

- Keep your car's gas tank at least half full.
- Know the location and operating specifications of your electric garage door's manual release lever.
- Use flashlights for emergency lighting instead of candles or other open flames, which can pose a great risk of fire.

DURING A BLACKOUT

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to keep your food as fresh as possible. If you must eat food that was refrigerated or frozen, check it for spoilage. The

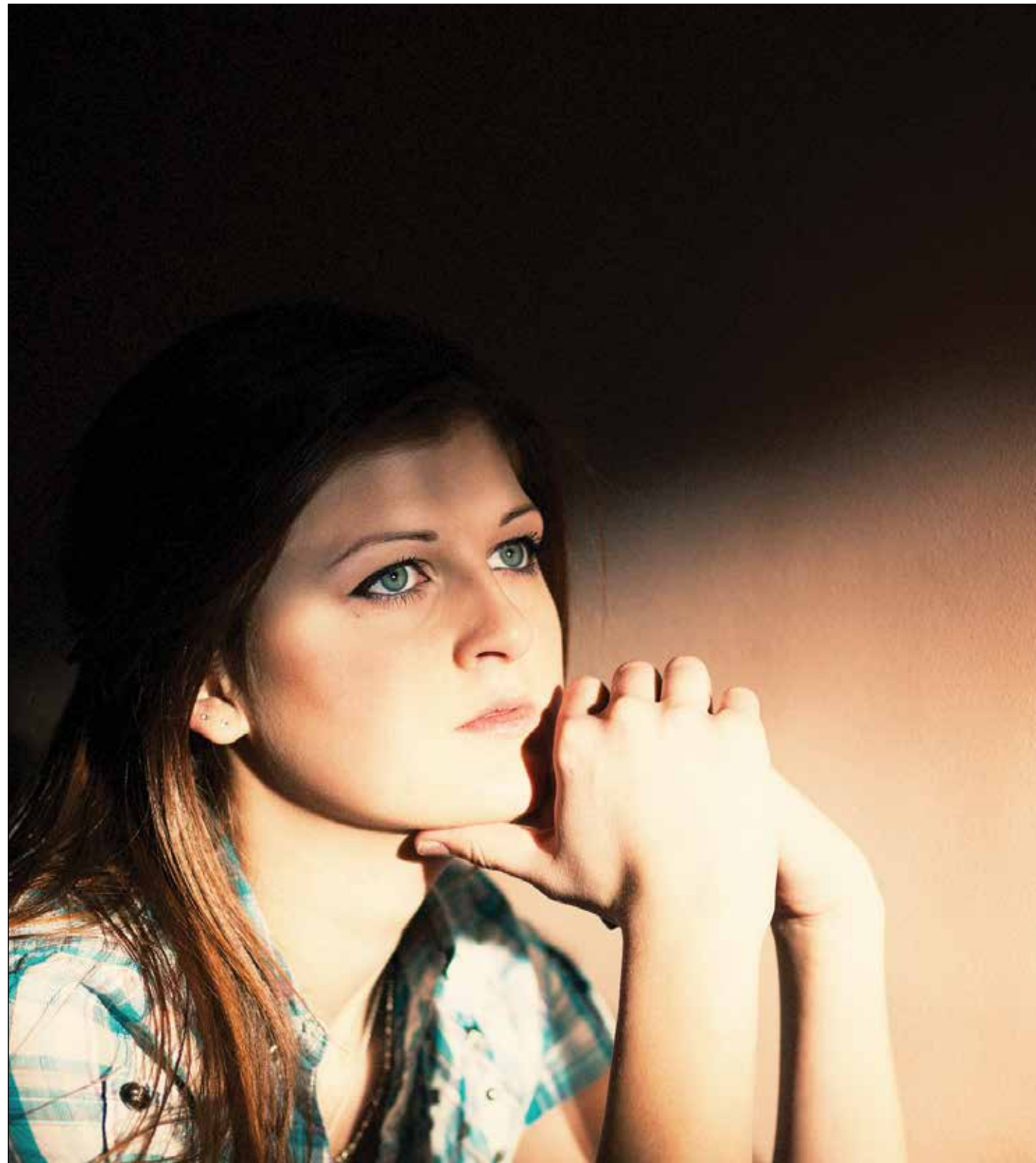
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that food can last four to six hours in case of a power outage.

- Leave on one light so that you'll know when your power returns.
- Turn off or disconnect appliances and electronics that were in use when the power went out. When power returns, it can do so in surges that can cause serious damage.
- Never run a generator inside a home or garage.
- Listen to local stations on your battery-operated radio for updated information.



