

Report: Why have an Emergency Readiness Plan



Guy L Snodgrass

A written Emergency Readiness Plan is a lifeline that enables everyone to know what actions need to be taken, when those actions need to occur and by whom. This document discusses what an Emergency Readiness Plan should contain.

Great Living Sources

Somerset, Kentucky

12/10/2018

An emergency/readiness plan

Do you have an emergency/readiness plan?

One question I always ask is, “do you have an emergency/readiness plan”? I ask this question of everyone, folks that claim to be “prepared”, prepper vendors, and prepper expo attendees.

The answers are pretty well split between two camps, some say they do, some say they do not. Of those who answered, they have a plan I ask, “Is it on paper”? Here the answer is almost always the same – “it is in my head”. My reply is, “then you do not have a ‘plan’, you have an ‘idea’ for a plan”. Most agree with me, yes, they only have an idea for a plan. I have had two who said they actually have a written plan. Two couples out of the hundreds I have asked this question actually have an emergency/readiness plan. Those are not great statistics.

In 2016, the United States had 91 natural catastrophe events. Over 41,369 people have lost their life from 1900 to 2016 from natural disasters.

(<https://www.statista.com/statistics/236509/number-of-fatalities-from-natural-disasters-in-the-us/>)

In my opinion, this is entirely too many deaths. Any loss of life is too much. Thousands more lose everything they own. In many cases, those that have lost everything never fully recover. I wonder how many people would have been saved had they had an emergency/readiness plan?

When a disaster strikes, time is not your friend. More often than not, there is not enough time to decide what action or actions you and your loved ones will take to ensure your safety after a disaster has occurred. Disasters often strike rapidly, and sometimes without warning or very little warning.

When disaster strikes, no matter how prepared you are, there is still an element of fear involved. When we are in fear, we are not using our higher reasoning to make decisions. When we are under the influence of fear, we usually have only three options fight, flight, or freeze. During an emergency/crisis, these three options are usually not the best options for our survival.

When we are in fear, we are not using our higher reasoning. Fear shuts down our prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that is responsible for higher reasoning function such as judgement, decision-making skills, and planning. This means when we ‘plan’ under the influence of fear our plan may not be the ‘best plan’ for our survival.

The time to create an emergency/readiness plan is before an event has occurred. A plan we create before an event will benefit from the higher reasoning capability from our prefrontal cortex. Having an emergency/readiness plan greatly increases the chances of surviving a crisis event.

What event or events should your plan cover?

The plan you create should cover the event or events that “keep you up at night”. In other words, what event do you feel is the most likely event you will face? For example, a person living on the coast would likely want a plan that covers a hurricane. Someone living in a low-lying area would likely want a plan that covers flooding.

The plan should also cover secondary events. A secondary event is an event that is triggered by a primary event. For example, a hurricane could be a primary event; a secondary event could be looting. Other secondary events could be power outages, flooding, and others. In other words, a plan should address the possible repercussions of a primary event, in addition to the primary event itself.

What should your plan include?

Event/Crisis

The plan should address the type of crisis or event (primary). What will trigger the execution of the plan? Will you shelter in place or bug out to another location? What is the terrain like around the location you will be sheltering (this information may help in the decision to stay put or bug out).

Resources

The plan should include what resources you anticipate you will need to endure the event. Resources include food, water, tools, etc that might be necessary to endure the event. Inventory the resources available to you. After you know what you have available, what resources do you need to have adequate materials to endure the event your plan covers. It is assumed that the location you will be during the event is a sheltered location. If this is not the case, what will you do for shelter?

Course of Action

The plan should include what actions you expect the “event” will do. If you are planning for a hurricane event, where does history suggest is the likely track.

[Note: During the event, you will want to be aware of the storm’s actual track. If the event is a man-influenced event i.e. civil unrest, terrorist attack, etc, what actions do you anticipate will be taken by them? What action will you want/need to take?]

Support Network

If you are part of a support network, or have friends/family as part of your group, where are they going to be located? What will they do before, during, and after the event?

Actions to be taken once the plan is initiated

The plan should cover what actions each person will take once the trigger for the plan’s execution has happened. This should cover multiple contingencies. For example, a family of four (mom, dad, daughter, and son) have a plan that covers a flood. Should the flood occur when mom and dad are at work, and the kids are at school, what actions will each one take when the plan is initiated? What action does each take to inform the

rest of the family they are safe? What action do they take if there is no way to contact the other family members (phone lines and cell towers are down)? Where will each go in order to link up (i.e. which rally point should each one go to)?

This part of the plan should answer the questions of who, what, when, why, and where. The more detailed this section is thought out the better it will help you get through the event. Contingencies should be addressed. That is, what action or actions should be taken if the circumstances change? What action or actions should be taken if something happens and prevents anyone from completing their part of the plan?

For example, both of the kids discussed above go to the same school, but are in different locations for after school activities. The son plays soccer at a soccer field north and east of the school. The daughter takes dance lessons at a studio that is south and east of the school. One contingency should cover their actions if they are both at school (i.e. the meet up at a location in the school). Another contingency covers the actions the son would take if he were at the soccer field. Another covers the actions the daughter takes if she is at the dance studio. Another maybe if any of those locations are unobtainable (i.e. they cannot be accessed-for whatever reason). Where is the alternate location?

