

Alexandria CERT: Community Emergency Response Team

Police – Fire – Medical Emergency	911
Alexandria Non-Emergency	703-746-4444
Alexandria Animal Control	703-746-4774
National Poison Control Center	800-222-1222
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	800-273-8255

May - June 2021

Making Your Home Safer

Fixing common home hazards through simple measures can prevent problems and reduce the risk of injury or damage to your property, which can in turn help you avoid insurance claims. And to help emergency vehicles locate your home quickly and easily, make sure the street number is clearly legible from the street.

Prevent Water Damage. Inside the house, fix leaks in faucets, toilets, or pipes immediately. Check for cracked or missing grout across the base of your toilet, bathtub and/or shower, and bathroom cabinets. Continued small leaks can result in mold, dry rot, and pest infestations. Treat mold with a solution of 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water. Inspect your water heater for leaks and partially drain the heater every 6 months to stop sediment from building up on the bottom. Check for signs of wear on the water hoses on your washing machine, dishwasher, and refrigerator icemaker and replace them as necessary. In the basement, use shelving or store items several inches above the potential level of flooding. In cold climates, protect against frozen pipes by making sure you have adequate insulation where pipes run along outside walls, above ceilings in unprotected attics, and under floors above basements.

Outside the house, ensure gutters and downspouts are not clogged with debris. Direct drain water away from the foundation. Grade the property: Add soil around the foundation for more adequate drainage away from the building. If there is erosion due to fast moving water after a heavy rain, add rocks to slow the movement of water. Before cold weather, disconnect outside garden hoses.

Prevent Electrical Problems. Ensure all cords and extension cords for power tools and equipment have the correct amp rating for the electrical load they are carrying. Replace any appliances that overheat, short out, smoke, or spark. Make sure extension and appliance cords are in good condition and are not frayed or cracked. Do not run cords under rugs. If you have a heater, make sure it has an automatic shutoff.

Avoid Chemical and Fire Hazards. Store flammable liquids such as paint thinner away from heat sources and in well ventilated areas. Keep curtains, furniture, or other combustible materials away from heat sources, gas appliances, or flammable materials.

Child Safety

Children, especially younger ones, don't understand dangers. They may act unsafely or touch or taste things that are hazardous. Teach children in age-appropriate ways about hazards and how to call 911.

Poisoning. Keep items that can be ingested out of reach. Store prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications in childproof containers. Secure cabinets that store cleaning products. Apply the Mr. Yuk label as appropriate. Put on a high shelf painting supplies and other hazardous materials such as pesticides and herbicides, gasoline, charcoal lighter fluid. Certain plants such as philodendron and aloe can be toxic to children and pets.

Other indoor hazards. Cover electrical outlets. Make sure candles and matches are not accessible to children. Keep all sharp objects and electrical tools out of reach. Put safety gates at the bottom and top of stairways. Place guards around fireplaces or radiators. Ensure curtain cords and shade pulls cannot be reached. Lock firearms away and make sure they are unloaded.

Outdoors. Monitor playground activities. Make sure children stay away from equipment such as lawnmowers and snow blowers.

Vehicles. Install child safety seats and use them for infants and small children. Ensure older children buckle up and stay buckled up. Be careful when backing up a vehicle. Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle, even briefly.

Flood Awareness and Safety

Flooding is the most common and most costly natural disaster. Floods can damage or destroy homes and businesses and cause environmental erosion. In July 2019, 3 to 5 inches of rain fell within 2 hours in Northern Virginia, DC, and Maryland. Roads flooded and some roads buckled, and people were stranded in their vehicles. Some Metro stations were flooded, and debris clogged the Potomac River. Cameron Run and Four Mile Run rose about 7 feet. Damage across the region was in the millions of dollars.

Types of Floods. River floods occur when the river banks can no longer contain the flow within the channel. In moderate flooding, water levels are high enough to affect nearby property and some evacuations may be needed. Major flooding is very extensive, isolating neighborhoods, closing roadways, and requiring numerous evacuations. Flash floods are particularly dangerous: they usually result from intense rainstorms within a short period of time, occurring with little or no warning. They are quite destructive due to the speed and force of the water, and they carry along debris including large objects that can damage roadways, bridges, and buildings. Coastal flooding occurs when water from an adjacent body of water is driven onto land by high winds; a related term is storm surge.

Warnings, Watches, and Advisories from the National Weather Service. Flash flood warnings and flood warnings are issued when flooding is imminent or occurring. When damage from a flash flood is expected to be considerable or catastrophic, your mobile phone will receive an automatic warning – a Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA). A flood watch means that flooding is possible and that you should be prepared. A flood advisory means you should be aware that the event may cause inconvenience, such as detours around minor flooding.

Turn Around Don't Drown®. It is NEVER safe to drive or walk into flood waters. Over half of all flood-related drownings occur when a vehicle is driven into hazardous flood water; vehicles are often swept downstream. Never drive around the barriers blocking a flooded road. The road may have collapsed under that water. The next highest percentage of flood-related deaths is due to walking into or near flood waters. People underestimate the force and power of water. A mere 6 inches of fast-moving flood water can knock over an adult. It takes just 12 inches of rushing water to carry away most cars and just 2 feet of rushing water can carry away SUVs and trucks.

Flood Insurance. It is estimated that 1 inch of water in a home can cause upwards of \$25,000 in damages. Only 3% of Virginians have flood insurance. Homeowner and renter insurance policies typically do not cover flood damage. Because it takes 30 days for flood insurance policies to go into effect, it's important to plan ahead. Buy flood insurance now, so that your property is covered. For more information, visit FloodSmart.gov.

Wind Storms

Strong winds from thunderstorms, tornadoes, and hurricanes or tropical storms can damage property and injure persons outdoors. Tornadoes have rotating winds. Other damaging winds are straight-line and exceed 50-60 mph. A derecho is a straight-line wind storm extends more than 240 miles and is associated with rapidly moving thunderstorms. Here are some ways to prevent storm damage.

Trees. Identify and remove any dead trees or other trees and branches that pose a threat of falling on power lines, walls, roofs, or vehicles.

Storage sheds and outbuildings. Secure storage sheds and other outbuildings, either to a permanent foundation or with straps and ground anchors. You may use straps and ground anchors for manufactured homes to anchor outbuildings.

Before a storm with predicted strong winds:

- Bring inside trashcans, flowerpots and hanging plants, outdoor furniture, small grills, and other items that could become airborne.
- Secure larger outdoor furniture and grills with cables or chains.
- Move breakable items away from doors and windows. Wind can pick up smaller objects and drive them through windows and glass doors.
- Board up doors and windows (if possible).
- Turn off propane tanks.