Dealing with Disaster

We often consider the physical dangers of emergencies – injuries from flying debris or car crashes, for example – but can overlook the mental impact associated with such incidents.



Crisis situations can result in loss of loved ones, debilitating injuries or traumatic stress that can change lives forever. And because these events are few and far between, they can be hard to deal with when they occur. Experts urge people of all ages who may be experiencing psychological distress as a result of natural disaster or incident of mass violence to seek the help of trained and caring professionals.

THE SIGNS

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) identifies the following physical and emotional reactions as being warning signs for seeking professional assistance.

- Irregular sleeping patterns.
- Painful stomachaches or headaches.
- Anger or edgy attitudes.
- Overwhelming sadness.
- Increased worry or guilt.
- Lack of energy or always feeling tired.
- Drinking alcohol, smoking or using tobacco more than usual.
- Using illegal drugs.
- Eating too much or too little.
- Not connecting with others.
- Rejecting of help.

HOTLINE HELP

SAMHSA has set up a free hotline to assist United States citizens dealing with a traumatic event in their lives. The hotline is staffed by trained counselors from a network of crisis call centers located across the U.S. They are trained to provide crisis counseling for those who are in emotional distress caused by any natural or human-caused disaster, information on how to recognize distress and its effects on individuals and families, and tips for healthy coping. The hotline's counselors can also provide referrals to local crisis call centers.

The confidential and multilingual hotline is available via telephone (1-800-985-5990) and SMS (Text 'TalkWithUs' to 66746).

Business Planning

Your business should not be put on the back-burner when instituting an emergency preparedness plan. If you are responsible for employees, it is your job to make sure your staff members are equipped with the knowledge and capabilities to protect themselves in the face of a disaster.

Simply knowing what to do won't cut it. Your employees need regular training and reminders of standard operating procedures related to your company's emergency plan.

WHY TEST YOUR PLAN?

Putting your plan to the test will help you find out if it is ready to stand up to a high-stress emergency. Don't think of your test in terms of pass or fail, but focus on improving your plan piece by piece for a more effective comprehensive program. There may be simple fixes you are overlooking that can make your plan a bit more stable, which can make all of the difference in a dangerous situation.

HOW TO TEST YOUR PLAN

Testing doesn't have to mean full-blown exercises in which you simulate every possible emergency situation. You have a business to run, and putting that much time into executing "mock" disasters probably isn't an effective use of time. Set brief, regular meetings instead. Elicit feedback from your staff to improve your plans, while continually reinforcing their knowledge of procedures, systems and equipment. Keeping an open dialogue on emergency planning also can make sure everyone is on the same page.

ARE YOU READY?

Ready Rating is a free American Red Cross service that helps businesses, schools and organizations become prepared for disasters. Members of the program are privy to extensive resources, tools and expert advice that can help them improve their ability to withstand disaster while maintaining operations and keeping their employees and customer safe. Visit readyrating.org for information.



Teach the Children

Your children should be a big part of your emergency planning. By helping them understand the dangers of storms and other crisis situations, you can further their knowledge of how to stay safe during them.

But spitting out a few statistics and tips won't cut it for kids. Communicate with them on their level for optimum impact, maybe even integrating games or activities in their learning. Emergency preparedness is serious stuff, but is best delivered to children in an entertaining, interactive manner.

EASE FEARS

During and after disasters, children will usually look to adults for help. How they see you react can cause a chain reaction into their own actions, so it is important to stay calm and reassuring.

When you're sure that danger has passed immediately after an emergency situation, concentrate on your child's emotional needs. Ask them what they may still be scared of or what you can do to help.

INVOLVE THEM IN PLANNING

Ask your children to help when you pack or update your emergency kit. Doing so can help familiarize them with what is in your kit and how to use the items in emergency situations. You can make planning fun, too, by quizzing them on what to do in specific situations. This type of emergency prepared-



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ness can help ready your child for emergencies while you build in some bonding time, as well.

CRITICAL PHONE NUMBERS

If for some reason, your child is separated from you

or is away from home during an emergency situation, he or she needs to know important phone numbers. Here are a few that your child should either memorize or have on a sheet of paper when traveling.

• **9-1-1:** This one is obvious and can be crucial to receiv-

ing help in dangerous situations.

• **Home phone, parents' cell phones and parents' work phone numbers:** It is vital that your child can easily reach you at all times.