The same goes for the parents. Both parents work at different locations so one contingency would cover their actions if they were at work. Another contingency would cover their actions if they were not at their office when the plan goes into effect (i.e. they are at a restaurant during their lunch hour).

Family Emergency Communication Plan

Household Information

The plan should contain pertinent household information. Points of contact for schools, work, doctor, insurance company (home/car), mortgage company, veterinarian, kennel, electric company, gas company, etc. During a natural disaster, this information may be lost or destroyed if the house is destroyed. Having this information on hand can speed up the process of getting assistance and getting back to "normal" life.

School, Childcare, caregiver, and workplace emergency plans

The plan should cover who will pick up kids at daycare, or school if the parents are unable to get there. Ensure the school, childcare or caregiver has permission slips allowing someone, other than the parents, to pick up the children.

Emergency Meeting Places

A list of meeting locations ("rally points") needs to be identified. This list should include places that are out any potential danger due to the event covered in the plan. This could also cover locations that maybe outside of the immediate area. This could also include an out-of-town neighbor or family member.

Out-of-town Contact

The plan should include contacts that are out-of-town from where the plan is being created. During an event, phone and cell phone systems can be destroyed and/or

overwhelmed. Family and friends attempting to contact the family in the impacted area will not be able to get through. Having a contact outside of the impacted area that can be contacted by family and friends can help alleviate concerns for the family in the impacted area.

The family, in the impacted area, contacts their out-of-town contact once they can access the phone/cell system. Family and friends are then able to contact the out-of-town contact. The phone/cell systems outside of the impacted area are less likely to be compromised the system inside of the impacted area.

A written plan

Many ask why the plan needs to be written, “I have the plan in my head, I don’t need to write it down”. I tell folks if their plan is in their head, it is an *idea*. There are several reasons having a plan in your head is not a good. First, and foremost, when a catastrophic event occurs there is a good chance that you will experience fear. When that happens, as described above, the ability to carry out higher reasoning is diminished. This can result in making decisions that are not rationale. This can lead to deadly circumstances.

Another reason to have a plan that is written down and not in someone’s head is, in the event that you are killed or rendered unconscious, no one else in your group has access to the plan. With a written plan, anyone in the group can continue execution of the plan. Additionally, having a written plan allows you, or someone in your group, to follow the plan even if they cannot think due to fear or chaos has rendered you unable to think straight. Having a written plan gives you something to focus on during the first few moments of an emergency until you are able to gather yourself, and begin to execute using your higher reasoning abilities.

Why not just have a digital plan? A digital plan is great, unless the power goes out, or the device is damaged. As soon as the electrons that make up the digital plan go out, so does the plan. In the Army, we used digital maps. The digital maps are usually on a mobile device such as a laptop. The joke was if our laptop got a bullet in it – we had junk. However, with a paper map, if it got a bullet hole in it we still had a map. The same is true with your plan. If the device that contains your plan takes a bullet, or is otherwise damaged, you have junk. If you have a written plan, and it takes a bullet you still have a plan.

Rehearse

An emergency/readiness plan is a living document. It is not designed to be created and then put in a glass box that says, “Break glass in case of emergency”. The plan is meant to be used, rehearsed, and updated as additional information is gathered. Every time the plan is rehearsed additional information, or situations may come to light. This additional information should be rolled up and the plan modified to encapsulate this new information.

Rehearsing the plan begins to build what we used to call in the Army, “muscle memory”. Muscle memory is where you have done an activity repeatedly until you no longer have to think about what you are doing to accomplish the activity. Brushing your teeth and driving a car are two common activities that we do using muscle memory. In most cases, these two activities have been done so much that we no longer have to focus on what we are doing we just do it.

When it comes to our emergency/readiness, we want to get to the same point. After the plan has been rehearsed repeatedly, muscle memory will be built up. Once it has when the event occurs and the trigger happens we will begin executing the plan without conscious thought. This automatic reaction can often times save your life and the life of your loved ones.

You should rehearse your plan at least twice a year. Once a quarter is preferred. If you have little ones, include them in the rehearsal. Make a game out of the rehearsal. This will help them to remain calm when an event occurs. They will get used to rehearsal so that when the real thing occurs it will not be as frightening.

Conclusion

A written emergency/readiness plan can and will save your life. Can you survive without one? Yes, but do you want to rely on “hope” in order to survive a catastrophic event, or would you rather have plan so your odds are much better that you and those you love will survive? My choice is to have a plan and put the odds in my favor that those I love will survive whatever event we might face.

My goal is to give you and your loved ones the best chance of surviving whatever disaster may be encountered. Over the years, I have helped write and/or written countless plans. These plans include Joint and Army level military operation plans, special operation plans, Recovery operation plans, real-world natural disaster training scenarios, plans that cover natural and man-influenced disasters, and recovery plans, among others. The successful results of having and rehearsing a plan prove that your chance of enduring a catastrophic event is greatly enhanced versus having no plan, or an “idea” for a plan.

Final thoughts

- Have a well thought out written plan with contingencies
- Have an out-of-town contact
- Have a list of important phone numbers and account numbers
- Know where everyone will meet
- Rehearse your plan