• **Family Members:** Two or three close relatives who may be able to reach you, as well.

• **1-800-733-2767:** This is the American Red Cross' Safe and Well phone number that lets family and friends know you are safe. Children can dial this number and report their location. They can also go online to www.safeandwell.communityos.org to do the same.

Flooding Safety

Floods are frequent natural disasters that can cause widespread damage to homes, businesses and property in a hurry. They can also take lives.

In water year 2012 (Oct. 1, 2011–Sept. 30, 2012), flooding caused 34 fatalities nationwide, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (www.noaa.gov). Flooding was also directly responsible for \$500 million worth of damage.

TYPES OF FLOODING

Once a river reaches flood stage, the National Weather Service places flood severity into one of three categories: minor, moderate and major. Each category has a definition based on property damage and public threat, and are explained below.

- **Minor flooding:** Zero or very minimal property damage, but possibly a chance of public threat.
- **Moderate flooding:** Some inundation of structures and roads near streams with necessary evacuations of people and property.
- **Major flooding:** Extensive inundation of structures and roads with significant evacuations of people and property.

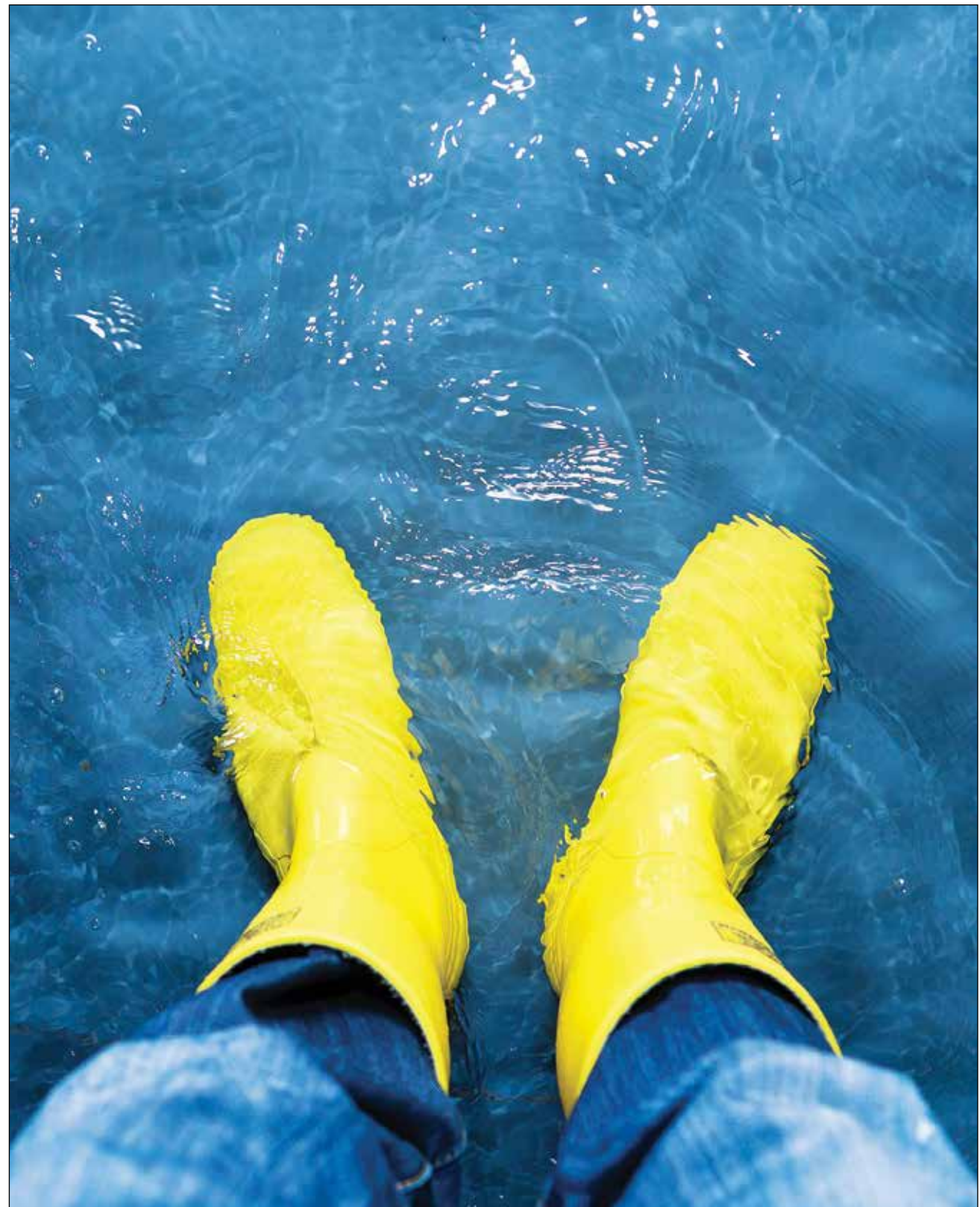
PREPARING FOR A FLOOD

The American Red Cross put together a list of essential items that can help you better prepare to withstand flooding. Here are a few highlights. Visit www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/flood for the full list.

- **Water:** At least a three-day supply; one gallon per person per day
- **Food:** At least a three-day supply of non-perishable, easy-to-prepare food
- First-Aid Kit
- Seven-day supply of any critical medications
- Sanitation and personal hygiene items
- Extra cash
- Maps of the area
- Baby and pet supplies if applicable
- Insect repellent and sunscreen

TURN AROUND, DON'T DROWN

A flash flood can happen in a hurry, which can cause people to act without taking the time to think about potential dangers. Half of all people killed in floods are those in vehicles, according to the NOAA. The organization urges drivers to remember the simple mantra “Turn Around, Don’t Drown” — return to higher ground — if faced with flood waters on the road.



Emergency Room Visits

Emergency room visits are on the rise in the United States, but not all such visits are necessary. The National Center for Health Statistics estimates that ER visits rose more than 28 percent between 1995 and 2008 and are continuing to increase.

Many argue that a large portion of these visits can be avoided and are caused by lack of access to other providers. One study by the American Action Forum estimates that waste in the healthcare system attributed to unnecessary ER visits totals \$14 billion annually.

WORK SAFE AND SMART

Emergency rooms report 18 percent more traffic in May through August than any other times during the year, according to Blue Cross Blue Shield. More people are participating in outdoor activities during this time period, leading to more injuries and medical emergencies. Some of the most common issues related to working outside are related to dealing with the summer heat. Overdoing it in hot, humid conditions can quickly lead to heat stroke or dehydration, so it is imperative to take frequent breaks and drink plenty of water while you're working outside. Doing so can help keep emergency rooms a little less busy during their peak time of activity.

LEARN FIRST AID

If you're interested in being better equipped to deal with emergency situations involving those around you, then taking up an American Red Cross training is a great option. The Red Cross offers first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated



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external defibrillator (AED) certification courses that could make a big difference in your ability to save someone's life in a crisis. The training could come in handy in many different environments, including the workplace, school, home and wilderness. Visit www.redcross.org/take-a-class to find out more about the organization's offerings.

MORE EMERGENCY ROOM NUMBERS

The following statistics come from the 2010 Medical Care Survey by National Hospital Ambulatory:

- Number of visits: 129.8 million.
- Number of injury-related visits: 37.9 million.

- Number of visits per 100 people: 42.8.
- Percent of visits with patient seen in fewer than 15 minutes: 25.1 percent.
- Percent of visits resulting in hospital admission: 13.3 percent.
- Percent of visits resulting in transfer to a different (psychiatric or other) hospital: 2.1 percent.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Accidental carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning kills more than 400 people every year in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The odorless, colorless gas can cause sudden illness and death if inhaled, so prevention is key to keeping you and your family safe. A large number of the annual deaths caused by CO come during power outages after hurricanes or winter storms. People use alternative sources of fuel or electricity for heating, cooling and cooking inside their homes, which can catalyze a quick buildup of deadly CO gases. Generators, grills, camp stoves and other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices should never be used inside a home, basement, garage or camper under any circumstances.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE CO POISONING

Exposure to CO can cause loss of consciousness and death, with the most common symptoms being headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain and confusion, according to the CDC. People who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol are at an

increased risk for CO-related deaths, because they can be poisoned before ever having symptoms.

DETECTORS

Every home should have at least one working carbon monoxide detector. The detector's batteries should be checked at least twice annually, at the same time smoke detector batteries are checked. Detectors can be purchased for about \$20 at your local hardware store, so expense should not be a factor in your decision to buy one. It could be a small price for a smart, high-return investment.

OTHER TIPS FROM THE CDC

- Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked in an enclosed or partially enclosed space, such as a garage.
- If conditions are too hot or too cold, seek shelter with friends or at a community shelter.
- If CO poisoning is suspected, consult a health care professional right away.

